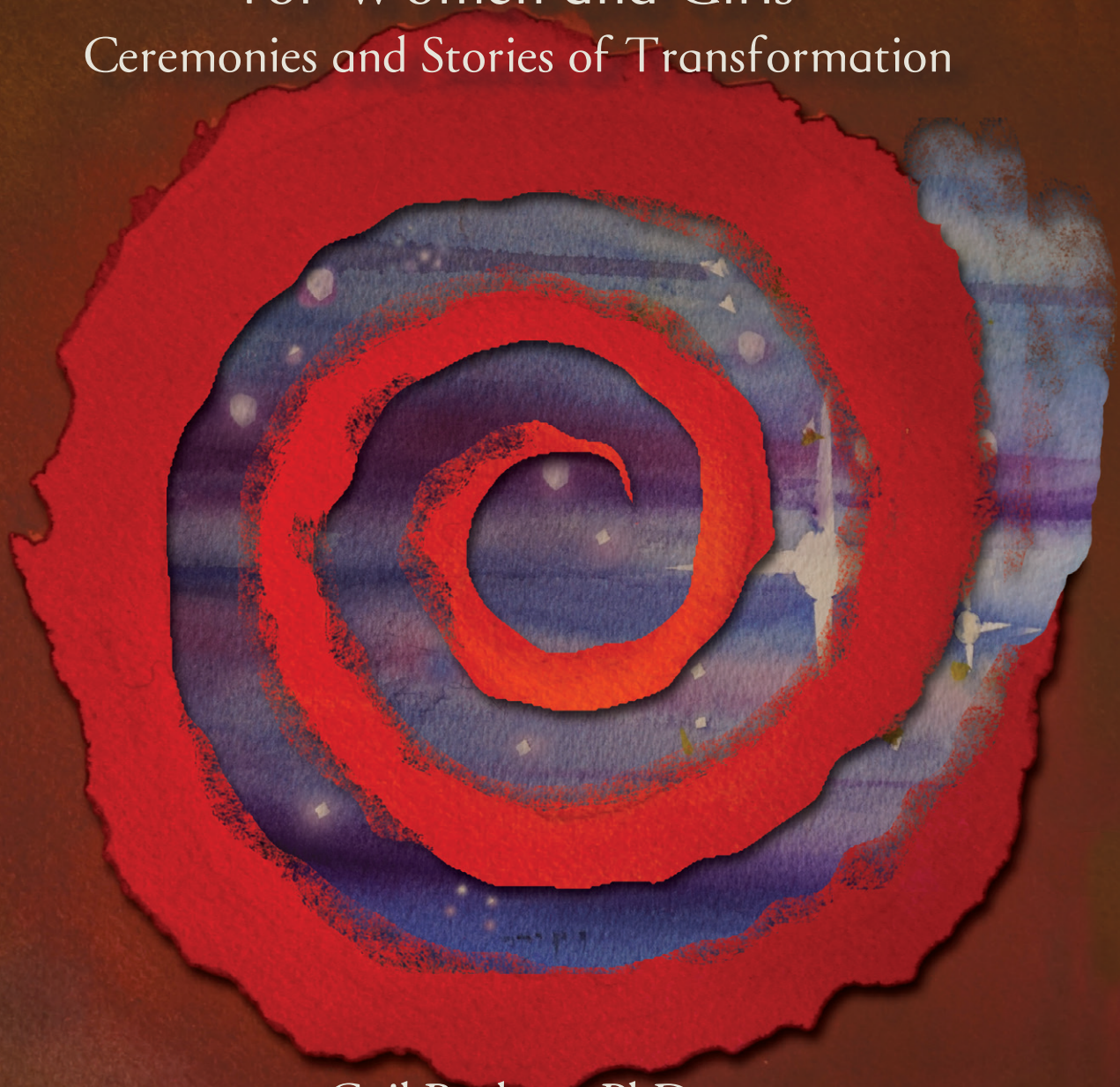


# NINE PASSAGES

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.”

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## 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 inevitability 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

WOMANHOOD BLOOM, DEEPENING WOMANHOOD,  
ELDER ENCORE

Three Adult Passages reveal your evolution as a human being. You have already played many roles student and seeker, mystic and medicine woman, loved by many soon you will understand how your personal development builds a life in layers with seasons, questions, curiosities, and ambitions. Initiation and the ritual of honoring thresholds of change teach you how to stay connected to your Soul. The first Passage is Womanhood Bloom, luscious and spacious. When your nest is empty or your Soul demands a change, a new twist called Deepening Womanhood is spiritually compelling. Go deeper, set out on an all new quest, rest only a little on your laurels. The edge Passage is the Elder Encore and welcomes Divine guidance. Pass through these gates of change with your women's circle and your family as witness; they need the model of you.

Just before launching into the vast abyss known as Adulthood, imagine that the years span from approximately 30 to 60. Your heart and emotional foundation will be forever fueled by all that went before: Your stories matter.

Developmentally, the quadrants of life stand in their own vortex of energy. With Child and Youth forming a foundation for Adulthood, you have already discovered or invented many coping mechanisms for challenges. The old saying is: God gives us no more than we can handle. Sometimes this seems barely true, but it is true nevertheless. Hindsight reveals that Divine guidance is more magical and mysterious than we originally thought.

As Elder Mentors, we feel especially reverent for how your life journey stands apart from ours. Your Soul is your guide, not us. This Mentor's guide to Adult initiations, audacious and challenging, reveals our deep respect for your accumulated wisdom. We inspire you to imagine your best life. There is something in these Passages that may help you through your rough patches. When you discover these three Passages for yourself, you are participating in the human evolution that Rites of Passage ceremonies brings to the culture. Change spirals spiritually through your stories. We offer you these ceremonies as our gift; once you have them, feel them, you may be inspired to give them away.

This is a little book with broad strokes. We have relished sharing discoveries that served us well through our adult years. The guiding question was the same as in the Adolescent guide: "What did I wish someone had told or showed me, had offered me, or had talked through with me?"

We emphasize adventure for the richness of those stories carry power, spiritual and experiential. Allow your spiritual quest to guide you, what your Soul came to do will surprise you.

Part of this search is for right livelihood: How do you do the exact thing for money which feels more like play? Nurture your talents and above all be daring. Often our jobs define us, limit us, and end up displeasing us. We are not bound to anything but our Souls. Well, women are most often bound to our children, but those relationships change as much as we do. Change is the mystic's magic for all of your adult years.

In the pages of this Mentor's guide, you will find the conversation rich and the tools meaningful. We have held our Mentor selves to high standards. We have opened doorways for all of womankind in search of our Higher Selves, our Soul-selves. We pray that we can each find our personal Gifts for Gaia and give generously.



## DEEPENING WOMANHOOD

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### THE INTENTION:

### BECOMING A CULTURE-MAKER FOR THE VILLAGE

*I see and honor the amazing energies that flow in and through your body, sometimes you are Fire, Air, Earth, and Water; occasionally two of these energies merge. All the more beautiful and stunning, every day your woman-self is changing, challenging, creating, and different from the days that came before. Looking back to the last Thresholds you crossed, now far back in your rear-view mirror, fire burned through you to bring you here and now. You finally understand that womanhood holds secrets slowly revealed—moist, ecstatic, earthy—as you realize more and more brilliance in yourself. Because you laid a foundation in your teens and twenties and burned through the pain, your transformation was complete. You are ready to receive the full power of your adulthood throughout your thirties and forties. This is your life. Live your dreams and share your passions. Do what you love and do it often. I am your Elder inspirer, always in your corner.*





## EAGLE'S VIEW

You have stepped over a Threshold perhaps you thought you'd never reach, but now you are over that milestone, beyond 30 and blossoming. This is the age and stage of your life when pure creative powers emerge. To help you spin your dreams, call on your resiliency and curiosity to reveal new things. The brilliance of your 20s comes into this decade so you may literally stand on your own shoulders. Feeling vital and alive, you love growing, always wanting to be something more, because you know there is more in you. You will spend time with the Saturn question: "Who were you born to be?"

Smiling to yourself each morning when you wake, you will have a bigger taste of life when you use your Moon days to observe the unfolding of your dreams. Seek the sacred in the ordinary to discover that ordinary is sacred. You are the change agent and have the power to create and change absolutely anything.

Personal and spiritual development becomes your prime directive because your physical body, your temple, has completed its development. This is true, until pregnancy changes everything. I call this Deepening Womanhood because now is the time for Passages within Passages. So much will happen as the seasons turn, you will soon understand deepening and then deepening some more. Passages layered and always going deeper, this may ring a riddle tune. That is fitting of this very long, prime stage, your womanhood.

Consider the common thread to all of womanhood: We are daughters first, sisters often, and we continue to grow into the roles of wives, partners, Mothers, and culture-makers.<sup>1</sup> Because these outward manifestations seem to define us, we long to stretch ourselves out of these bounds for our Soul-selves. In everything you set in motion, seek to balance being and doing.

When you locate the inner acceptance of being 30, other people will also observe your development and see you as a fully mature adult. As a woman who knows her own heart, you integrate lessons, blessings, and opportuni-

## Nine Passages for Women and Girls

ties. As a seeker and creator of joy for yourself you discover laughter and make that a quest. You are a culture-maker for your family and community. You rest when there is warm sand to lie on. If you haven't already, you will discover there is more to do than you can manage. I hope to help you find heart-ways to merge work and play so you can release the cultural curse of busy-ness. This is a false myth for women.

I see you walking along the beach alone, climbing mountains, flying kites, turning cartwheels with children. Radical in your self-belief and your fierce love, I smile when you find your niche and fill it for the entrepreneurial fun of it. You and your friends celebrate woman's variations and potentialities as you make plenty of time for each other. High-energy activities stir your body to its truth. You talk to understand how you feel, what you stand for, why it matters, and how you can make a difference. You love the Earth and give yourself over to Gifts for Gaia.



Honor Your Teachers

You use rituals to honor your Moontime in a flowing rhythm of self-care. Each one is your own quiet initiation into the depths of you, your desires awaken, and your curiosities lead to passions to reveal a little more of yourself each Moon.<sup>2</sup> As inevitable as Moontime is for you, the Vision Quest you ob-

serve faithfully each month guides your heart's intentions, unfolding with la Luna in the deep quiet of rejuvenation for yourself.

In the Eagle's view of this era in your personal development, you become a heroine to yourself and to others. Half close your eyes, become squinty-eyed like me and look into that far distance; see how you might shape relationships and build rapport with others. Being a far-seeing visionary, you build your life with eyes forward and take great care to be on purpose.

This Eagle's view includes all or most of the next two decades. I believe as the Navajo Diné women, that the middle of womanhood, the first Deepening Womanhood Threshold, arrives around 52. While you are still squinting, see that the exquisite 50s will be the very middle of your life, a glorious decade indeed. Figuratively of course, the end remains elusive, too far away to imagine. When you add 100 to the year of your Birth, you will be closer to understanding how life will go for you. Your own Soul is the messenger and will deliver that faraway Threshold with grace and good news.

Ahead the distance is farther than the Eagle can see. Walking beside you, heart-to-heart, together we will look into this time and space capsule from 30 to 52. We will not count again until the next Threshold appears. As worlds spin around other worlds, the multiverse comes into you; amazement becomes cliché. Before you hit cruise-control, understand that your Soul is laden with Coyote's twists. Sometimes flying in like an asteroid, twists of fates and hidden blessings will enrich and surprise, so find your willow-like core. Trials that test this inner resilience are your Soul wanting your attention.

## BUILDING A LIFE

As a woman, you are gifted with the rarity of rhythm. Ovulation and shedding blood are the two life energies of every woman.<sup>3</sup> To increase your consciousness, build your life around your Moontime, swinging between these energies. In the deep quiet of your Moontime, when you lie cuddled beneath

your hot water bottle, intuition and inspiration meet to reflect on the little slice of life since your last Moon. This way, your stories become bracketed by your cycles. Only you can carve out this Vision Quest and quiet rejuvenation time for yourself. This Moon and the next one take you deeper into your interior life where you are a wise, brilliant woman. You train yourself to open to your Soul's calling and to receive guidance. This rhythm is how you build your life.

A chasm of age separates us, Elder to Woman in Bloom. I am thrilled that I can talk woman-to-woman and celebrate your youth as you celebrate my age. In fact, my intention is to celebrate you, be with you, encourage you, and cheer you on through your every action. As ever the Initiate, I hope you continue to waken. Everything you do feels wonderful to me. Every time you step outside the boundaries of your regular habits, I feel a special excitement. When you feel even a little bit daring, it seems contagious, and I feel braver and more inspired.



Still a Long Life Ahead

I crossed this same Blooming Threshold and clearly remember my moment basking in the glow of thirty. I would have benefited from this holistic view and would have enjoyed having an Elder in my corner to smooth my ruffled feathers. I see with clear sight how the Great Mystery, with the help of many Goddesses, carried me thorough hardship. This is a changed perspective from being in the muddle. We will work together to shine light into the enigmatic building of your life. I have gathered the wisdom of many Elders who all

encourage you. We invite your Genius to come out to play. Know the heart of women is to give, give, give and with great love, I remind you to put on your own oxygen mask first. Your own inner Genius also known as your Soul, needs tending first, so you don't give from continuously empty places.

I provide a rather earthy, sensuous, and practical way of seeing into the mystery to call forth your authenticity. In many ways women are alike—we have heart and passion, we have history and personal demons, and we have gathered skills and relationships. In just as many ways, women are different, more unique almost every day. Beneath the agenda of each day, the Divine light of woman's spirituality shines occasional beams of dazzling light.

Being real, showing your true self as you become known to you, is the same individuating energy you perfected when you separated from your Mother. Your original effort of individuation may have been filled with hesitation; this advanced effort seeks to discover how much more of your authentic brilliance may be filled with endless delight. Your gifts and talents have been kneaded and massaged, work and play histories combine to reveal an interesting story. These are the elements I will help you work with as you craft your beautiful womanhood.

## SEEING SHADOW

Remain vigilant for how life presents itself to you. Mischief may be one of the adventures of these two decades, but adventure is something quite different from shadow, a vast uncharted territory inside of you. Even though I have known great darkness, hidden from view like the inside of an envelope, my shadow-self has become one of the knowns in my quiver. Shadow is a great informer and a springboard for change. When I looked inside the envelope, my story emerged with blessed clarity and even wisdom. My destiny became light over dark. There's so much to learn about yourself: Inside of every dislike, every negative view and every judgment you harbor your own shadow. Those are gifts to be exposed, to be brought to the surface and acknowledged. You do

not have to spend a ton of time with your shadow self, but know that shadow cannot be denied. When I revealed personal magic by facing my shadow-self, introspection became fuel for my authenticity.

I learned comparison, one of the darker aspects of shadow: I watched others enjoying highly active lives, enjoying their bodies and their relationships. A certain mindlessness of self gave way to a darker force for my womanhood; I focused on career development and missed enjoying many parts of life. I went further into darkness by focusing on what I did not have instead of simply locating the inner power that I did have. This is a true Scorpio mannerism. When I went back to graduate school at 44, I went seeking all those things I missed during the time I had lived in isolation yoked to the corporate mirage. Fortunately, I had learned well how shadow fits into my personality. In the very middle of my life, I knew everything needed a closer examination: Heart, assets, beliefs, spirituality, gifts, talents, loves, desires, relationships, self-care. I chose silent seclusion rather than isolation and learned the difference between those choices.

Occasionally your life is too big to hold. If you need to, choose special silent retreats. I recommend contemplation and deliberation for spiritual relief and Soul-full adjustments. Writers have given me permission to be introspective.<sup>4</sup> One early inspiration was Anne Morrow Lindberg who inspired me to slow down; I gave myself to the mountain, rather than the sea, and allowed something new to arise out of that stillness. Another influence was *Creative Visualization* which describes building a life for yourself, our theme-song, by locating and following the desires of your heart.

Women have many ways of knowing. To unwind the knot and harvest the goodies inside, I began to explore all these ways of knowing. The entire world is your stage; the multifaceted and scrumptious parts in this slice of your life live in you because you are the lead actress in your own play. You cannot possibly see all your facets or understand how to feed your Genius. As a personal gift from the Elders, please trust this is true. Facets are aspects and assets,



talents and rare gifts. Put yourself in the middle of a star with rays and remind yourself of your strengths, your special qualities, your facets. Perhaps you will discover your own artful expression. Remember, you do deserve these personal strokes.



Before the Moon descends into darkness, a tiny Crescent begins your Visioning Time

## MOON FOR VISIONING

Give yourself permission to design your life with visions and dreams, with imagination and creativity, and with incredibly hard work. This will bring deep rest for your Soul each night. With this one wondrous ingredient, *permission*, you will experience your life through a unique lens and immeasurable freedoms. Almost daily, you will see the many ways your gifts can be woven together. At any time, you can stop, dig in your heels, turn your direction a few degrees or all the way around, and begin again. You have every woman's permission.

By the time you reach 30, you have used half of your eggs to build and vision your life to now. In the brilliant design of woman's nature, you still have nearly 200 remaining Moon visions to design your life your way. This visioning is your opportunity to understand your Soul. Visioning opens your Divinely Feminine portal of receptivity. If your antennae are clear of psychological junk, the God and Goddess of your understanding will deliver the whole of the

Universe, but you must be quiet and present to receive all the inspirations that belong to you, Moon-by-Moon. As the power of your passion is revealed, take the action steps to build your life in an inspired way.

From the worldly intersection of Great Mother and your wild nature, Earth offers the inspiration you seek as your intuition expands. So many people have dedicated their lives to protect sacred pieces of land so you may now go there for the inspiration you need to discover more of both—your inner nature and your wild nature. Women do not keep this secret, wild Earth is our collective source for great inspirations. Singly and in small groups of adventurers, we simply and tenderly find our way to the deep quiet in places that hold special meaning and good energy. We nurture ourselves with Earth's offerings for personal reflection, lying on her tender body, absorbing Earth's regenerative energies.

The pure, revitalizing energy from Earth Mother is ours to receive every moment we genuinely connect with her Nature. Many women go to Nature to create private Moon ceremonies; what we do always feels deeply spiritual, often secretive, and always nutritional. We repeat this as often as each Moon calls or whenever we are able to dip into this spiritual well for Soul-full nourishment. By falling deeply in love with a place, you become one of its protectors.

Consider the intersecting energies of Nature and your Moontime. By far, my deepest spiritual experience came when I received the inspiration to bleed on the Earth and acted on it. I would like you to grasp this simple gift—inspiration invites action. In my contemplative solitary years, the heart of Mother Earth came into me. When my Moon began skipping months, I was deep in the silence of my Moontime and feeling the wonder of it. Within this time of exquisite quiet, I found Mother Earth to be the very heart of inspiration. With such a gift I felt a responsibility to take an action step. I stepped out the door and went up into the woods to a mossy spot to experience the intersection of Moontime and silence, of inspiration and action.

FOR THE GIRLS OF GIRLS OF GIRLS

*I stripped naked and asked my dog to watch over:  
I received this message, from Higher Power,  
From God and Goddess, from the Womb of the Universe  
And Great Creator: Share this story with women.*

*Share it with girls, advocate for all women,  
Moontimes filled with silence.*

*As my dog lay near enough to stroke  
Thoughts transported me into the future  
Where the Seven Generations would unfold,  
Girls of girls of girls;  
Tears fell down my cheeks.*

*Sierra sat up, gave me her paw,  
And leaned in to taste my tears;  
Giving my well of regret to the Earth,  
I wondered why this inspiration  
Had never come to me before?*

*As it would be, this was my last Moontime.*

*Opportunity forever closed the door  
For an egg to be planted in my womb  
Blanketed with blood and nourishment.*

*I had become a Crone.*

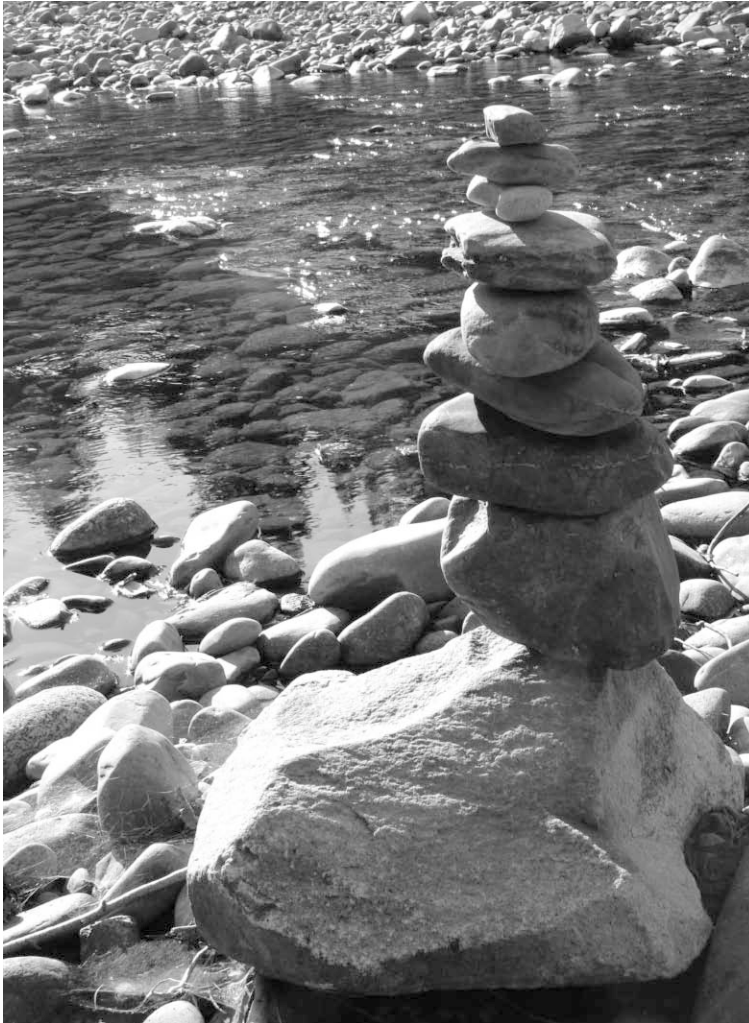
*I made one delightful Moon-story, a touch-stone.  
My beautiful companion Sierra,  
Named for the daughter I never had,  
Helped me create this story, so women will be inspired*

## Nine Passages for Women and Girls

*To find the silence inside their Moontime.*

*I offer you a place in my Circle  
So you may speak for yourself  
And you may build on my one little story  
With Moontimes filled with silence.*

©Gail Burkett & Janis Monaco Clark



Revering Nature

That was not the last inspiration I have received from spending time on the Earth feeling the Moon. In my Moonpause, I have doubled down. I now give la Luna the long attention that a close relation deserves, especially when she exalts. I call this rhythm, New-Half-Full-Half. I adore cosmic time, knowing and feeling what our Ancestors felt; in holy relationship with Earth and earthlings, the Moon presents her energetic gift of inspiration. This exquisite rhythm from New to Full and back has taken me deeper into honoring the gifts women have received for millennia from the cosmic language of time. I have learned the truth about the distinctly different energies of these four phases of the Moon and the subtle energies in the Moon's different seasons. I am now learning to blend Astrology with the ancient messages that come from the Moon just for women.

I go outside every single day, sometimes twice a day. Prayers for the Earth and my Sisters call me out. I walk in an empty meditative way with my dog friend Rosie, successor to Sierra. I feel how the season expresses; I feel the energy of the Moon kissing the other planets in our solar system. Wandering in the woods creates a blank slate inside of my heart-mind, I send my antenna out like a butterfly's. Being an enthusiast, I always come back with photo images, but on Moon days, I am most astonished to receive profound inspiration for Passages. This is a long recovery process, dusting off all the Passages for women and offering them up to the Moon and to you.

When the Sun reflects nothing at all on the surface of the Moon, earthlings call this a New Moon. She is dark and feels so mysterious, holding promise and potential for at least three days. This is a good metaphor for life: Not everything is light, but darkness serves incubation. Intentions seeded during New Moon phases, received as inspiration from her darkness, feed your Soul. The waxing phase from New to Half to Full provides building energy to sprout ideas and projects, exuberance for creation. Each day the Moon changes 13° which offers numerical magic and inspires growth and change in you. It's all magic energy. Watching the sky for the expression of the Full Moon, the Earth's people, especially women, are captivated by the sight of her. We swoon, we find love, we feel love, and we fall in love.

She is out there in her Full Moon glory even on cloudy nights to teach us about love. I am convinced of this fact: La Luna verifies what my friend Diana taught me before I could believe this truth, “Love is all there is.”

La Luna’s capacity for relationship is so big, she guides our hearts to pump blood, she helps us release water; Luna regulates the flow of all women’s cycles. She illuminates the fire inside while pulling out our love song. Moon reminds us we are given this high privilege to dance on the Earth; how wonderful life is for awakening women.

Whatever the vision or inspiration you receive during your Moontime, give it the honor of a single action step. Even if you never find the opportunity to bleed directly with the Earth as a way of giving back to our Great Mother, use the inspiration she offers inside your silence to give something of you back. A nurturing practice for many women around the world is bleeding on cloth, rinsing blood from the cloth into a bowl and offering this Blood of your life to plants. I am grateful to Rachel Hertogs for being one of the leaders of this change so needed in our relationship to our Moontimes.<sup>5</sup> You do not need to be an Elder to verify this spiritual promise: Open to receive the gift of sacred inspiration which adds fire to your passion; then give something from your heart. In giving you will receive tenfold.

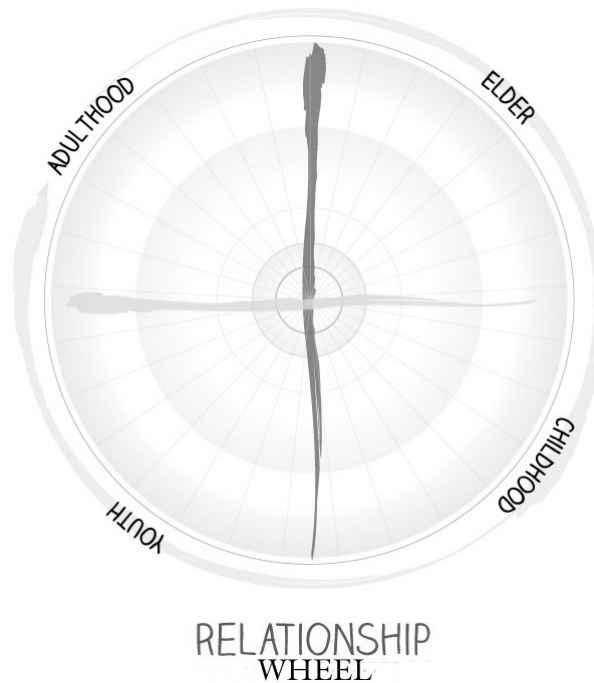
## DIVINE RELATIONSHIPS

The distinguishing characteristic of this Passage is caring for others. Looking outside your Soul-self, you will see who else has joined your journey. Accompanying your beautiful woman’s journey, sacred Others—a partner, a child, beloved friends—become your teachers. Because of the sensual and giving energy within your womb, this long journey through your 30s and 40s very often involves Mothering, whether you have none or if you have one or more children. Your most enduring teachers helped you come into this life, parents and grandparents. Among your teachers of choice, the ones you also hold sacred are your partners and your sisters. Slightly different than your ex-

perience as someone's Divine child, you and your friends and lovers teach one another. Hopefully, personal evolution enters your mind regularly: How do you become more human?

You gather your teachers in unity with your Soul. Offer care for these sacred Others in exchange for their love and lessons which reflect and inspire your trials: What did you come to learn, to do, to be?

Besides your great giving energy that nurtures your tribe, seek until you find intimacy and companionship. A few Others will hold your secrets and support your Genius: These Others will track your growth, and teach you more about wild Nature. The Divine energy of teaching and learning, of giving and receiving, supports your inclination to grow through your whole life.



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Truly Divine, the sacred Others in your life bring you play and work, they bring the gift energies of sharing, guiding, inspiring, and the melodic laughter of joy. I have used the word “Divine” lavishly and intentionally.

Nearly every other Soul who crosses into your sphere will bring you a gift, a spiritual gift that you cannot source for yourself. I invite you to bow to these Divine gift-givers for their generosity. Notice how their stardust matches and how it differs from yours.

Learn to see your concentric circles: You, at the center, draw sustenance from the juice of these swirling energies—nurturance, learning, sharing, connecting—to discover more about the threads of your passion and exactly which of those threads lead to your purpose. The characters on stage with you will distract you or support you; at different moments, you may feel the power struggle of time and attention. Your animus, your natural masculine self who feels drawn to action, to doing in the world, is healthy if you see the energy as just one part of the whole of you. You do not imitate men and you receive your nurturance within your Divinely Feminine silence.

Whenever I deeply feel such struggles of power, I raise my own awareness by seeing into the dueling priorities. None of us do this well or even gracefully all the time. When yin and yang struggle, I am never in balance. Something must give way for my attention to return my focus to the energy of my passion.

## POWER TO BE FREE

Try singing, “Freedom.” This is your song, “Freedom.” Declare yourself free of shackles: *Should* must go. The need for personal approval must evolve and every expectation turned inside out. Freedom is women’s uphill struggle. Consider the vast implications of your personal freedom song.

### FREEDOM SONG

*Baby, you tell me this and that  
How I ought to be;  
Let me tell you what I think,  
Don’t lay your should on me.*

© Janis Monaco Clark



Increase your awareness around another single word, power. In relationships, this incredibly large word, power, can elevate all of your connections once you understand, and with reverence, attend to its pure energy.

We joke about alpha males and alpha females. Put your attention there for just a moment, can you feel the attraction of this power? Respect for power—whether you have it, feel it, or observe it—makes relationships sacred. Helen Luke<sup>6</sup> speaks of humility which rises from the word and feeling of humus. We are of the Earth, receptive and nourishing. She wrote about women's aim for equality in *The Way of Woman*, with a corrective aim that at once elevates and preserves women's difference.

“If we are to stop the wreckage caused by the disorientation of women, by their losses of identity under the stresses of the new way, then the numinous meaning of the great challenge they face must break through from the unconscious; for no amount of rational analysis can bring healing.”

Consciously sharing power, and as equals who acknowledge our differences, makes the jokes funnier, allows for the possibility of freedom, and causes relationships to rise to higher levels of love, compassion and personal growth. Return to the humus of your receptive nature.

When power offers beneficial empathy that feels equal, you thrive. Power also has a troublesome side. I would be correct in saying power has a historical reputation as a trouble-maker. I may even be correct in saying the dark side of power, which is control, has a personally historic context for 95% perhaps 100% of the women in the world. Women have all felt a controlling power over or through us. This deserves reflection. Power-over is oppressive, it shuts us down, it steals from us, and we run off the stage that is rightfully ours. Raise your awareness about oppression; it is a global epidemic and no woman is immune.

In relationships, do you strive for respect or control? You have learned about these two energies through all of your felt senses. Because of its attitude and its intention, when you feel power-over someone, the essence of that energy

is control. To keep your children safe, you use control because you must. The other side of this power, the felt sense, is respect. Between your heart and your mind is an intersection. You have the emotional intelligence to know which of the many roles power plays in the theater of your life. The characters on your stage change over time. Parents have the main influence in childhood, peers and teachers throughout your adolescence. Woven in and around all of these influences, Nature and love both have starring roles. Consider what influences money and sex have in your relationships. Each one of these elements has a power and a spice component. If growth and enrichment are the driving forces through life, you will discover that power and spice make the going either smooth or not.

Consider that only you pull the puppet strings as you dance on this life stage. Many times in my life I would have laughed or even scoffed at this statement. Those were the times when I allowed someone else to have control over me; my choice was buried beneath my fear. I did not have the awareness to understand power as belonging to me, so I gave it away. If the squinty-eyed Elder in me teaches you nothing else to guide you through Deepening Womanhood, I wish it to be awareness about your personal power. I have deep experience in the theater of oppression so I know that women can wiggle out from beneath its force by understanding power.



Like leaves on a tree, review your many gifts.

One of the Geniuses I have studied in my desire to understand power is Riane Eisler.<sup>7</sup> I stand on her shoulders to offer up this distillation about relationships and power. Her work dives deep into the nuances and historical perspectives about the two sides of power, which she calls domination and partnership. I invite you to explore your personal history with power. These words alone may be self-explanatory. I gave my power away to men, then to corporations, then to fear. Look into your experiential memories for the energy that Riane Eisler calls domination. You may see something similar in your historical relationship with power. This is one of the clear differences between the genders. Go into your own stories, harvest what you have learned. When you become the sacred observer of your life's experiences, you will see how power influences your life. It's far deeper in influence than your partner, your parents and other relationships. Power plays its game through competition and can be especially difficult between friends. Look to employers, all levels of government, and power-plays between countries for a deeper understanding. In the many ways that power colors your story, you can wield it as a force for transformation. Women are never without personal power.

With you, I practice reverence and respect. This is the most Divine of all the personalities of power. I ask you to notice how power offers lessons into and out of your core. This third chakra is the inner core of you and your personal power center. For women especially, this place of power in your core draws your sense of balance closer to earthly power. I am endlessly fascinated how the inner energies interact; use personal respect to be your own witness. The interaction between your heart energies and your inner power center is always active, but not always conscious. How do you dance with these very unique inner energies, power and love?

Those who you pull into your inner circle receive your love and those farther out receive your Genius. Your stage may include the public sphere and the world sphere. You have a role to play in all these spheres and will recognize that role when your own people help you find your purpose. When you share a sacred cup of tea and a candle, you may feel compelled to turn the spotlight

on your sister sitting beside you in support of her Genius. Allow her to shine the spotlight on your Genius; this is the respectful nature of power shared and the deepest beauty in relationships.

Consider that we all start out in the place of beginners, although our Soul is ancient. For most earthlings, we forget so we believe we know next to nothing. We learn by exploring, talking, and observing. Exactly what does your Soul know and how does remembering become a source of learning? From your inner realm, feel the spin of entelechy, your pure potential. Become the one who teaches all the sacred *Others* what you have learned about power, potential, and purpose. Respect for your relationships offers these 10,000 lessons on a shiny silver platter. Become an observer of power, inner and outer power. Meditate on your intuitive powers and all that your Soul does know.

## ENERGY AND GIFT EXCHANGE

In this precious package you call self, something is always cooking in your energy field. You receive and hold a special capacity for balance in the juice flowing through your central energy channel. Take your understanding up a level, the yogini practices have focused on healing and spirituality through the parasympathetic nervous system. Every woman has capacities for healing oth-



Heart for Giving

ers, there is no greater gift. Now that you have the benefit of maturity, your next action step will often involve others—cooperating, leading, and giving to others. Consider who needs your hand to lift them up.

The natural energy of women, womb-energy, draws you deeper into generosity. When you give from your heart, in return you receive the golden sustenance, the energy you need to live. Your exchange might be for gift or for money, in every way, all of your giving feeds you. This one truth is worth discovering and practicing: Giving shines like light through a gemstone—all that you give heart-fully and without hooks or attachments comes back to you. Perhaps you will not recognize it or even trust this golden drop of truth until you try it out. Then, it becomes such a spiritual experience that you will find, like an Earth Mother, thousands of ways to express your gifts. Giving without expectation, giving without need of reciprocity, giving because it's your Soul-food, this is one of the simplest ways to discover sacred connections which build community.

Did you feel the twist? Here comes the Cosmic Coyote with her multiplication. First, you need to give intentionally to yourself; extreme self-care has its relationship to consciousness and survival. Then you expand to give to another, a sacred Other or others with whom you feel a special kinship. Turn by turn, you begin to feel the divine inner glow of relationships expressed among your family and your sisters because you learn the higher value of giving. In giving you receive, it's a spiritual law.

In this luminous, holistic capacity of Deepening Womanhood you find yourself sitting on the web of your own design. By your creation, you feel at home in your Village and you begin to pull the strings to draw people in. Because you feel the magic of giving, others feel it too. You discover this juice together, it's heart juice and deeply crimson. I call this the formula for Divine relationships: Giving with heart and opening your heart to receive. It's a gift exchange. This is the love that makes the world go around.

By your delightful modeling and generous sharing, a sense of trust begins to grow in your community. It happens when you play in the water and sit around the fire; it happens when you feel the air pass by your lips in song and story. You feel your family growing. The communal feeling that people share as vital members of a throbbing community spurs everyone to cultivate their gifts.

In this juice, celebrating Earth's creatures and communing with Nature become easier. You have moved through survival into a pulse of thriving and you like it. Your efforts and your action steps begin to return the dividends to you and your family. You begin to trust that everyone in the community who feels the recipient of your gifts will discover ways to surprise you in return. Elders have been teaching this gift-economy our whole lives, no one escapes our teachings.

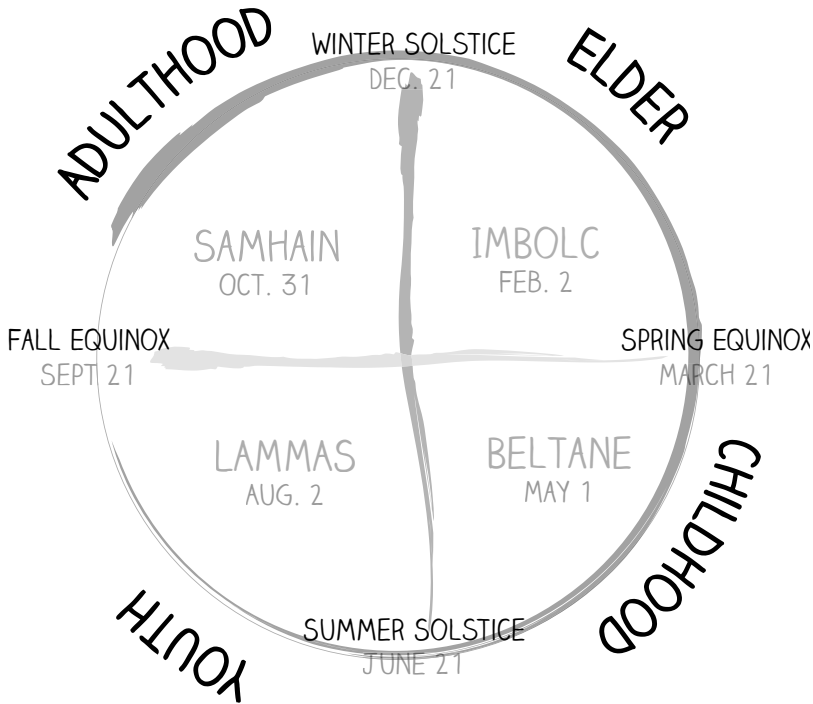
This is illusory with a dream-like quality, this exchange of energies. Yet, I ask with all sincerity, who lives with you in your inner circle and the next layer out? Who gives you the juice of their life in exchange for yours? Connection with your family, with your community, and with deep Nature cause a satisfaction like no thrill can provide. Are you exploring and sharing your gifts?

Connection holds an opposite energy, disconnection, once explored in depth by Jean Baker Miller for women.<sup>8</sup> Since I studied with her, I have been the cultural observer—a student of disconnection in relationships. It's happened in my own relationships and seeing it seems to double the hurt. In a whisper of ego, a disconnection happens. Often an abrupt end to the flow of energy feels like a little tear in the fabric of a relationship. Words have invaded the culture, like busy and schedule. Such words tear at the heart of well bonded relationships. Soon, without repair, a fade begins, and your once cherished relationship enters a risky place. Will it survive or end? As members of the gift economy, women need to take responsibility for our sacred gifts of connection.

## BE A CULTURE-MAKER FOR YOUR COMMUNITY

Earth Mother conspires like a Cosmic Coyote to offer seasons to celebrate. Some of the glue for thriving relationships and the communities of concentric circles, the idea of gift exchanges wraps around the Divine Masculine, those sacred *Others* we each hold dear every day. Come together for the eight special days when all earthlings feel a celebration rising. Many of these celebratory days came before the holiday calendars of our parents and grandparents. Once you see the beauty of this design, a quickening happens. Something truly

irresistible ties women to men to children. Celebrating the Earth and her journey around the Sun is a warmly held reason for gathering, to have a potluck party and maybe even a bonfire.



Change is a holy thing, and every year Earth Mother shows us the grace and joy in noticing. When you see change in yourself, you will begin to see how entelechy, the beauty of human potential, spins inside of everyone. Use your wise eyes to learn to see into those you love. The essence of community fills with divine passion and with an earthy spirituality that honors each other's Genius. Gatherings become the rituals for honoring community members in need of a ceremony marking their change. When the deep well of inspiration and clear sight reveal growth and maturity as the holy bond for communities, a shift will be certain.

The multifaceted strengths lying as hidden gems in your neighbors are waiting for you to discover them. These kindred spirits share love of place and

many other things. In permaculture, these folks are known as friendlies, but they are so much more. When you feel the vibrancy of this web from your place on Earth, you will begin to feel the emergence of your special purpose also. The comfort of cultivated relationships will hold you when change comes into you. Gaia awaits the gifts we each have to give back. Allow your community to support your Genius.

In the world where half the women are Mothers and half are Aunties or Elders, the magic of building a community is having the support you need to express your purpose. You have experienced self-care so you understand the on-going nature of giving to yourself over your lifetime. Paying close attention to you is an ever evolving talent for regenerating your mind, body, and Soul-self. You have felt the heart of a girl-gang, your sisterhood, and have felt the many ways you throb together. You may have finally discovered the beauty of community festivals as the holy markers where women can see change as a deeper intimacy, as seeing into one another.

By flowing through one Passage and then another, you have become an active participant in your life. Sitting in silence to vision with the Moon, exploring and practicing the elements of Courage, you prepare yourself to take all the next steps. This is the time when your penetrating vision looks within and outside, shifts towards making the culture you want to live in. Leadership shows up for you and your friends. Please remember to ask for help before you find yourself alone with your vision.

In post-modern cultures like ours, we find it rather easy to deconstruct things, just like we were taught in high school biology. We are looking for the intersection of science and art; this may help you find your way to your greater purpose. When I say, find the art and science intersection, I am giving you permission to allow your imagination to run free, to explore these crossroads that have been strictly separated for more than 400 years. If you follow either the art or science thread, you will gather skill and polish those into a craft. Since the world's people thrive on creativity, examine where art crosses your science or vice versa.





Deconstructing and Reconstructing Self

Some people miss seeing their gifts altogether so they seem to always feel a quest in their hearts. What you love the most gives you the biggest clue. This is where to look for your purpose. Inside of what you love is a passion like no other, maybe two passions, maybe an art and a science providing enough fire for you to go deeper but never feel lost. You will actually find yourself; this is true passion and it needs something from you. This passion needs your faith, like a seed needs water and sunlight. Trust yourself—inside the very thing you would love to spend the rest of your life doing lives the very thing that you were born to bring to life for the rest of humanity.

Inside of this trust you might find a prayer worth repeating. Never be embarrassed to say, please God. This needs only be the God of your understanding, your Higher Power. We all have one, I actually have many. Sometimes my God is the huge Cottonwood tree that stops me in my tracks when I am thinking about my passion. This tree sometimes just sits me down and I must

dream about what I love. Maybe she is channeling God, I don't care how it works. The Great Mystery conspires to help you and me through inspiration that feels just like magic juice. That feeling reminds me why I care. This is known in French as *raison d'être*, the thing most important or the reason for existing, now used in ordinary conversations as a cultural meme. Have faith in yourself and you will find your purpose.

Part of passion is prayer and part of prayer is trust. I want to return to that Cottonwood tree. Have you ever watched a tree grow from seed? I use this to demonstrate the patience you need to grow yourself and your purpose. Once a seed receives just the right amount of encouragement, like water and sunlight falling on Earth, two things happen: A root goes down and a shoot comes up. I can hardly express the miracle of a seed bursting, it seems like super-natural intelligence. You have such a seed inside of you. Under the right conditions, you will send down tiny little root hairs like feelers, testing the soil for nutrients. If you don't find the conditions right, you will crawl back inside your seed-shell and wait. You are waiting for the right conditions. Maybe you need to dream a bit more and use your imagination to discover the right ingredients. Maybe you only need to talk and receive loving, willing reflections from neighbors and friends.

Like stardust hidden in your fingertips, all of the essential ingredients, pieces like patience and persistence, can be learned and practiced. Once you understand them, you will use them to design your life around passion and purpose. To deconstruct the parts and pieces of living, see how you have or may have a spiritual life, a practical life, a physical life, a married life, a sexy life, a creative life, a family life, a Village life, a dreamy and powerfully purposeful life. Which of these parts already belong to you?

Once again hold and behold your Soul question, who were you born to be and what were you born to do? Beneath your adolescent's mask you asked this sacred question: Now, crossing your Womanhood Bloom Threshold into Deepening Womanhood, Saturn brought this question back. Look deeply into

these many different aspects of life rolled into one you. How do you fulfill your Soul's urgent request? How do you imagine your life story and shape it to serve you while you serve others? Can you find the spiritual opening to receive what you need—love, juice, nourishment—from the sacred Others in your life?



Emerge from the Darkness

## MOODS AND THE AGE OF AWAKENING

Sometimes in equal doses, life is dark and light. Some days you're dancing in the cherries and another day you're in the pits. When life's path inserts a sudden curve, it may feel like darkness takes over. Let's look at moods, their

sources, their power, and their magic. I will reveal my personal red-flags, gathered over the years of being a cultural lover and critical observer.

We all know moodiness; it became fully engaged in adolescence. Maybe you have literally felt the shifting of moods from light to dark, from positive to negative. These polarities rarely stay for long, mostly moods reside in an in-between territory. Look introspectively, look very carefully at your own sources. What causes your positive and negative moods? Do you have stories you will not share? Do they haunt you? How about the stories you treasure, some of them even make you giddy. Do you share those freely? On the outside: What bugs you? Can you fix it? Should you? Have you practiced the Serenity Prayer?

### SERENITY PRAYER

*God, grant me the wisdom  
To accept the things I cannot change  
The courage to change the things I can  
And the wisdom to know the difference.*

All around the world, women have found journaling to be useful because writing often surprises and leads to deeper self-knowledge. To wrap a cloak around moods, the culture has begun to sprout new fields of study—positive psychology, happiness coaching, emotional freedom techniques, emotional intelligence, mindfulness training, and an integration of all of these called interpersonal neurobiology. To these I would like to add personal observation. The over-culture has become too helpful, even offering too much advice. During times when our balance is off, sometime we do need guided spiritual and personal growth.

Remember always, your inner power grows stronger in silence. See for yourself if exploring, contemplation and meditation in Nature offers the kind of spiritual help that only needs silence and your attention.

To know your moods better, begin with a raw timeline and lay out

your stories by year; put the positive ones above the line and the negative ones below the line. Your dance will show up when you walk with the New or Full Moon, moods up, moods down, up, down. This will be an exercise that leads to harvesting. Be patient enough with story to allow this richness to fill and satisfy you. No one is ever all one side of the line or the other.

My most enduring and eloquent teacher has been Clarissa Pinkola Estés.<sup>9</sup> I was sitting with Dr. E. when she said these words, “. . . we were made for these times. Yes. For years, we have been learning, practicing, been in training for and just waiting to meet on this exact plane of engagement.”

In this fast changing culture, your spirit may be at risk of being crushed or fractured. Find just the right combination of personal practices that will weave you back together. Maybe movement and dance will dispel your despair and stimulate your intuition. You have dedicated hours to honing your skills and your gifts needed by this seemingly uncaring culture. This risk that I call fracturing is the reason I focus on your Moon practices to unearth your purpose.

We were all made for this 21st century, for this Age of Awakening. Thank you, dear teacher. Remember patience and persistence, we are all challenged to find what is ours alone.

I have been cynical about culture, the over-culture can truly be crushing. One example is how we think we can see right through advertising if we try. We must be powerfully vigilant to avoid the psychic influence of something we didn't know we needed or wanted. Advertising is one thing we can agree on, it's a red-flag. Be vigilant about personal advertising. The Internet thrives on the strong narcissistic thread of social media; learn to see it and use your vision to keep your selfhood and your sisterhood healthy.

Competition among women may be on the same dark side of culture. See the red-flag of this energy. What is it, why is it? Look inside your own ego and your own shadow; hopefully you can find and tame this demon in yourself. Do you compare? Do you need to keep up or 'best' your friends? Reach out

to other women in the kindest and gentlest way you can. Talk through these questions. Competition is a felt sense and when its shadow appears, the energy feels like betrayal. Beware of comparative words; more than, better than. See these red-flags before they materialize into something unimaginably painful. I always say, “There is no peace in comparison.” This reminds me to return to my heart’s desire: Peace.

Sometimes our dark moods come when we simply speak criticism about our culture. I am so very guilty of this. I use care to not pass my cultural critiques down to the personal level. Shake your head in wonderment, dear Makers. As culture-makers, we still have the over-culture squeezing in around the edges of our very special communities. This is the Age of Awareness, what change do you wish to see? Practice kindness every day and know the picture is so big you can only see your little part. No personal criticisms please. It’s much too hard to be a woman in this big over-culture. Positive feedback is always welcome, when it’s kindly delivered.

Laziness is your welcome respite during your Moon and during any time you need to exhale. However, trust me when I say that deep laziness can lead into a darker hole and fester more negativity. If it’s the dark you need, dive deep inside to discover what the darkness has to teach you. If you need to, let the darkness know you are searching for answers. Journeying is a method I wish to learn. Just a glimpse into Shamanic practices brings one little exercise for you: Imagine the darkness surrounding trees’ roots. They are all connected below the ground by threads of fungus carrying and sharing nutrients. These connecting threads are mycelium interconnecting trees below the ground to one another. This is a freeing and healing image. I suggest that you make a symbiosis with mycelium. Honor your darkness, for there is richness to be harvested around the roots of yourself. Every woman knows this place. Only you can wake yourself up if your lazy mood is habit forming. We need you to rise up, we all need you and your gifts. If you need the darkness, then you do and no one is judging.

I invite you to see these other deeply feminine aspects that our culture so often judges. Because they are personal teachers, the final explorations of women's moods need to be harvested. I received much of this muck through relationships—moodiness, cynicism, competition, guilt, betrayal, criticism—and I have practiced laziness. Deep experience with suffering, alone in the darkness, now helps me see everything. Only when you are ready, the Earth is waiting for your gifts. I invite you to rise up to your fullest expression, like your balloon perpetually filling with helium.

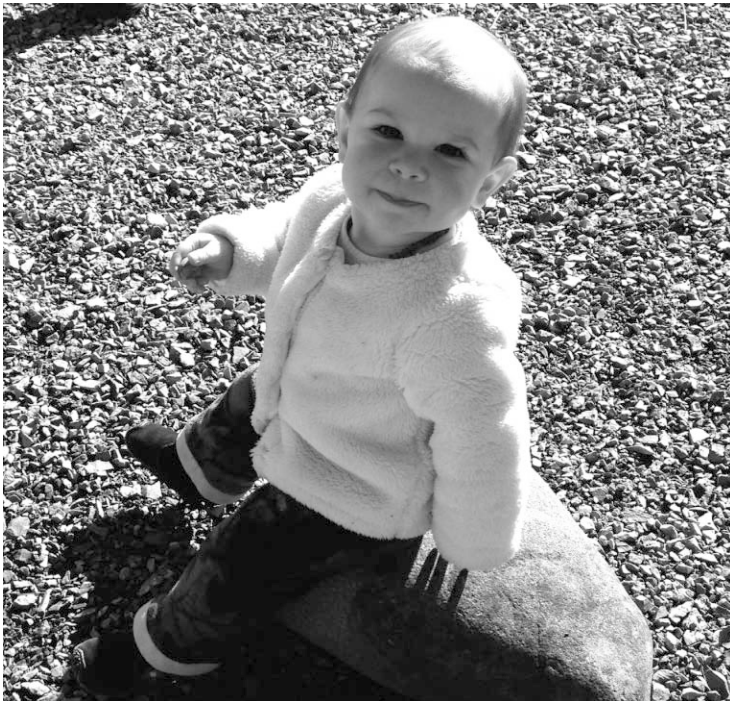
By our example, yours and mine, those beloved women who make up our girl-gang will begin to use these pieces also becoming fully luscious culture-makers. We do need to vision the world of our making, together. You are fertile inside, when you increase your curiosity, you increase your awareness. What is yours alone to bring to the world? Mary Oliver developed her personal convergence with Nature and poetry, out there, with wild Nature.<sup>10</sup>

### WILD GEESE

*Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,  
the world offers itself to your imagination,  
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting  
over and over announcing your place  
in the family of things.*

## RESILIENCE

Watching a one-year old baby learn to navigate the world around her, I watch her stand up, fall down, sit down, and get back up again as perpetual motion serves her. This practice has gone on for days and weeks and months, her practice of resilience. I have seen this very same motion in pre-teens and teens. They seem to have curiosity in their hearts and sometimes their world explorations cause suffering. From the very heart of suffering, resilience is the practice of your Soul. Use the energy of hope and nourishment that this word offers, you have it in you from when you were a baby learning to navigate.



Face of Resilience

You've likely heard that all things begin with a thought. All things actually begin before the thought. All the inventive things the world needs begin in the sauciness of energy, in the earthy fire of the first three chakras.

Things may actually begin in stardust and the creativity of childhood when you were making forts and finding bugs under rocks; when you knew no



limits and you were grandiose along with your friends. Your seeds of greatness were planted under the blankets behind the couch in make-believe and in mud puddles and staring at blades of grass where the tiniest of the insect world lives. Even if you feel your ideas now are too grandiose, like your inner 11 year-old's, they may in fact be your leading edge. Perhaps those seed ideas only need the green juice of affirmations and the willow-like strength and endurance honed from your inner resilience to fuel emerging passions.

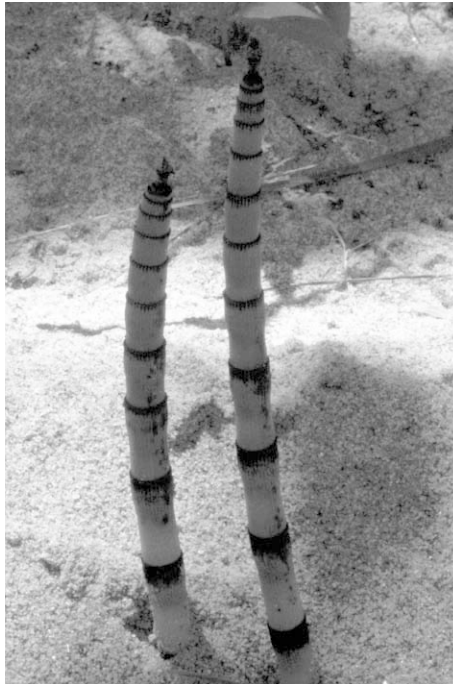
To understand the very beginning of the audacity needed for greatness—wrap a ribbon around your incredible first mud pie and all the imaginative fantasies of your dreams. Inside you lives a fertile and receptive integrated energy system for passion. Just as you can dream with the same fluid boundaries of your child-self, you can also be assaulted by the floating memes in the over-culture to squash your dreams. At both ends of your capacities, where you know your Genius and where you doubt your Genius, you are especially vulnerable.

See how this works: Privately, you receive inspiration from who knows where; God and Goddess connect to your receptive self. You nurture this inspiration until something in you has made a thought out of it and it might become a thing. When you doubt or criticize your inspiration, using words like hard or outrageous, that over-culture meme which stops thoughts from becoming things, shreds your idea to bits. Does this make you feel vulnerable, as in weakened? Take heart. This is a place of opportunity. It may be a choice place—do you follow inspiration or the meme of doubt? Are you bold and courageous or worried about what someone might think? Do you see this as an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of yourself? Remember these two things to help you decide: Mistakes or failures are sometimes the only way to learn how to move forward and the Earth needs your Genius. When doubt overcomes you, read or re-read Brené Brown's three books.<sup>11</sup>

From the quiet inside of your prayer and time in meditation, you may find your great idea. Rising to a sweet place of service to yourself, your family,

and your community, maybe you need to nurture inspiration without self-imposed boundaries like supplies, money, assembly, time, or help. Have you accepted all these or other super-adult realities as personal limitations? What if they weren't there, what if you could source all of them? Do you have the kind of juicy passion that contains persistence in generous doses? Is your passion the kind with patience? Does it keep you awake or wake you up, have you prayed over it? Do you have faith in yourself and your idea? Well then, you see what I mean, people may call you crazy because you are so close to the leading edge. Your greatness, your Genius comes from your Soul; it's in you from the beginning of time. If you have molded your inspiration into a thought already, it may be holy, like this book you hold in your hands.

## COMPETITION



*Equisetum Arvens* – Horsetail – Competing since the time of dinosaurs while standing in relationship

Exposing the evolutionary truth of competition, let's choose to understand it rather than practice it, I want to deconstruct where women learned

competition: In women, this is the shadow expression of the inner Animus, the Divine Masculine.

Competition in sports teaches about physical possibilities and teamwork. Competition between women is much more insidious, hidden, and often propagates deep feelings of shame. Many phrases are still part of the over-culture and have pushed every woman—win at all costs; there’s a war out there; you are better than that; be first in your class; break through that glass ceiling—can you think of other phrases? Talk to yourself about this pattern of competition between women and talk to your friends. Talk, talk, talk. One of the antidotes to competition is now a cultural meme, be the change you wish to see in the world. Let’s evolve competition so we can see it for what it is, the winner of one and the destroyer of the other.

Frankly, some of life’s best lessons come through a darker lens. There is more power in your Genius than you realize, and that may feel like something to fear or run away from. Look back, sort through your experiences to find and use the power of your passion. Your path began with the work of your 20s, finding your firm foundation and knowing what you believe. Polish up your daily practices, work with prayers to your unseen God and Goddess. Discover all the ways and means to heal what prickles you. When you can be authentic with other women, your Soul expression, the Genius that wants so badly to emerge will find no more resistance.

## ON MOTHERS

To honor Fern, thank you.

I write because of my Mother, and when I think of her I always say a prayer for her Soul. I was raised by a Mother who was different to me than to my three sisters. There was some karmic connection between my Mother and me that gave her permission to be over-powering and still feel safe enough to reveal her dark nature to me.

I write because of my Mother, to repair the breach between some Mothers and daughters. When I didn't get what I needed, or what I thought I needed from my Mother, I looked everywhere else before I circled back to understand what and why. I feel grateful for truth and validation; I feel compassion for the darkness my Mother carried. I feel relief that I have her genes and have located that over-large capacity in my Soul to carry more than is mine to carry. That is what she experienced too.

I write because of my Mother, she lived with such a void inside of her. Never was there an ounce of recognition for her Genius beyond being Mother to six of us and wife to an extraordinarily powerful man. I know she had a frustrated Genius because I was with her for two of her last three years on Earth. At the age of her Spiritual Elderhood, and especially her last 13 Moons, she finally quieted her demons and grace cloaked her. She left when she wanted to leave, on her own thought-wave.

I write because of my Mother, women have had it hard for centuries. For equality to mean anything, women's hardship must be dissolved. We can work together to empower ourselves, to hold our sisters' and friends' Genius up to the light. By searching, we will find ways to cast off what is not ours, like competition, petty criticisms, and judgments. These dark threads were born of cultures that have been toxic to women. They will dissolve when we applaud one another for pure courage and brilliant insights. This is the New Way for women; we can rise above our hardships by standing strong together and recognizing Genius in each other.

I write because of my Mother, and to change the culture that surrounds women. The most holy exchange between women is recognition. I wish to show myself to you as excitedly as if you were my BFF so that you will show yourself to me. After our sharing, you will receive Anne Lamott's three essential prayers: Help, Thanks, Wow! I promise.<sup>12</sup>

## RESISTANCE

I am having a love affair with resistance and so can you. Whenever I have a grand idea, resistance is the director who shouts, “Cut!” I adore my ideas. We are culture-makers, you and I, taking care to create a home environment and a luscious community for ourselves and our dears. Satisfying your Soul is part of making culture. Weaving your inner world of passion and purpose, rise before dawn to find what is yours to do. If you go to bed just a bit earlier, the dreamy dawn time could be yours alone. All the rest of the day, create opportunities compatible with your outer journey.

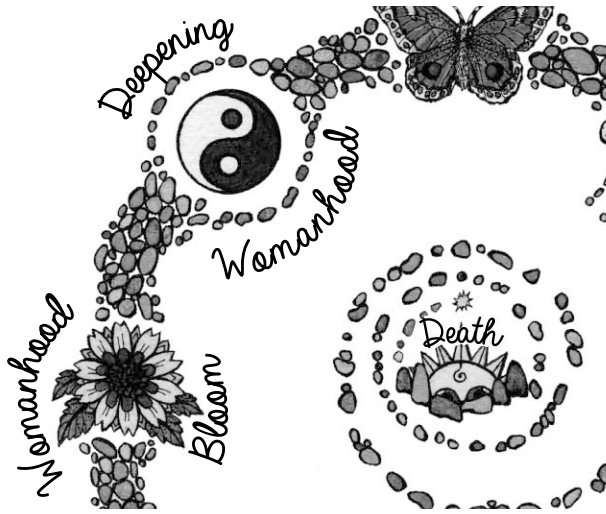
Learn to recognize resistance as pure energy. Sometimes your spirit may sense that it’s attached to a negative feeling; often the feeling is oppressive, and just as often that oppression is born from memories rather than what is true right now. That thread to the familiarity of your past is why it delivers a spark of recognition. Feel the jolt of resistance because its source is entirely inside of you. This energy may give you pause, sometimes for days. We call this procrastination. See it for what it is: Resistance puts on the breaks, creates the voice of doubt, behaves as a real stopper overlaid on your creative, inner Genius.<sup>13</sup>

If something wants to emerge, you have to love it and love your resistance to it. The trickster in resistance hovers over your head like an umbrella. On the other side of resistance, an entirely new level of your being waits to meet you. Usually, it’s a higher level and with it, a felt sense that you have touched authentic Divinity by persevering on your own behalf. See and feel the oppressive thought, the feeling of resistance, and the love that pushes through as the Creator. God and Goddess are waiting for you to push through resistance and appreciate the grand sigh of relief. Feel a deep willingness to push through your energy centers, alchemy of will begins to merge with love when you reach for the next level. Your idea pushes through to a higher level; it works every time.

All your hard work puts you in touch with your core growing like a tree, gathering rings in the rains and casting shadows in the sun. You are both parts,

small and scared, bold and dedicated, light and shadow. Feel the love dearly, it's in you, inviting you to feel every ounce of resistance, harassing you. Do not be stopped by yourself any longer. Have a secret love affair with resistance. Love always wins in the end. I pray that these words may be wisdom for you.

## GRIEF AND REGRET



I deeply love the women who model this stage of development, filling its varied cobblestones with the deep imprints that have built their lives. A Threshold looms, Deepening Womanhood, one that deserves a ceremony fit for Elders-in-training, for those cobblestones beyond belong to the next phase of life. With all my heart, I believe Divine Feminine is wrapping her arms around all of us women of the 21st century.

Your two decades of Womanhood elongate from 30 to 50, so you may experience the fullness of being human as you ride the roller coaster of ups and downs. This ride often brings very real feelings of regret and grief. Among the more reflective of feelings is regret, which will move right on through when you recognize the choices you made were right at the time. Invite this idea of movement to help you. Although these feelings carry different energy charges, sometimes grief and regret accompany one another. If something happens that

begins with regret and later ends up causing grief, use your friends and talk, continue reaching out. Write down your feelings, get help from an energy Medicine Woman, and find your way to relief, but not alone.

Grief over loss is an emotion of honoring, take the time to feel deeply. Go below the surface of your life and into your memories. Allow your thoughts and your body to feel the essence of slow time. All that ever was feels shattered and shaken. The deep grief of loss teaches all of us about impermanence and immortality. I have become philosophical about Death, it is the one event that no one avoids and every Death is a lesson for the rest of us. Death walks with us through every day. Grieve well, my daughter. This is my blessing.

Everything you have learned about yourself adds to your core strength; no one can take that self-knowledge away. If you feel regretful or grievous, slow all the way down until you can cope. If you have an unplanned dark-night-of-the-Soul, of course go deep enough into that darkness to feel the whole of it. Honor the darkness with your presence and your patience. If you are safe, stay with the darkness until you need the light more. If you are not safe, seek help and protection in your community.

## BALANCE IS KEY

I am audacious enough to offer this Elder counsel: All you need is inside of you and no, that's not original from me. The Eagle's view offers a thrilling design for you to consider. In this slice of the Spiral of Life, the whole of your adulthood lays out before you. Beautiful events year after year will define you just as childhood and adolescence have done. As you design your life, you will grow ever stronger from experience but need to remain willow-like because twists of fate wrap around your destiny.

Locked inside the mystery of coincidence, synchronicity, and Soul contracts, you cannot know these twists ahead of time. All the rest, you have complete control over, where you sleep, work, and play, and whom you love.

Remain open to the spice that will come sweeping in or sneaking in, and give a nod to the Great Mystery when something surprises you. In a very long succession, all of the twists of fate in my life taught me to be adaptable, open, and watchful. In reflection I see that I was hardly ever quite ready when Coyote came calling.

Your life is not a total give away, but here is a question for you to consider: How can you improve life for another, several others or many others? You are privileged if you have pulled the pieces of your life—mind, body, and Soul—all together. After you have traveled this far with me, I ask you to keep up the good work, remember to acknowledge your gratitude, and gift yourself some special training once a year. I believe in reaching for the brass ring, what teacher do you need to experience next? How can you build on your experience to be of service to yourself and others simultaneously?

All women can perform miracles with the creative juice of our wombs, whether it's the actual miracle of making and rearing a baby or blending new juice with skills already in our quiver. Those with a particular energetic charge, do both! Soften all edges and blur your vision, sit in deep meditation on your Moon, and allow your imagination to seek out the art and science intersections where passion may be lying dormant. You have entered the power decades. If you are as lucky and as gifted as in your dreams, you will truly become yourself. That is no small task.

You may be inspired to do one little thing for peace and justice to help others focus on personal healing. In your way of visioning, watch your own influence ripple out like a pebble dropped in a still pond. If you can see how the word, *dysfunction*, first used in 1916, has grown and infiltrated families, organizations, and whole countries, then you can offer up prayers for healing and take one step of action.

In your lifetime, people will re-imagine and form mini-Villages. Many immigrant peoples who remember Village life now live among us in our mobile, melting pot. We do not have to reinvent the wheel to come together as



Villagers. From my home Village, I lived next door to teachers, post masters, and doctors. I grew up with the model. Within a bicycle ride, we had bankers, grocers, and every kind of farmer. I would like to re-activate those dormant genes that truly knew cooperative sufficiency. We can dream it into being. Even if we live in a high-rise apartment building, we have a common address with dozens of others. How can we become cooperative? Isn't that the elemental definition of a Village, feeling we belong because we cooperate, first by greeting one another, then finding more common threads?

## THERE IS NO END, ONLY A CONTINUUM

You have an opportunity to see and live for your Soul-self. When you make listening to your Soul a conscious decision, your modeling will be seen, even felt, by all the other women, younger and older. It's all sensate, live with your Soul activated and feel fully alive. The Youngers will feel their own genes awaken and the Elders will sigh with joy and relief. As you collaborate with other women to build community, offer Rites of Passage to the little sisters, your personal reservoir will fill to the rim.

When you feel the irresistible energy that signals change, delivered through a catalyst, turn into that wind, it will blow for you. If you can imagine the next Threshold, it will appear out of the mist. Make preparations for a retreat, a personal ordeal, and a time away with yourself. Ask your loved ones to prepare a ceremony to welcome you back. They will do this for you and receive your journey story as well. May I personally welcome you across the Deepening Womanhood Threshold and into the mysterious and luscious training ground for your Elder Encore.



Consider a Death Ritual to transform this Life Stage and prepare for your Elder years

## LAURA'S TRIPLE INITIATION STORY

**Gail:** In a rather anxious but daring moment, I took a draft of *Soul Stories*, to Laura Wahl's house to invite her to consider being the designer for the book. We had lived in the same town for years but we had not met before. She was sitting at the tiniest picnic table, I remember her Blue Heeler eyeing me suspiciously while I shifted from one foot to the other. I told her *Soul Stories* is a guidebook for a woman's journey to reclaim her Soul through her stories. I was really surprised by her response, I swear all the planets were in alignment. She said, "I want to do this!" which put me into shock at her clarity and im-

mediacy. Simultaneity became our theme-song, mine and Laura's. I said, "Five other women, plus two in California, are crossing the Threshold next week, on Summer Solstice."

"Can I bring my girls?"

I had been zinged; perhaps the surprise was readable on my face. She stood up from the tiny table, gave me a generous hug and offered me a cup of tea.

"I love girls the most, how old are yours?" When my palpitating heart slowed down, I realized the Cosmos had blessed me with a new girlfriend and someone I truly needed. I had not known the power or emotional response of my book until Laura's honest reaction; I had secretly hoped for that. I had not known how writing had caused me isolation and Laura's genuine warmth covered all my holey needs with the sweetness of honey.

While we investigated our common threads, we found overlapping circles of friends and overlapping afflictions: We love through hugs and encouragement and example—Laura and I have each found the spirit inside of addiction. Together we have almost 60 years of sobriety, she has 34 years herself. She has literally been practicing life wisdom, intentionally increasing her consciousness, for all of her adult life. She faces the world with bluntness and fierceness while she lavishes love. Laura calls herself a party girl and when I'm around her, my definition for light takes on a clearer shine.

Her power cord gets plugged into recovery where she sees and feels the suffering of others, where she knows too well the powerful potential of addiction for destroying lives. From the inside, where her bone marrow is made, Laura has felt the deepest thrill of loving another suffering human being and watching their lights come back on.



Mother's Prayer to Carry Across Her Threshold

*Laura:* As a single mother with two girls, one entering high school and the other in elementary school, life sometimes felt ‘out of my control.’ Once upon a time I had fantasized about being a Mother and imparting to my girls all the “wise” lessons life had taught me. Reality was different. The years sped by. Work sucked up too many hours of each day, months, years.

I made mistakes. I was too demanding in the garden, insisting their rows be straight, that the seeds be placed just so, neither one will garden with me. I took them on hikes that were too strenuous and they whined; I put them on horses and they got scared.

And then I began to notice if I stepped back and allowed someone else to do the teaching and demanding my girls brought their accomplishments back to momma with pride. I needed to open my arms and let other women help me raise my girls.

So four years after separating, divorcing, and being on our own I noticed Mason (my oldest daughter) was attracting friends from similar backgrounds; broken families, with histories of addiction and denial among other things. How could I stir up the strength, empathy, compassion that I knew was in my girls? How could I reroute this energy before it got angry like my adolescence was...?

Into my world walks “little Gail,” as we refer to her. Her first sell was about the healing transformation and discovery that initiation offered. Go through this process, connect girls to their Moontime, teach them ritual, become an Elder myself. Thank-you, little Gail, for entering our lives at the exact moment we needed you.

**Gail:** Laura gifted me the overwhelming power of affirmation. When I met her girls the following week, I saw how all of their threads connected and I saw something else. The girls are connected to Nature. There is something obvious about kids who are comfortable in the woods and around wild water like the torrential creek that runs through my play space. But, there is more: Mason and Sage are also fluent in the language of birds, in the purpose of spiders, and in wild weedy plant medicine. I am also, so I asked a couple of questions and began to deeply appreciate that Laura’s kids have been raised knowing the conscious dialect of Mother Nature. Sage was 6 and Mason was 13 then, but they were growing fast and I could see their changes coming.

Mason took all the photos for our Soul Sisters’ Threshold crossing. This was participatory research for *Soul Stories*. Before we launched our guidebook for women’s initiation, we needed to give it a test drive. On the beach, with my stone Spiral, I explained how the Sun and the seasons would mark our movement through each of the Passages we have already lived through. There are stories needing to be recalled, even healed, and bundled together before crossing each Threshold.



Introductions to the Spiral

Taking a moment to look around the circle, peering into the Souls who stood with me, a sense of pure love for women and girls was reflected back to me. Besides the girls, Laura had brought her partner Nancy to be an anchor for the journey ahead. I realized the Divine Feminine was present, digging her toes into the sand; I felt her energy. I have faith she is always present when women stand in ceremony offering our whole selves to regenerate Women's Ways of being and knowing. When we stand in ceremony, we trust Divine guidance. I also knew that three other women were elsewhere doing ceremony to be with us in spirit, to take this journey to recover the stories of their Soul.

We smudged each other with sage smoke. I smudged Sage, and made a joke about how her name covered all of the women with a blessing. Girls are welcome in my Women's Circles, I would like to say always, but that's not quite true. When women offer Circles for girls and raise girls with the ritual of sitting in a Circle, in quiet, waiting for their turn to hold the talking stick, the dynamics of consciousness will shift all around the planet.

***Laura:*** Mason was going on 14, not very interested in my "old" boring friends sitting around a tipi doing "hippie" things. I asked her to participate as an artist and photographer for the day and she agreed. Once we got to Gail's for our

opening ceremony, I saw it was time for me to step back and allow relationship to develop.



Shift to Sacred Time with Smudge

Mason and Sage both connected with Gail's dog, Rosie, and they watched Gail through veiled glances. Gail tempted and teased them with marvels from the garden, rocks from the creek, plants in the woods and she finally won Sage's wonder with a deck of Tarot cards and a book that explained things in words Sage, at 7 years old, had no way to comprehend, yet she was hooked.

The girls left Gail's, as became the habit, with treasures in their pockets and in their arms. And thus we all began our journeys, each on a separate path, all to a similar place.

**Gail:** In the following months, when I checked in with Laura, she would report that she had lagged and always, her sweetest smile followed. Her life is huge. She was getting what she needed and she was in immersion whether she kept up her journal or not. We moved around the life Spiral meeting regularly with another Soul Sister, Janis, because now we had become the book team and wanted to polish *Soul Stories* for publication. We met and talked and bonded through the journey and through the book project. We practice the way of women, all things simultaneously.

When Laura told me that Mason was going to do a Rites of Passage journey, I was thrilled. Suddenly there were two females in the same house involved with initiation rites. How sweet is that?

Mason came out to my place with a gift and asked me to be a Mentor for her journey. I felt another jolt, an honoring filled with surprises, and without knowing more, I said, “Yes, of course.” Women other than Mothers have special gifts for these budding young women we still call girls, they still call themselves girls, but the truth is emerging day by day. If we give them only time to talk, if we give them the blessing of listening, that is a huge gift.



She gave me the date for her ceremony and asked me to come. I said, “Wow, so fast.” Then, I thought, What about womanhood training? That can come after. Mason at 14 was an eighth grader, bursting with energy to match her beauty. She knows a few of her gifts and is on an intentional discovery path to know more about her body and her Soul-self.





Feeling the Change

At the initiation ceremony for six teen girls, I was present as Mason's Mentor. Watching, I was impressed with the pomp and pageantry as these young women crossed back over their Threshold after being away together. To anchor their energy, the young women-becoming built an evergreen arbor as their ceremonial portal; they crossed through this Threshold for the community to witness. I saw each girl ducking a bit coming through the portal, it was like her prayer to Great Mother, a nod of an initiate's head. Yet, standing together, each girl felt the power of her accomplishment, she had finished. Let the celebration party begin!

I watched Laura and Mason together, absolutely the rarest spiritual experience in our culture, Mother and daughter going through Rites of Passages simultaneously. Because I have felt the special power of integration, I have been listening to and watching as Changing Woman does her secret work. The final step—formally known as reincorporation—requires a year, 13 Moons, before reflection illuminates the bridge of change. Reflection is an unusual trick, but looking back now to before, change becomes evident.

## Nine Passages for Women and Girls



Initiates Addressing their Community

As a Mentor present for Mason at her ceremony, I was called on to give these six girls a final blessing. I cupped my hands into a clamshell and spoke of the pearl each girl would find inside herself, when she focused on her inner world. Of the six, I only knew Mason and briefly, but I could feel the magnitude of this message, each girl received a pearl image of herself. I opened my hands to each girl, showing her a metaphoric pearl. I felt it was what an initiating Elder needed to do for this young circle of darlings. My experience gives me privilege as a seer. I am certain such a ceremony invites change to become felt, even noticeable.

*Laura:* Once again I stepped back to be the Mother and allow someone else to work the miracle. On her own without any prodding Mason asked Gail to mentor her through her Rites of Passage (ROP) with the group she spends her summers and weekends with, Twin Eagles Wilderness program. At first she resisted involvement in her own ROP but was eventually swept into the current. Her words at her own emergence ceremony (after her initiation weekend) were wise and strong, She had found her strength, faced her fears and realized “together” they could endure and emerge. She was becoming the strong com-

passionate Soul I had sensed in the shadows.

She carried on into high school that fall with a new grace and understanding of who she was. Her friends have begun to change as she finds ways to reach out to other young women unafraid to reach outside her comfort zone.

**Gail:** Maybe it was the ceremony in the yurt, but soon Laura shared an epiphany with me. Sage's eighth birthday would come in August, she asked, "Is June too soon?" Once again, I could not resist my Guardian Angels bringing another invitation to me, to walk my talk.

I know this for sure: A Middle Child ceremony celebrates the change within childhood and adds an emphatic, so far. For a girl, when responsibility enters her desires, sometime between age 7 and 9, a ceremony prepares her psyche—her watchful Soul—for all of the coming ceremonies to celebrate her maturity. Built around play, a celebration is especially powerful when friends are present to witness and be celebrated too. A Women's Circle thrills the feminine psyches in their very young Souls, and they want more ceremony forever! Research indicates this Middle Child celebration is the ceremony that makes all the others possible.

When Laura asked me to help with Sage's ceremony, I was already inside the wonderment that had been created by Laura's initiation, followed by Mason's Rites of Passage ceremony and standing on my own consecutive Thresholds celebrating all the changes in my own life. I said, "Absolutely!" We were in ceremony together when she asked and we were working together to put *Soul Stories* together. Our own closing ceremony date had not even been set. "When, exactly?"

Six weeks before the girls' ceremony, our time came to step across the last of our Thresholds. Laura and Janis and I gathered to complete our year-long ritual with a celebration six Thresholds for Laura and seven for Janis and I. We joined our hearts together to close the portal and say prayers of encouragement for our other Soul Sisters. I had found my final Threshold in

February and eddied up until we gathered in early May. Waiting is one part of nourishment, like the Earth waits for rain.

*Laura:* My six Passages covered 9 months. From the beginning there was trepidation about the commitment. I had a full-time job, raising two girls, a partnership that often suffered from lack of quality time.

But I heard the promises of healing and felt the truth in what Gail offered and I wanted it.

So during the Passage phases I put pen to paper and wrote, not every day like she hoped but often enough that I worked through each phase, spending time with self, listening, telling stories. The biggest realization was that there was a new story here. I had heard my Mother's version of my birth, filled with her own disillusionment and feelings of being overwhelmed, but when I sat down and wrote my story, I wrote about the characters that surrounded me. It was a different story than the one I thought I knew. This was my story, filled with love and wonderment and I preferred it.

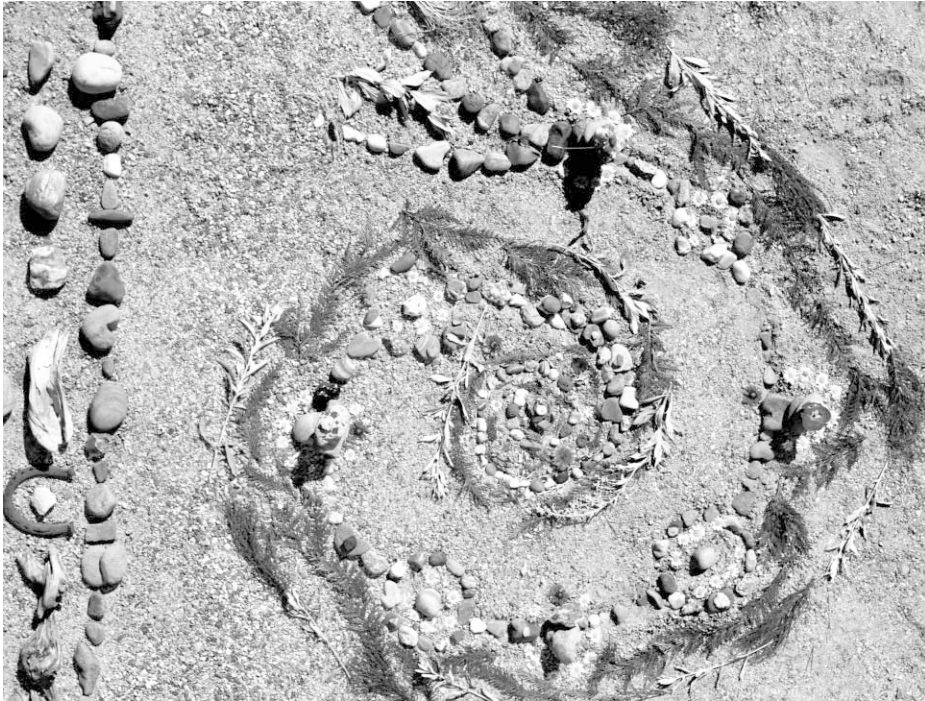
Each month I shared and listened to other women's stories. Each month we took an hour out of a Sunday morning, it wasn't hard. If I was home with the girls I went into my room with a candle. If I was out somewhere I found a quiet place to sit. After each talk I was warmed with a blanket of connection. Sometimes the women reached out to me with words of advice, encouragement and sometimes I had a kind word for someone else.

My sixth Passage caught me up to where I am in my life, at the beginning of Elder-ship. I can't say I feel confident in being a wise Elder, but I can see getting there one day.

One day one of the sisters in response to my share of recent heartbreak and loss said something to the essence of this:

"I envy that you were able to drop so many balls and fall so completely apart. It allowed you to change everything that wasn't right." She saw strength

in my journey, not just loss, and slowly I began to roll that song into my own and learn to celebrate the growth not the loss.



An Elder's Meditation: Spiral Ceremony of Gratitude

## SAGE'S MIDDLE CHILD INITIATION

**Gail:** The heat came early in June. I made this Spiral to express my gratitude for the New Moon in June, for the 360 days in ceremony with my Soul Sisters, and for the girls coming in a couple of weeks.

With barely a pause in all this swirling energy, we settled plans for the Middle Childhood event. Meeting once with the three Mothers, we dreamed drama into the plans to make a big story for three little girls. Sage invited two of her friends to share this day with her so they could enjoy their own spotlight. Each ceremony takes its own form, but special to Middle Childhood is play and Mother-daughter time.



Let's Play!

The Sun baked the Earth at the end of June, 2015. Keeping to the ritual form, I welcomed three beautiful little Initiates and their Mothers. Arrangements had been made for other responsibilities and the pause button was pushed on their busy lives for two whole days. They offloaded their gear inside the tipi poles, minus the cover. Then, with just a little orientation to the land, I introduced my husband, Kenny, and my dog, Rosie.

We always open to play first. Everyone changed into swimsuits and headed for the water. Ordinarily, late June is pretty high water, but danger had passed, peak water and heat had come early, so the water was Sun-warmed. Girls know about play and help women remember.

The next day was reserved for ceremony. This all-play day sets the stage for togetherness, for the pure spirit of play to be part of the story, and for bonding the women and the girls. Since the girls were friend of Sage, the Mothers were long-time friends with Laura. This is the nature of close communities. They would be there to help one another throughout the next year.

On ceremony day, the mood changed. We made relations with all others who come to stand in celebration of the girls. We gathered around brunch the next morning to meet Grandparents and other best relations.

Before the high heat of the day, I led the group through the woods to the beach to stand in ceremony and cross the girls over their Threshold. We passed the smudge bowl. Out in the open, standing on the sandy bluff over the creek, there was no place for refuge from the searing heat and perspiration began to drip. Nature was cooperating in her way, the atmosphere felt immediate, everyone's energy was altered.

I felt the feminine spirit of change envelop the witnesses and each young girl. Saying words that would not be remembered, I was intentionally formal, delaying our rush back to a cool sanctuary. I thought of how the Mothers and daughters would remember this feeling and would remember the spirit revealed through long moments under the hot Sun. We were each like our standing friends, rooted to the Earth and absorbing love from our day star until we were almost cooked. I knew the heat would be remembered and I hoped the spirit of the moment would be easily recalled. I dearly love to watch the faces of each girl because when the spotlight is solely on them, something begins to shift. It's subtle, but their inner light takes on a new glow.



Initiates on their Middle Child Threshold

When I looked around to the faces of Laura and Mason, I was met with dazzling smiles and the force hit me. Three Souls journeying through life together, Mother and two daughters wrapped with the same gossamer threads to celebrate how living brings change and change invites maturity. To be fully wrapped into the weave where Soul announces a new level of maturity, each one of us only need to have our lives celebrated when change appears. This is the value of ritual.

## A LITTLE CATCHING UP FOR THE ADULTS

Nancy and Mason took the girls away for some solo play while I gathered the adults in my ‘cool tea room.’ Setting the stage for memories to emerge, we rearranged the altar and lit the candles. Nine adults passed the talking stick for one question that seems small but lives large inside, “Can you tell your story of you at 8 and how you were greeted by change?” This question causes spontaneous engagement. Unexpectedly, strangers hear intimate stories of change. Listening to each other, we appreciated on a deep, Soul level, what this ceremony means to those three girls.

As culture-makers, women are on the leading edge of offering Rites of Passage to young and old alike. This edge is where people are just beginning to recognize the significance of Rites of Passage. This edge of a cultural paradigm shift believes in marking change. Early in this new century, many Nature connection and related organizations are offering Rites of Passage for youth only. I remind myself, this is an edge, like Nature’s ecotone, the zone where two well defined and differentiated ecosystems meet and blend. The ecotone represents the best parts of both and creates a unique and sacred third ecosystem. On one side, the uncelebrated, on the other side religious offerings like communion and bat mitzvah. In the middle zone is the ecotone,<sup>14</sup> where ceremony thrives and is beginning to grow into the culture. Just look at Laura’s story, imagine the holy way spirit moved through her to create this story for herself and her girls.

**Laura:** The younger Middle Child ceremony took me outside my comfort



zone, as I wove generations and families together. My family who live in the midwest and miss so much of day-to-day of our lives were invited to join in the ceremonies. I wanted this connection for my girls. And like my family does, they rallied. We built our summer vacation around Sage's closing day of her two-day ceremony and Mason's "Give," six months after her ROP ceremony as a gratitude dinner. Not until I was making the final itineraries of who goes where at what time did I realize how much each of us would have to bend. Things we take for granted like walking to the creek, sitting in a Circle, smudging each other, passing a talking stick and then presenting a dinner for over 20 people became a rather huge mountain of logistics.

The temperature heated up to over 100°, my Mother was immobilized by a foot injury, my 84 year-old Father and my urban executive sister would be asked to sit in a Women's Circle in a half day ceremony. Nancy and Mason along with cousin Alexander from Chicago would be asked to take the three little girls for part of their day into the woods. I realized too late how far out of everyone's comfort zone this was. But like troopers they all showed up because I asked them to. These two days were not about me or them but being a momentous part of my girls' lives; it was a lot to ask; perhaps it was good that I hadn't been discouraged by how much or I wouldn't have asked.

In the end, we all enjoyed a fine meal of salmon and the three young girls and their Mothers all beamed at such attention lavished upon them. For a moment in each of their lives they were special and valued and loved. The connection between Mothers and daughters were woven and strengthened. Each girl, voicing gratitude, at eight years old! **Proud Momma.**

## MASON'S "GIVE"

As a sort of conclusion, Mason's ROP included a "Give" as in a give-back gratitude meal to her family and friends. We waited until my family was here for a week to pull it together. Mason drew up the menu, helped prepare and served each guest. Her Grandparents, her Mentor Gail, as well as her

Mentor Jeanine from Twin Eagles, my partner Nancy, her brother Autry, sister Sage, and Mason's Aunt and cousin Alex.

After dinner, without giving details of her Rites of Passage, Mason told her story and what it meant to her. She had gifts for all involved.

It was a moment of pure gratitude and appreciation. I smile as I think



The Inner Beauty of an Initiated Woman

of the courage it takes for a young girl to stand and address a crowd of peers (siblings and cousins) and Elders. I smile at the awkwardness that will not remain as she finds her voice. I felt in my heart it was just the beginning of the emergence of the young woman to be. **Proud Momma.**

*Gail:* To celebrate change and spiritual maturity, Laura knew that each daughter needed to be pulled out of their mundane, ordinary lives and placed in a sacred container for a time away. This was their Threshold time.

Such time away in Rites of

Passage ceremonies may be hours or days; if the ceremony is carefully done, all that is offered to the feminine can be interpreted symbolically so she may be imprinted by her own story. Each initiation will complete itself in the 13

Moons that follow. The ecotone becomes more holy over time.

Now Laura knows the value of initiations for women and Rites for girls. She has lived with change for the full round of 13 Moons, watched herself and her girls, watched the spirit that moves through a family unit, bonded in ceremony. The change is more than noticeable, woven into their conversations, it is welcomed and remembered. There is more change ahead for Laura, for Mason, and for Sage.

I like to notice and write about women who hear the call and take action. My friend Laura was a quick study. After a full year, all three females in the house had Initiated to themselves, transformed, and felt the joy of change as a welcome companion. Each journey was individual, unique, and very beautiful.

Viva la difference, Laura, you are an Initiated woman, and now a baby Elder! As an Initiated Elder myself, I say to anyone who asks, transformation isn't easy, but neither is resistance. She is called Changing Woman for a reason. A Rites of Passage ceremony smooths out fear of change and erases resistance.

**Laura:** Gail's gentle prodding, pushed me to eek out a little time for me, for my journey and my healing. Both of my girls have their own journeys; I am not solely responsible for them but I can guide, I can praise and I can provide a way for them. My load is lighter today as I learn to share it with other women, but maybe it's also because I have become stronger. I have found joy and laughter in these Circles. It was beautiful to wrap the lives of Sage's friends and their Mothers, my dearest friends into this journey. It's fun to grab the girls and head out for an adventure. They are friends, it's something they are sure of. Not everyone gets that at 8 years old.

## GIFTS FROM THE ELDERS: DEEPENING WOMANHOOD

**Consider the common thread** to all of womanhood: We are daughters first, sisters often, and we continue to grow into the roles of wives, partners, Mothers, and culture-makers.

**You talk to understand** how you feel, what you stand for, why it matters, and how you can make a difference.

- \* Your original effort may have been filled with hesitation; this advanced effort to discover how much more of your authentic brilliance may be filled with endless delight.
- \* As the power of your passion is revealed, take the action steps to build your life in an inspired way.

**Discover your inner Nature** and your wild Nature. Women do not keep this secret, wild Earth is our collective source for great inspirations.

- \* You gather your teachers in unity with your Soul. Offer care for these sacred *Others* in exchange for their love and lessons which reflect and inspire your trials: What did you come to learn, to do, to be?

**Try singing, “Freedom.”** This is your song, “Freedom.” Declare yourself free of shackles: *Shoulds* must go. The need for personal approval must evolve; see how every expectation can be turned inside out. Freedom is women’s uphill struggle. Consider the vast implications of your personal freedom song.

**Respect for power**—whether you have it, feel it, or observe it—makes relationships Divine. Shared power causes relationships to rise to higher levels of love, compassion and personal growth. Put your attention there for just a moment:

- \* Can you feel the attraction of power?
- \* In relationships, do you strive for respect or control?

- \* Consider what influences money and sex have in your relationships.

If the squinty-eyed Elder in me teaches you nothing else to guide you through Deepening Womanhood, I wish it to be awareness about your personal power: With you, I practice reverence and respect. This is the most Divine of all the personalities of power.

- \* Giving without expectation, giving without need of reciprocity, giving because it's your Soul-food, this is one of the simplest ways to build community. In giving you receive, it's a spiritual law.

**You begin to trust** that everyone in the community who feels the recipient of your gifts will discover ways to surprise you in return. Elders have been teaching this gift-economy our whole lives, no one escapes our teachings.

**By flowing** through one Passage and then another, you have become an active participant in your life. We are looking for the intersection of science and art; this may help you find your way to your greater purpose. What you love the most gives you the biggest clue. Have faith in yourself and you will find your purpose.

**Like stardust** hidden in your fingertips, all of the essential ingredients, pieces like patience and persistence, can be learned and practiced.

Look deeply into these many different aspects of life rolled into one you.

- \* How do you fulfill your Soul's urgent request?
- \* How do you imagine your life story and shape it to serve you while you serve others?
- \* Can you find the spiritual opening to receive what you need—love, juice, nourishment—from the sacred *Others* in your life?
- \* Look into your stories to discover what is there for you.
- \* What causes your positive and negative moods?
- \* Do you have stories you will not share? Do they haunt you?

## Nine Passages for Women and Girls

- \* How about the stories you treasure, some of them even make you giddy. Do you share those freely?

**Mistakes or failures** are sometimes the only way to learn how to move forward and the Earth needs your Genius.

**Do you have the kind of juicy passion** that contains persistence in generous doses?

- \* Is your passion the kind with patience?
- \* Does it keep you awake or wake you up, have you prayed over it?
- \* Do you have faith in yourself and your idea?
- \* Freedom: Power | Control vs. Power | Respect

Increase your awareness around power. In relationships, this incredibly large word, power, can elevate all of your connections. First, you must understand power and with reverence, attend to its pure energy. We joke about alpha males and alpha females. Put your attention there for just a moment, can you feel the attraction of this power? Respect for power—whether you have it, feel it, or observe it—makes relationships sacred. If you feel bound, limited, or small, you may need to ask for help to relieve your oppression.

Shared power, consciously and as equals, makes the jokes funnier, allows for the possibility of freedom, and causes relationships to rise to higher levels of love, compassion and personal growth. If you are emerging from a cloud of oppression, find comfort in starting again. In *The Power of Partnership*, Riane Eisler provided comfort when I needed to understand power.

## CLOSING BLESSING

After you have traveled this far, I ask you to keep up the good work, remember to acknowledge your gratitude, and gift yourself some special training once a year. What teacher do you need to experience next? How can you build

on your experience to be of service to yourself and others simultaneously?

Choose your battles carefully, but choose one. This may be your Gift for Gaia. These top women's issues listed by MsFoundation.org may include an opportunity for you to express your gifts and heal dysfunction. What are your top issues?

- End child sexual abuse because it's the worst form of abuse imaginable
- End domestic violence because we are all related
- Work for immigration because most immigrants are women with children
- Work for reproductive rights for women because choice is so precious
- Work for equal pay for women which has inched up from 56% to 77% in my lifetime
- Work for affordable child care because Mothers' struggle builds the future

Your Village needs this conversation and demonstration of courage. Everyone you know and love needs to feel the freedom of their imaginations.

## NOTES FROM DEEPENING WOMANHOOD

- 1 *Moon Mysteries: Reclaiming Women's Menstrual Wisdom, A 13 Month Journey with the Cycling Moon* (2010) is a reference for women of all ages and for Moontime rituals. I have high praise for the creators, Nao Sims, Nikiah Seeds, and Eyan Myers because I learn something new with each reading. On the book's website, they offer abundant generosity and celebration: <http://www.moonmysteries.com/moon-cycle-chart>
- 2 I owe so much to women who helped me mature, but I must begin with Judy Grahn. By the time I picked up her opus, *Blood, Bread, and Roses: How Menstruation Created the World* (1993), the historical basis for women's mysteries, I had already shed 350 eggs. Many women experienced this same oversight; we were raised without a woman-centered origin story. We can correct this with the generations alive right now, our daughters and the daughters of our friends.
- 3 I give thanks to Lucy H. Pearce for her fearless presentation of Moontime. She opens the conversation to the sacred mystery of our wombs. She writes about women and Moontime. Find her imprint and her remarkable books to share with Youngers here, Womancraft Publishing. <http://www.womancraftpublishing.com/>
- 4 Influences to feed your transformative fire: *Gift from the Sea* (1955) is a woman's journey to herself. Even for the briefest time a retreat is restorative as demonstrated by Anne Morrow Lindbergh. Silence reminds us of the value of silence. Shakti Gawain wrote several books that began to open me, *Creative Visualization* (1995) and *Living in the Light: A Guide to Personal and Planetary Transformation* (1998). I accepted these books as gifts from my great friend, Diana, who taught me that women influence one another with love, love of life and sharing.
- 5 Rachel Hertogs guides women and girls in ritual. Ceaselessly energetic and living off the grid in Wales, she runs a little online store for every woman's Moontime needs, including pads for bleeding and pads for incontinence, an Earth conscious way to fall in love with your yoni. Her website shows cloth pads hanging on the clothes line, soaking up the sun. How natural and beautiful, shifting the paradigm for all women! (<http://www.moontimes.co.uk/>)
- 6 Women are so often pulled between being and doing, the feminine and the masculine. Helen M. Luke's *The Way of Woman: Awakening the Perennial Feminine* (1995), guides women to a deeper contemplation of our feminine nature by celebrating our worth.
- 7 Riane Eisler the writer who, through *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future* (1987) brought women powerful images of Paleolithic and Neolithic times before women were so widely oppressed, also wrote *The Power of Partnership: Seven Relationships that Will Change Your Life*, (2002). Partnership is portrayed as the alternative to domination, which leads to oppression. She has turned the relationship power game inside out so conversations of healing can begin.
- 8 Groundbreaking then and now, Jean Baker Miller wrote for the hearts of women about our delicate relationships, how to deepen connection and how to weather storms of emotional trauma to remain connected, and what to lookout for that may yield disconnection and engage in repairs. All of this is unraveled in *Toward a New Psychology of Women* (1976). For hours of exploration about women-centered research, <http://www.jbmti.org/>
- 9 I mention Clarissa Pinkola Estés again because I cannot resist the delightful way her teachings



appear. Find all of her books and audios at your library or at [www.soundstrue.com](http://www.soundstrue.com)

- 10 Mary Oliver is one of many poets who interpret the language of Nature, women love that she speaks into our hearts through the familiar second person, and cheers us on at the end. This is an excerpt from Wild Geese found in *Dream Work*, her 1986 collection of poems.
- 11 Brené Brown, a graduate professor in Social Work from the University of Houston, has changed the face of shame, vulnerability, worthiness, courage, and showing yourself to your community. Backed by amazing research, she continues to publish her discoveries in consumable form. *The Gifts of Imperfection* (2010); *Daring Greatly* (2015) both meant for self-discovery and *Rising Strong* (2015) brings the conversation into the wider spheres where life revolves around others—home, work, church, and community service.
- 12 Anne Lamott is a writer's dream coach. *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life* has been a classic since it was published in 1995. When I read *Help, Thanks, Wow: The Three Essential Prayers* (2012) I realized how these prayers connect all women, to ourselves and our Mothers, and everywhere, all around the world, to one other.
- 13 I felt *resistance* for years and only began to recognize it as procrastination, then as hesitation, as fear, and as avoidance of my life's joy. Then I read Stephen Pressfield's *The War of Art: Winning the Inner Creative Battle* (2002). My love affair with resistance had already begun and I found ecstasy in this easy solution: See, embrace, and vanquish resistance.
- 14 We are all trackers through our Ancestral lineage. Since one of my main influences in developmental thought and human ecology was Paul Shepard, I have kept track of his wife. Florence Krall Shepard introduced me to *Ecotone: Wayfaring on the Edges* (1994) when I was lost in grief and needed to know that I was investigating an edge ecosystem. Grief and Earth offered me a doorway. Walking in silence has become a deep practice. Her newest book, *Sometimes Creek: A Wyoming Memoir* (2012) is written in the genre of a Spiritual Elder's legacy.

## 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.