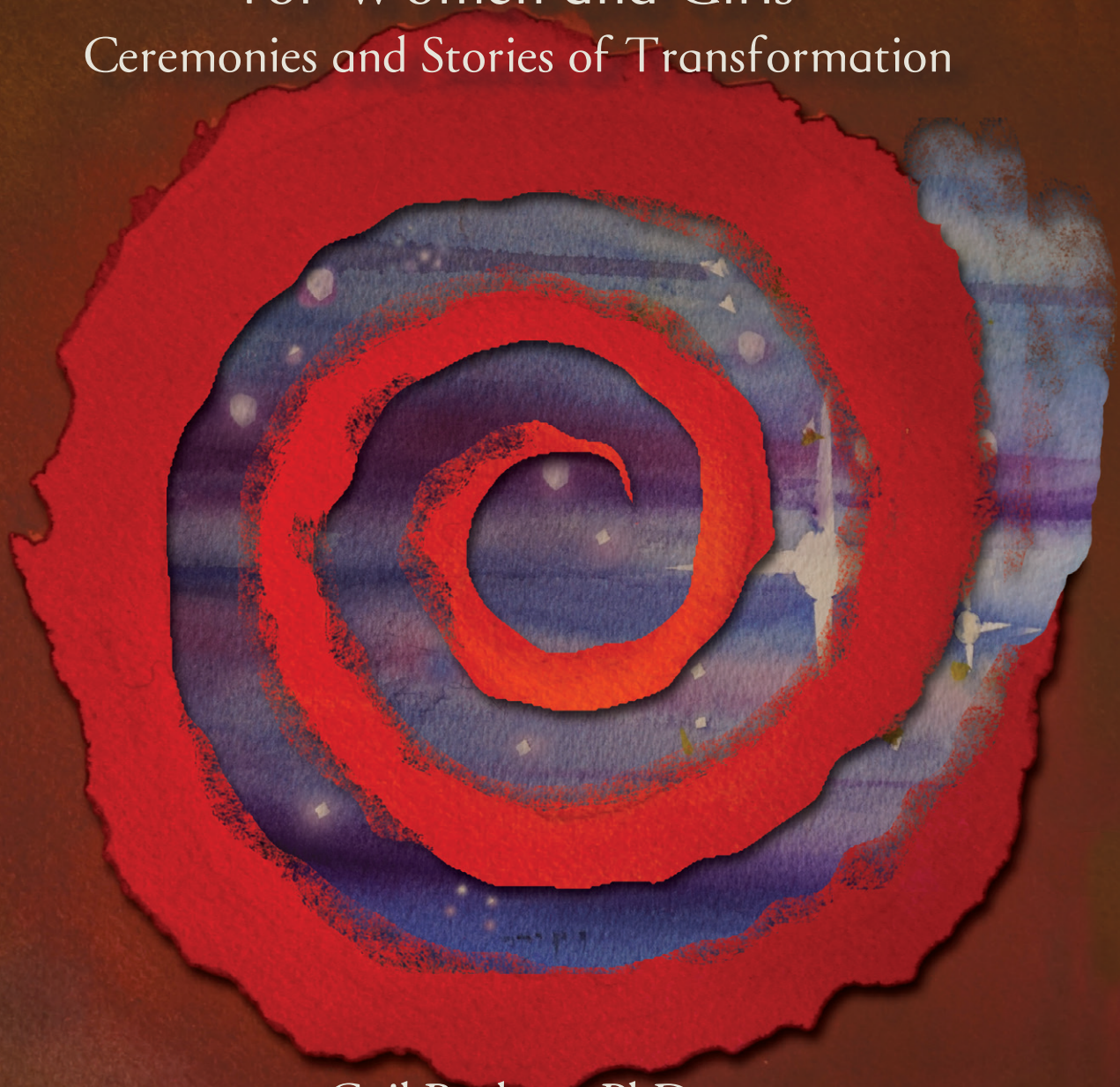


# NINE PASSAGES

for Women and Girls

Ceremonies and Stories of Transformation



Gail Burkett, PhD

# The Life Spiral



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Ceremonies and Stories of Transformation

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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

### ELDER ENCORE, SPIRITUAL ELDER, DEATH

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

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

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

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

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

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



## ELDER ENCORE

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### THE INTENTION:

### UNDERSTANDING PERSONAL WISDOM TRADITION

*Life has trained you well, my friends; the juicy-saucy Threshold I call Elder Encore is far ahead, the first of your two Elder Thresholds. You have only entered the training ground and do not yet need to think of Elder except to wrap your arms around one of us. We probably have a gift for you. In this lovely space just across the Threshold of middle adulthood, your ambitions have been filled and redefined, children are still growing, often ready to leave home, or long gone. The force of women who never had children has grown in power over the past decades and all women agree, women's experience is complete without children. Do not buy into negative stereotypes for another minute: Those sayings—over the hill or on the downhill slide—are passé. Do not worry about getting older. No woman is truly old until her last 13 Moons.*



I want to believe you took that mighty big leap of faith across the Deepening Womanhood Threshold and celebrated with a quietly raucous affair. Eddy up, find the still waters where no river current or fast waters can reach you. Remain quiet

enough to allow your sleep-time to integrate all the changes you have invited. This will take a year of Moons, a time for exhaling and for reflecting. Those twenty years of adulthood held all of life and delivered so many opportunities to grow: Desire and motivation, accomplishment, adventure, children, crisis, sex, love, birth, death, and rebirth. What could possibly be ahead? The answers are as varied as women, completely individuated, and gorgeously evolved: Spiritual practices, revolution, peacemaking and forgiveness, food, movement and body work, spirit and consciousness, peace and justice, and cultivating your inner Divine Feminine.

## THE EAGLE'S VIEW

Throughout all of life, your evolutionary journey towards destiny has blended your heart's desires—intentions, luck, and synchronicity—with determination including sweat and clairvoyance. Maybe your Soul planned all the events of your life to happen the way they did. Your accumulated experience of the earthly and celestial realms has developed your beliefs. You know with some certainty which parts of new age and old age philosophy belong in your worldview. Isn't it sweet that everyone's viewpoint is unique?

If we could shatter a point of light into its energy parts, the Divine or Source connection would be obvious, all light leads to and from the center. Human creativity would also be illuminated. Every earthly thing, material and spiritual, relational and emotional, has intricately woven into your energetic and evolutionary process and shaped you. Your relationships, your family, your home and décor, everything on your resumé and all of your adventures combine to weave your desire and determination into something. Please look around you, look within too. Now is the time to take stock.

Your middle years, the decade of your 50's, may be capped by a croning because these ceremonies, celebratory women's gatherings, are fun. Like a birthday, you can accept the spotlight for one day and night to feel the power of the Maiden-Mother-Crone archetypal energies and how those appeared for you. Stretch your croning to a weeklong celebration if that feels right.



## Nine Passages for Women and Girls



Include Flowers for Points of View, Points of Light

Reminiscing is nostalgic. These energies are real. When you look within and without, see that you and all women are more differentiated than similar. How will you mark your place in time?

Consider this coincidence: Our medical advantage predicts decades of health and vitality will elongate both life stages ahead, Elder Encore and Spiritual Elder. I believe the elongation affects both stages of adulthood also. We simply live in a time unlike any other. To be born into this time and with such possibilities has layers of potentiality.

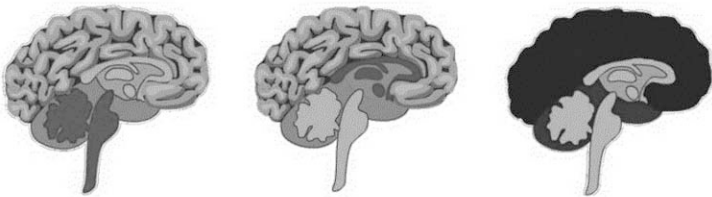
Half way to anywhere is a belief. Let's make an agreement with the Universe that the best of life is ahead. Life is about beliefs and how your emotions show up in your body. Are you learning how your heart guides your mind? Each thought is powerful. You are a supreme and evolutionary distiller of knowledge and experience. So much has been discovered about the brain's capacity, all of us absorb much more than we can use. I am really talking about Soul capacity. When I wrote *Soul Stories: Nine Passages of Initiation*, I adapted a concept that rose from my Women's Circle called double-tracking.<sup>1</sup> I have learned that this has scientific merit. We know this spiritually, but now the

concept of time-binding has offered validation.

The theory of time-binding goes in simultaneous directions through time. The entire life-work of Alfred Korzybsky<sup>2</sup> weaves science in and through the semantics of time to demystify how knowledge accumulates and is passed along from one generation to the next. Relationally, you with your Soul-self have an innate capacity unique to the triune brain of humans. This gift of evolution means people learn from experience, especially mistakes.

Triune Brain Theory

Lizard Brain	Mammal Brain	Human Brain
Brain stem & cerebellum	Limbic System	Neocortex
Fight or flight	Emotions, memories, habits	Language, abstract thought, imagination, consciousness
Autopilot	Decisions	Reasons, rationalizes



The Triune Brain in Evolution, Paul MacLean, 1960

One Tiny Glimpse is Enough

With your miraculous brain,<sup>3</sup> and across the timeline of your days, you were born with the ability to grasp the past, present, and peer into the future nearly simultaneously. You are the recipient of parental influences and ancestral traits. Your Ancestors have gifted knowledge, mannerisms, and wisdom directly to you from their life experiences. Generously, if they applied the Golden Rule to all relationships, it will seem most natural to you. Other habits you may have to work through since you will be Ancestor one day, passing along traits bound in time.

Watch this compounding: Throughout our lives we learn from everyone

we come in contact with and we learn from everyone who shares their special knowledge and wisdom, as in literature, music, and specialized crafts. Much more complex than all this first appears, each person inherits all of the knowledge that has gone before, recorded as well as cultural. An expansive worldview surely, it is still much larger. Each Soul has the capacity to bring influences of past lives into the present and influence the future. When you understand your timeline for gathering your legacy, somewhere along the accumulation of days you will wonder truly, how you know all that you do know.

I invite you to consider your Soul as the next great teacher in your life! How do you harvest your Soul's gemstones? Gathering your stories, intentionally drawing in learning, will prepare you for the Threshold ahead. Now you understand why silence is so important.

## REST ON YOUR LAURELS

Perhaps this is the year to “rest on your laurels,” as my Mother used to say. Even the most brilliant mind and body needs rest to locate the spiritual side of living. Locate your Soul in the midst of this swirl. Dive deep into inquiry, give yourself this extraordinary gift. Then take time to *integrate*, a holy transformation of Mind-Body-Soul connecting the past to the future.

Before you receive the call to initiate as an Elder, careful navigation of the years ahead will prepare you to embrace your Elder Encore. This is the time, while you are still a baby Elder, to recognize your mortality and take the blinders off denial. As surely as we are born to this world we will pass from this world. Death is ahead as surely as it walks with each one of us through every day of our lives. You were born with a purpose, maybe a different energy for each Passage. Search for still hidden gifts, you have something more to offer, something great. What is it you must do and only you can do? This is the time to set yourself up for that one big thing you came to do or say, write or paint, build or develop, while your burning desire still radiates heat.

What could this mean, set yourself up? In preparation for the next giant Threshold, each woman takes a personal inventory. This means, harvest your personal sparks of joy from the story of your life. Like almost every woman, you have had peak moments, lofty memory places where you touched the Divine. What energy still lives in you to share with others? This is called Encore for a reason you have yet to discover.

Carefully inspect life-lessons unique to you; each offered something in contrast to your joy-filled peaks. I often refer to the contrasts as troughs. Find your gratitude for these times of trial, moments of loss and grief, and times when you have spun your spiral of life down to learn from your shadow side. We all learn so much during a lifetime, in the light or through shadow. I find my deepest gratitude in the contrast. Can you truly know one without the other?



Looking Back to Womanhood Bloom and Ahead to Spiritual Elder

Women who are Mothers often will begin reflections through their womb creations. What did your children teach you? All women agree that the ecstasy of birthing another human being goes beyond imagination and into the realm of miraculous. Think of all the Passages that have come along

as change agents for yourself and your children: Weddings, births, divorces, graduations, these are the mini-Passages and unique to each woman's story. Nine life-stage Passages including this 7th one, your Elder Threshold create the common threads that connect all women.

After deep introspection, I see how the initiations that I have experienced combine with those I have led; both bring me to a broad consciousness about the Village. The original fracturing of the Village concept happened when people gained mobility to move long distances. In 1878, my own Great Grandparents spanned oceans and continents.

When we adopt Rites of Passage as a life affirming system to see one another, then we will reclaim the adhesion to form our Villages with strength enough that they will retain their shape. Rituals are that powerful and when they are personal, and inclusive of every person all around the Life Spiral, then true connection will begin to repair the culture.

I have become an adopting Grandmother which compliments my Elder years. My arms spread wide like wings for children of every age to fly under for a time. I understand the future of the dream we all call tribe or Village includes and extends beyond our families. Our collective future depends on Elders helping to hold it all together for the Mothers who want our help. This is the time when your Encore may touch many lives.

Because I am without children, I embrace a large number of dear women friends who have also had no children. Perhaps you are one of us. We love the capacity of mothering; it just was not our path. Without children, we may have missed the ecstatic experience of birthing and the joy of raising a child or several, but there are always children to care for when we find our capacities to help Mothers. Every Mother appreciates help!

Weaving these pieces together, Elders who know themselves through initiation will become the whispering ones. We are the ones who see the Eagle's View first because we have finished with careers and intense domestic

duties that consumed so much time. We begin with ourselves, then our closest family members, whispering how memories are formed, how imprints matter, indeed how personal stories matter. We understand, even if vaguely, how the Ancestors influenced our path. This, naturally, includes relations and teachers who have shaped us so that we may see to be useful to others. Our whispering includes practicing and sharing our rituals, this is where Elders will have so much impact for the future of the Village. We may even find our way into Circles of Clan Mothers.



Metaphorical Heart of the Village

Including both vantage points, bearing and non-child bearing, women create the heart of the Village around the children. If we are out in the workplace, improving our life and others', the youngest generation is often at the heart of our work or in our thoughts, benefiting from our actions. At every edge of our society, the concepts of patriarchy, which has kept women bound, are beginning to crumble like a cookie without enough binder. This is thanks to every woman for her daily efforts.



## YOUR GREATEST GIFT

When women reach a certain age, time becomes demystified, it simply moves at lightning speed. Since I have lived about 24,000 days, I have come to see time as the gift of an Earth walk. Every day that same gift is repeated, exactly and precisely the same. I have learned that there are two times of day, the filling times and the emptying times. To be effective, you honor your special rhythm. Even without the language of biorhythms, you know when you are able to operate at optimum. Those are filling times. The emptying times include sleep, but may also include reading and journaling, and all of your story-time.

In this wonderful blend of rhythms, live morning-doves and night-owls. You have come to know your Moon rhythms and how you feel in the cycles of New Moon and Full Moon and back. You also know your most and least favorite season. Rhythm is your personal instinct for survival; we cannot all be the same. As a youth or even as an adult, rhythms and their boundaries could be pushed around. Now, approaching this Threshold, when you look inside to understand your rhythms, this deeper knowing will be personally enlightening. Honor the one you are without apology, find balance with your own bio-system.

One of the old Greeks said, “Know thyself,” and this becomes more essential with each passing year. The depths of your Soul are vast, exquisitely cavernous, holding capacity, potential, and your promise. Soul secretly holds unimaginable complexities. Humble earthlings, you and everyone you know, strive to unpack these mysteries. Knowing yourself in the noise of modern life requires quiet time. I am not saying silence, because even deep in the wilderness, Nature is noisy. Your Soul thrives on the unique ways you have learned to wrap yourself in quiet. Your Soul essence will communicate what is left for you to explore if you attend to your rhythms and find quiet enough to listen. Dare to ask.

All Passages lead up to this Elder Encore Threshold. Every day of childhood, adolescence, and adulthood have been the training ground for your

Elderhood. The delight-filled experiences of all of your 50's, maybe even half a decade into your 60's, are the developmental capsule for creating meaningful experiences, stretching your capacity and living in wholeness at full potential. Every emotion filled day has helped you get ready for your Shawl Ceremony.



La Luna is always with you, through all your seasons

## MOONPAUSE

If you grew up through an expanding consciousness while you were a bleeding woman, you have nearly completed a long series of Vision Quests for yourself. You are the first since ancient times to step inside your womb-body for this honoring. When you began this practice, forty some years ago, you held the idea of 400 eggs. That seemed like so many Moons. You only have a few eggs remaining now because time has a way of passing—the Earth rotates and the Moon turns the opposite direction on her axis following the Sun. The exact number of your Moontimes is a mystery.

## Nine Passages for Women and Girls

Moonpause is coming, the gateway to your Elder years. Don't worry, it's the new in-thing. Everyone you know is on this wave of becoming her Elder-self with no blood left to release. Please, take a journey to yourself, for one year. By remembering, you will practice extreme self-care and open your neuropathways in memorium. Crossing five or six Passage Thresholds with a ceremony for each has helped you find honor in your position and honor for all of your days lived.

Soon you will know the bundle for Deepening Womanhood is well wrapped and can be put away. You will know when the time is right—the Elder Encore Threshold will appear out of the mist, but you must be watchful. Only you know how Moonpause—the arrival of your beautiful Crone years—relates to the Threshold ahead. Does one herald the other? Women without all their womb parts still have a womb-space and a 2nd chakra. These Sisters are often quiet about their experience because it's fashionable to share experiences about Moonpause. Please stop judging and denouncing women! Celebrate uniqueness and womanhood. The Elder Passage comes, unique to each woman, with or without Blood.

A little story: Becky was a beautiful woman who challenged me to think outside the box. During an early ceremony with these Nine Passages, she felt inner conflict. She faced this Elder Threshold with certain courage. Knowing and feeling that Elder Encore was her true place on the Spiral, she accepted her Elder Shawl in ceremony, in celebration, and with personal protest. She was still bleeding. Just over a year later, Becky died but she was thrilled to be an Initiated Elder.

## WOMEN OF THE RED BLOOD

*Young and old connect heart to heart*

*Womb-to-womb through Blood ...*

*Like sleeping and dreaming,*

*Mystery is born of Creation*

*Pumping through wombs, releasing*

*Red Blood to a woman's Soul ...*

*Each Moon offers*

*Life and Death as familiar gifts.*

© Gail Burkett

If you have danced, really danced in the last month, then you are in your body; if you walked, been outside to wander around, then you are in your body. If you floated in the hot tub or a hot bath with candles lit and music playing, then you are in your body. Your body is a tool and a temple, a source of delight and a source of pain. By the time we reach a certain age, bodies hold memory and capacity that few have written about. Christiane Northrup<sup>4</sup> has several large reference books that explore the intersections of body with emotions, with spirit, and with actual physical responses. Your body holds more information than anyone can put into books. Spend time to focus on your inner self; take this opportunity to harvest your own personal wisdom. Everything you need is inside; answers are more abundant than you might think.

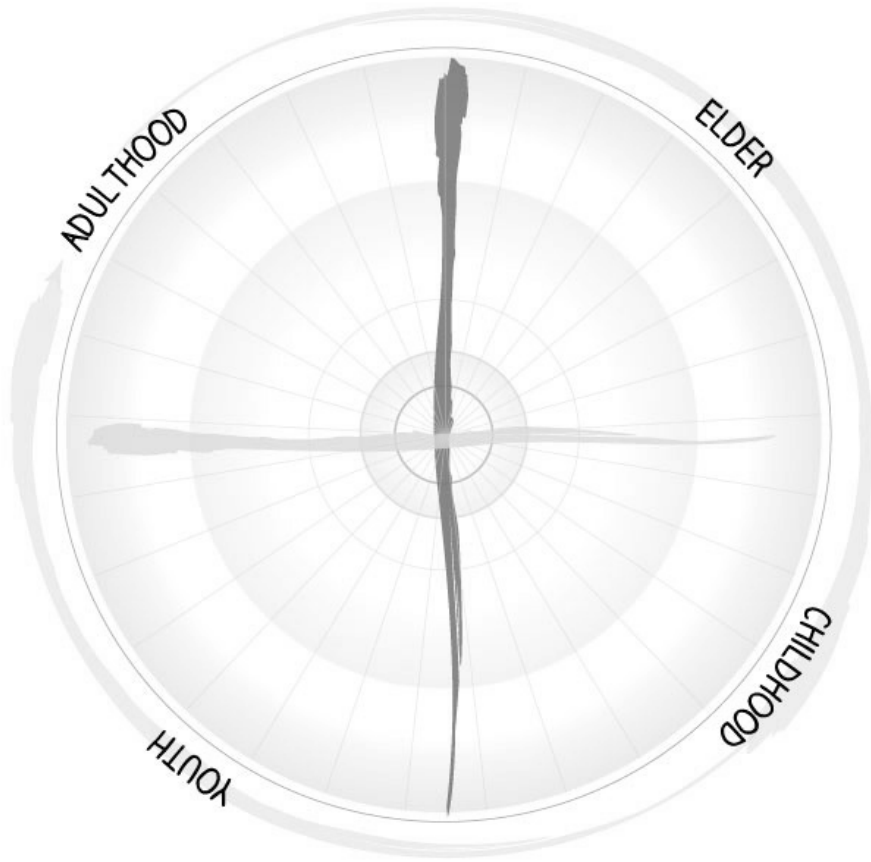
When you truly separated from your Mother, maybe you were nearly 30. You fell into the loving arms of your Earth Mother and began to enjoy the fruits of her labors. Now we call in the Indigenous relation, Father Sun, for the image of wholeness and harmony. Fuel, food, energy—throughout your life's days, every single thing comes from Mother Earth. A brilliant synergy of life between the Sun and the Earth, made whole with air and water, and for that synergy we are here because nowhere else sustains life. These ingredients combine for ceremony: Earth, Air, Fire, and Water, this you know already.



A Gift of Serenity from an Elder Sister

This difficult time in collective human evolution calls for daily ceremony. Ceremony infuses your day with gifts from your emotional body through your energy centers and into your daily record. Personal ceremonies of gratitude and observation will reveal what you are all about, why your life is this way. Deep listening, through playful questioning in the Cosmos, may give rise to a plea for action. Some have begun Moon Lodges and Red Tents for all women in their Village but these are only two examples to fill the voids of women's collective needs.

Reflect how Moon teachings and observations around your menopause, your Moonpause, have shaped you, even prepared you for this time between Thresholds. You have traveled far; consider this an invitation to share all you have accumulated about the Earth and la Luna, the Moon. Being culture-makers, perhaps an earthy tradition will rise from our collective blood. Madre Grande is the only home we have, the home of our children and grandchildren. Contemplate, in your journal and in silence, the legacy all women are weaving for future generations.



Focus on Relationship Wheel ©2016

This is a good place to introduce a little exercise that was shared with me by Janis Monaco Clark. When she journeyed through *Soul Stories*, she used this Four-Season mandala to remember all the people who held her, loved her and taught her something. Of course, some of those people in your relationship Wheel are blood relations and extended family from your personal origin story. Every one of those names radiate out of the quadrant of your child-self. This is the circle you were born into.

## RELATIONSHIPS: CURRENT AND PAST, CHARGED WITH ENERGY

Over the years, Youth became Adult and your relationships proved themselves: Some were deep and some shallow, and a few other precious relationships started as intentional, like a chosen teacher and a chosen subject. Women enter Elder Encore with friends who originated from three prior stages of life: Child, Youth, and Adult. This begins to create an image for the concept of *tribe*. We are lucky to bring one or two from childhood and we feel joyful for teen friends who have been tribal since forever. Diving into the stories beyond your Deepening Womanhood Threshold, we each feel deeply privileged for friends who navigated the emotions and stresses of adulthood and stayed strong.

You know by now who is in your tribe. So many people have been called in by your Soul or by other means, to fill a contract in karmic lessons or offer a gift. The others, the tribe members, came along from stardust with you and will return. If this concept, which points to eternity, stretches your comfort zone, look deeply into your relationships.

Who has been in your life, in deep or shallow relationships and what gifts have they brought to you, consciously or unconsciously? This question gives me pause. The answers are legion and could take some time, but that is the gift of days, we have time.

I have released a few relationships that still cause a little twang in my heart. In my immediate family, two siblings released the whole rest of the family so I have released them as well. Both of my parents have slipped through my arms and crossed over. I will say this, all four of these relations are still my teachers.

On this frontier of human consciousness, these relational connections that serve your heart and Soul are rather Divine. Reflections from my Sisters, real and adopted are a reflection from Source, the Great Mystery. You may call this God or Goddess. I use all terms interchangeably. I am wildly fond of my family members and sweet friends who wish to be in relationship with me.

What and who serves your heart and Soul and what does not? You know.

You see how sticky this is, not just for me but for all of us. Relationships are current works, charged with energy. You use analysis, emotion, understanding, sympathy, empathy, forgiveness, mostly love and constant communication to understand and nurture them. There is the excitement and titillation of new relationships, your wide circles of friendships are always fluid and growing, especially if you give spontaneity a twirl once in a while. Beloved people who hold all of my history in the depths of their heart, those are my keepers. They return nothing but love, occasionally a question, rarely a challenge, and the complexity and richness of mutuality feels wonderful.

Light a candle and spend time with your relationships on paper. See where and to whom you have given and still want to give your attention. Remember what the toddler taught us: We all thrive on *focused attention*. This is the opposite of distracted attention, what it is not, may help clarify.

Why would I send you looking for the intersection between time and relationships? You've been practicing this for years. Because we are human, we can be wounded and we can do the wounding. People hurt people. This is a fact of living, we either go unconscious or discover a limitation or set a boundary that hurts feelings. I once lost a friend, an exciting new friend, because I asked her to stop bombarding me with questions. Zip that was it, all she wrote. Now she waves but that is as close as she will get.

When you give the subject of relationships this extra attention, someone who needs your love and attention will probably rise to the surface. It may be someone with whom you want or need to make amends, to apply glue enough to super-hold that relationship like new. Someone you wish to thank will also rise. Appreciation is infectious. Maybe you need to make a few biographical journal entries to understand relationships of this age or another. Touchstones that include love and forgiveness are valuable and will keep your heart open.



## CIRCLING

*I speak of Circle because of community*

*I speak of community because of Mother Earth*

*Women's Circle gives from heart directly to Earth*

*Your friends reflect the Divine Feminine you have been looking for*

© Gail Burkett

At every age I highlight body-mind and spirit-mind because of personal evolution, we are all constantly changing. In the exciting field of neuroscience, researchers are revealing the interconnectedness of feelings.<sup>5</sup> Your emotions matter! Doctors like Daniel Siegel who love the body's mystery have unlocked the secret of integration. His name for this is interpersonal neurobiology, an umbrella term covering all sciences and spirituality, to discover the vast connections between thinking, feeling, beliefs, stress, and wellness: These all hang on the same web. Neuroscience and spiritual explorations have developed a large body of literature which Siegel and many others are now weaving together. Your personal validation is available through silent observation, by looking inside. People who meditate have firsthand knowledge of this web of connection, Mind to Body to Spirit.

When you scan your inner terrain, you can be intentional and actually notice neuropathways forming. Thoughts travel along the expansive transmission system of the body. When I write, it seems my fingers are thinking. Can you take a long view of the past and examine how your body has changed as your thoughts about your body have changed? How have your spiritual beliefs changed as you crossed over each Threshold?

Women need women to share, understand, and witness one another's crossroads. We need to talk about the personal evolution of body-mind and spirit-mind. A Women's Circle allows you to take your friends along on your sacred journey. The original few groups of women I circled with helped shape me by listening. Often what I said surprised me, but that is the nature of a safe and sacred space. Every single woman has concentric rings, always moving

out. My concentric ring has moved as I have moved. Change in me has been punctuated by geographic change. Only a few people in my inner ring hold my whole story.

Each of the Women's Circles in different places has brought new friends. To make new friends requires focus and bonding: So many of your facets are polished that it's hard to share all of them at once. You have lived through joy and pain. All of your journey has been yours to feel and to claim, the highs and the lows always feel very personal. Sometimes it seems that to have one you must have the other, low is followed by a gradual rise back to a peak, a different high. To know suffering causes a deeper appreciation for joy. Joy is something you want to share with friends. Sharing the good times refreshes those neuropathways.

Entering a sacred portal, women experience one another in a Council way. This type of Circle uses ritual and confidentiality and passes a talking stick around. Women have much to learn about our inner workings—what we think about growing in this Elder quadrant, and how we feel about our bodies, about our minds and spirits. How will we know these things if we do not hear those words fall from our hearts?

Passing a talking piece in a sacred sister's Circle will bring up everything: Change, grief, relations, activism, joy and celebration, even dysfunction and mental illness from family of origin. Circles practice folk psychology, this is true. Practice kindness and seek help outside of your Circle if something big rises to the surface.

## Nine Passages for Women and Girls



Women in Ceremony

After circling together, beneath the Sun and the Moon and watching the cycles of Nature move, your catalysts of change will become apparent. Around the Circle, you will know instinctively if one of you or all of you feel the calling of an initiation Threshold. Allow this feeling of Rites of Passage to come into the heart of the group. Ceremonies that celebrate personal evolution demonstrate a love for capacity, for honoring life, for stepping into your Genius, for giving yourselves this opportunity to elaborate on your life.

Perhaps you will find your path as a way-finder needing to lead a strong group of women. Initiated Elders can do the most good in mixed-generational Circles. The collective wisdom of women, supporting one another through stories, will show younger women how to locate their higher calling. Women who share good food as nurturance and deep listening as receptivity are practicing what the Divine Feminine teaches. Choose the smartest women you know and commit to one another: First Monday, second Saturday, you will decide together. These will become holy, visionary days. Find ways your core circle overlaps others' core circles.

Mary Catherine Bateson<sup>6</sup> describes the urgent need for women's vision

as Earth dwellers to extend far into the future. Unlike any other time in history, women now approaching this Elder Encore Threshold are energetic, vital, and natural visionaries for the future. Gather with your women friends, listen for the ring of truth in Mary Catherine's call to action: We are brilliant women who possess the creative womb energy of second chakras; we can see far enough into the future with our fourth and sixth chakras to imagine great-great-great grandchildren. Allow yourself full expression from your third and fifth chakras. Using your personal power to peer into the collective future Seven Generations ahead will create *cultural guides* of Initiated women Elders for the first time in dozens of generations. Your time and your wisdom are extremely valuable for this century. Circle and find out what you have to say! You may be surprised.

Through these Wisdom Councils, where women may discover the Clan Mother archetype long hidden from our view, we will all learn what our personal power is yearning for by hearing what we each have to say. Our collective legacy will influence the children of the future because we can imagine ahead that far.

Everything that needs attention or needs fixing is truly overwhelming, but we could form concentric circles to talk through our most pressing concerns. The only charge inside our Women's Circles is to pass the talking piece and be heard. Carrying emotional baggage is stressful and aging. Outside of the Circle, women will find ways to take care of our place on Earth. Inside of Circle is for *being*; outside the Circle is for *doing*. All of us can do more for our particular place on the planet. Let's do it with our girlfriends!

Take my caution here. I once lost a fabulous Circle of women to the divide between *being* and *doing*. We claimed cultural repair as a purpose, watch out for this vast ambition. Even though my Circle banded together over initiation, and really felt well bonded, we fell apart over the gigantic ambition of cultural repair. Women's Circles have a simple, sacred purpose: Being together to give our stories space to breathe.

I advocate for a Woman's Circle for every woman. I also warn about mixing *doing* into the delightful heart of *being* together. Playfully, joyfully,

sharing stories, and sharing teachings and learnings, this is enough for any Woman's Circle. If passion meets with a call to action, find your partners and take the *doing* part outside of your Circle.

The Elder's journey ahead defines the entire quadrant of life which may be the longest by total days. It's very hard to imagine life without Grandmothers, especially now that we have that privilege. When we Grandmothers step into our place as Elders, all younger women have a model and a clearer idea where they are going on their journey. We walk in beauty our entire lives. When you reach for Elderhood, you will have spring, bounce, and beauty in great abundance. Do not worry about it; prepare now to embrace the power and glory of these last two stages, for they last a very long time indeed!

## ORACLES FOR AWAKENING AND DEEPENING

An important planet in everyone's birth chart is Saturn. I refer you to Astrology occasionally for its uncanny accuracy. Like any symbolic language, this is a study and discernment. Seeing deeply is not always easy or possible, and interpretation is potentially powerful. How the sky full of planets interacts with you is *personal science*, only you know. Be perceptive about who you allow to influence your study of planetary positions and interactions with the Moon and how you might be affected. I read five or six astrologers in a Moon cycle, but I am a beginner. Your personal astrological chart aligns with the Universe. We can thank the digital world for a wide variety of astro-voices available through newsletters; talk about alignment!

The visible sky tells the story of the moment and cosmic energies change constantly, kind of like humans. Learn about the specific ruler of your chart, the interactions of the Moon with each planet. This will teach you why, for example, your day may start full of vigor, seemingly in optimistic control, then, an edginess appears out of nowhere. The explanation, at least for me and millions of other people, depends on how these celestial bodies interact with each other and how that network of influences affects my body-mind.



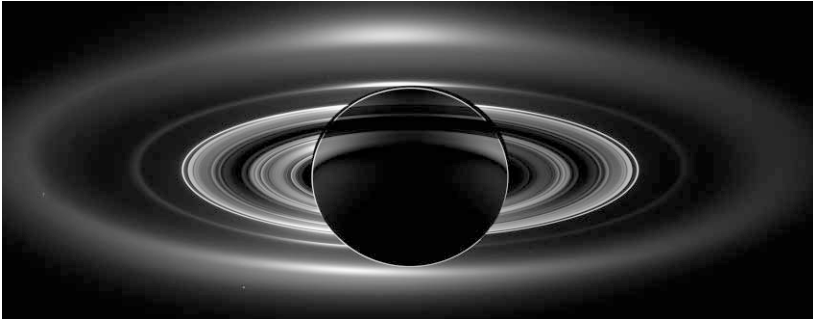
Women in Council Unifying the Past and the Present

Each one of us is seeking wholeness. I recommend using many avenues for personal explorations; epiphanies and openings happen often with oracles. Astrology offers a language of belonging. I understand my place on Earth by paying attention to the sky. The information, both spiritual and psychic in content, is quite revealing.

What does this cosmic language offer you? Are you operating with all the information at your disposal? Your heart's desire may cycle with the zodiac. One of my wise teachers is Teri Parsley Starnes<sup>7</sup> and she recently wrote, "Our desires may shine like the stars but we have to accept that we are human and fallible. ... Honor the tide of feelings. They are important too." At the very least, this is a little practice, opening to personal consciousness, where we learn to be reflective and quiet enough to hear our feminine intuition. At best, we can align with the secret power of intention where the creation energy of the Cosmos waits to be summoned.

Saturn returns to its place in your birth chart at the beginning of your Womanhood Bloom and again just before your Elder Encore Threshold ap-

pears on the horizon. After your second Saturn return, you will feel the call to change, you will feel another transforming experience is unavoidable. The energy of Elder will rise up to meet you where you are and invite a look. The cosmic energy of Saturn announces your Elder Encore with this legacy question: Are you prepared to give the gifts of your Soul? As an indicator of the Threshold's presence, you do not necessarily need to step across until it can no longer be avoided.



The Relentless Question as a Gift from Saturn: Who were you Born to Be?

Watch for coincidences and synchronicities through your interior lens; Saturn helps realign your priorities and supports your own inner task master. Other oracles may feel increasingly profound because Soul needs answers to certain questions. You have something to gift the world that is of true and lasting significance. What is the meaning of life, your life? How has your life experience led to this very time? What golden nuggets might be assembled into a “bundle,” a gathering of all of your stories? Saturn is like the pestering Coyote who asks, how are you progressing on the deliberate aim of your life? Who were you born to be?

I found this for myself: I was born to be an Elder. Crossing my Threshold in February 2015, I quickened and further awakened to my purpose. To prepare for this Threshold, I had returned to school and wrapped myself around the wonderful world of Women and Nature Studies. At 50 I received my PhD and began sharing life with my future husband.

The experiences from those watery depths are maturing just now be-

cause I took such a deep and questioning dive: As Nature beings, how do we locate the important intersections of personal searching, worldly experience, and human development? I felt like an Elder in training, but my Elder Threshold did not appear until all those years of research and synchronicities were completely composted. I had been in a receptive mode while in school, the degree placed a spin on things. My Father died just then. All of patriarchy seemed to flow out of me. I didn't know so much was in me. In this river of life, I see that my Soul was being prepared by Source energy. Saturn helped a great deal by serving to focus on the question, I was born to be, period. Other oracles not clearly seen in the academic realm were also leading me to the receptive, nurturing, warm side of my life.

I offer you the secret that worked for me: Use sacred inquiry to reflect back over the Moon cycles as they draw you into rhythm and dare to dream. Set clear intentions for one Moon cycle ahead, New Moon to New Moon. You will see that this creates a remarkable year.

A time warp of twenty years flowed out of my Deepening Womanhood initiation and the same will be true for you. No complete vision appeared in front of me, I was simply guided to put one foot in front of the other. Co-creation works like this. What my Soul dished up for me is so clear in reflection, but it was not always clear each day. I am a women's advocate; I have done many ceremonies for women and for girls. Each of these experiences has taught me something more about myself. There is always more.

Saturn represents only one energy from all the planets in orbit around our Sun. What I love most about Astrology is the real intrigue and mysterious energy of relationships and archetypes. As the orbiting relationships are constantly in flux, watch and wonder: How do those interactions affect me, my emotions, and my psychic inner world? The answers are rather astonishing.

I have learned a little about Tarot because it always raises an eyebrow and makes me laugh. A new deck, *Nature Spirit Tarot*, came into my hands in 2015 and I treasure the messages from the book. There is no coincidence that



this new deck was made by Jean Herzel, creator of my logo.<sup>8</sup> Also synchronistic, Jean uses Nature for her sacred inquiry, what could be more Divine? When I draw a card, somewhere deep inside of my body-mind, the message resonates. Then, when I raise my question, I come to know something new.

As a gift to myself, my newest inquiry is reading the hexagrams of the I-Ching. I was taught many things by a beautiful old Mentor, Dolores LaChapelle.<sup>9</sup> I am now studying the I-Ching with her son. Both crossed around the time, a very deep mystery, but fortunately their earthy wisdom was left to us in their books.<sup>10</sup>



Three Parts Merge at Birth: Feminine, Masculine, and Soul

I have always loved oracles: Tarot and I-Ching are both revealers. Astrology predicts relationship interactions, generally between me and the Cosmos, occasionally between me and another. Every thread, from the Cosmos or from the pages of ancient wisdom, leads to the core of you, to the touchstone which is your Soul. Something resonates in your energy field, it's that simple, really.

I spend enormous blocks of time alone, in contemplation, walking,

studying and writing. In all this listening—to the quiet, to others, to myself—I have continually responded to the call of my Soul. I didn't fully comprehend that it was all Soul until my year of initiation as an Elder, my joyous, edgy, penetrating year of rituals to honor the core of me. I grew in touch and conversant with the Soul I travel with in life and beyond. Now I can speak about the previous lives of my Soul and the future lives in much the same way. This is because I use the rhythm of one Moon for a Vision Quest. What began with the journey I took through *Soul Stories* laid down practices for my inner work; the practice and I have become good friends. I believe the same can be true for you. Because we are energy beings, we actually feel resonance and tingle as that juicy charge rushes through our cells. This is Soul, make yours a conscious companion.

In reflection, patterns will appear through a most enjoyable review of opportunities and synchronicities. I call this my rear-view mirror. Many of your days will appear as whole poems. Living to the fullest that life has to offer, without regret, with courage, and with a strong connection to Soul, this is women's manifesto. Gathering the lessons and wisdom of your stories, the patterns found in relationships, in review of the light and delight of your life, you will summon the honor your life needs to regenerate your whole self. When I moved across that Threshold as an Elder, I felt whole-hearted and ready for the responsibility of modeling and teaching about intergenerational connections.

Wrapping myself around an archetypal persona as the contemplative Elder in the culture, especially initiating other women, offers an edge that I want to explore. I want to know when Elder women were last revered by the entire culture; I want a tribe of Initiated Elders.

I would like to offer strong women who have modeled the matriarchal archetype an Elder's Shawl for keeping the archetype alive. Families have scattered and shattered before our very eyes and often in our personal experience. Think about what you want to model for your family. The Threshold for you

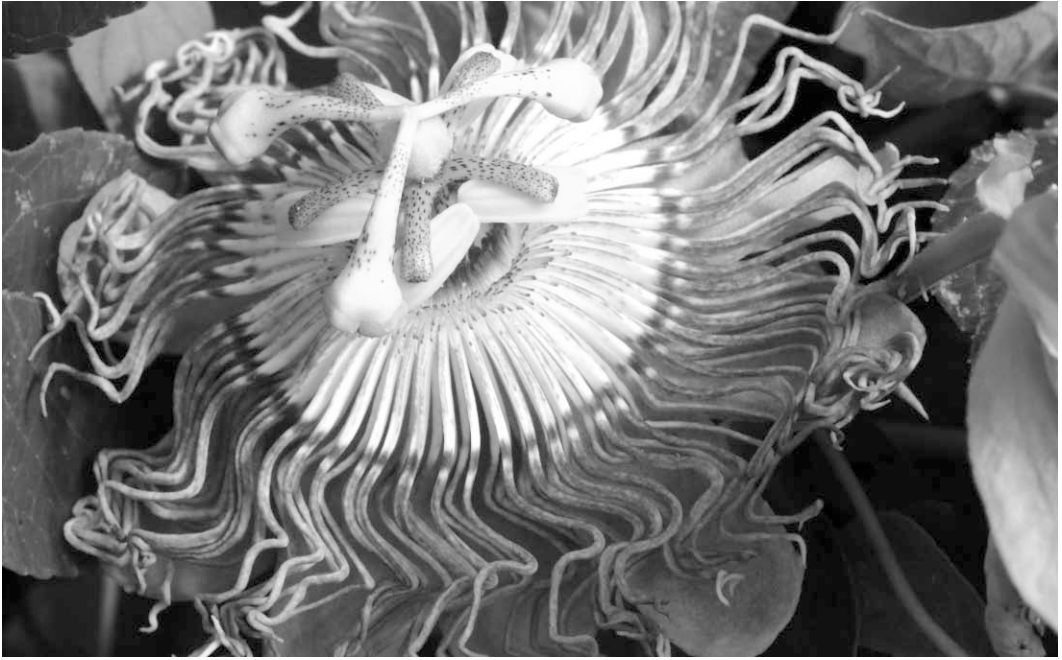
to receive your Shawl is coming up your timeline.

While your Soul is preparing you for this future, you will continue to blossom; your Soul is quietly busy with you. Use your time wisely; an ecstatic and peak experience is coming to you. What have you been training for your whole life? How can you best deliver on the gifts you were so generously given? Maybe an oracle will come to your aid as a perennial questioner. Maybe your girl-gang, your Women's Circle, will serve as oracle in their reflection back to you. If we do just one thing together, let's hold the image of 10,000 Boomers reaching 65 every single day, all looking into the same future, at the same time. If we all gathered up our Soul's creative juice, understanding that we came to Earth all at the same time, what were we all born to do?

## PRACTICES: SPIRIT AND CONSCIOUSNESS, MOVEMENT AND FOOD

In this lived reality we must constantly choose, refine, and winnow our playing field. Your world and worldviews continue to expand. We constantly learn even when we fail to realize that. Each one of us, living now, has a shared experience far too large to story; *exponential personal evolution* has become this reincarnation. Use inner quiet to recover from the culture's noise or to preserve your sanity. At any time you can step out of your comfort zone and do something daring with your resources.

You have infinite subtle inner worlds, worlds to explore through practices. Your chakras, those personal and Divine energy centers, will continue to invite you inside for some measure of each day. I locate the invitation by closing my eyes, but I also have practiced for years. These inner energy fields spinning on gossamer threads reveal how you are holding space for yourself and others. Rebalancing and realigning deepen this practice for me. There are always questions. What answers do you receive in your sacred inquiry?



A Cultural Challenge: To Harmonize Masculine and Feminine as well as a Flower

Women are enjoying the rise of the Divine Feminine into our consciousness. Like every other layer, once you perceive how this energy presence wraps the Earth, she floods your perceptual field and connects you into the shimmer. You will feel expansion and connection to all other women. The energy of the Divine Feminine cannot be explained easily, but women are opening the oppressive cracks in patriarchy in refreshing, delightful, and healing ways. Collectively, energy is flooding through the cracks. The reception we feel in return, utterly new, opens to the esoteric and to the deepest aspects of inner beliefs. We receive inspiration to meditate, to research the Goddess in archetypal form and cross cultural names, symbols come to mind, we light candles and say our prayers of gratitude. The Divine Feminine will continue to offer balance. Through your radiant smile, this energy reveals an inner divinity to you and others.

Consider how important the strength of your connection when the drums of war beat in various parts of the world. Your perception and connec-

tion are vitally important. Curiously observing the culture, you have learned a little something about how patriarchy and the Divine Masculine has a deep dark side. What you discover in your global inquiries seem so distant, warring men, oppressed women. Will the world ever change? Women have opportunity now, as we become clear vessels, to model something the world desperately needs: Peace lovers, light workers, Initiated women will help Earth come into balance. It's only a big job if we feel alone.

Through your rituals and symbolic images, you will find the Divine Feminine and Divine Masculine relationship within yourself which connects to the cosmic consciousness. A whole throng of people are finding this connection as the basis for faith in the future. Hopefully, through the longevity of these wisdom years, you have begun to accept the revelations of your private inquiries. Powerful forces are working with you.

You begin to know your true self in this stage. It does take thousands of days, perhaps 20,000 before the answers align and the world begins to make sense. Amidst layers of complexities, you will find peace in the little auric bubble of your inner world. The outer world needs to continue shattering into zillions of fragments. The shattering and apparent disintegration of culture will coalesce into acceptance and regeneration; this is an eventuality.

About spirituality: Find yours and go as deep as you can; welcome the next teacher. My collection of Mentors have taught me this continual and gradual reach for consciousness is what earthlings are supposed to do and continue to do right up to our final Threshold. All kinds of wonderful teachers are appearing on the world stage making growth of the sacred aspects—Mind, Body, and Soul rather easy and quite thrilling. We each have the far dimension to receive us; until then, find your spiritual practices and investigate profoundly. Deepen your well every season. Others will notice and bring their inquiries to you making you a Mentor. This is the highest calling of all.

Your 50s is the best decade to fulfill the desires of your body-mind. Find your tools for balance. Be very clear with your practices so that all you do to take

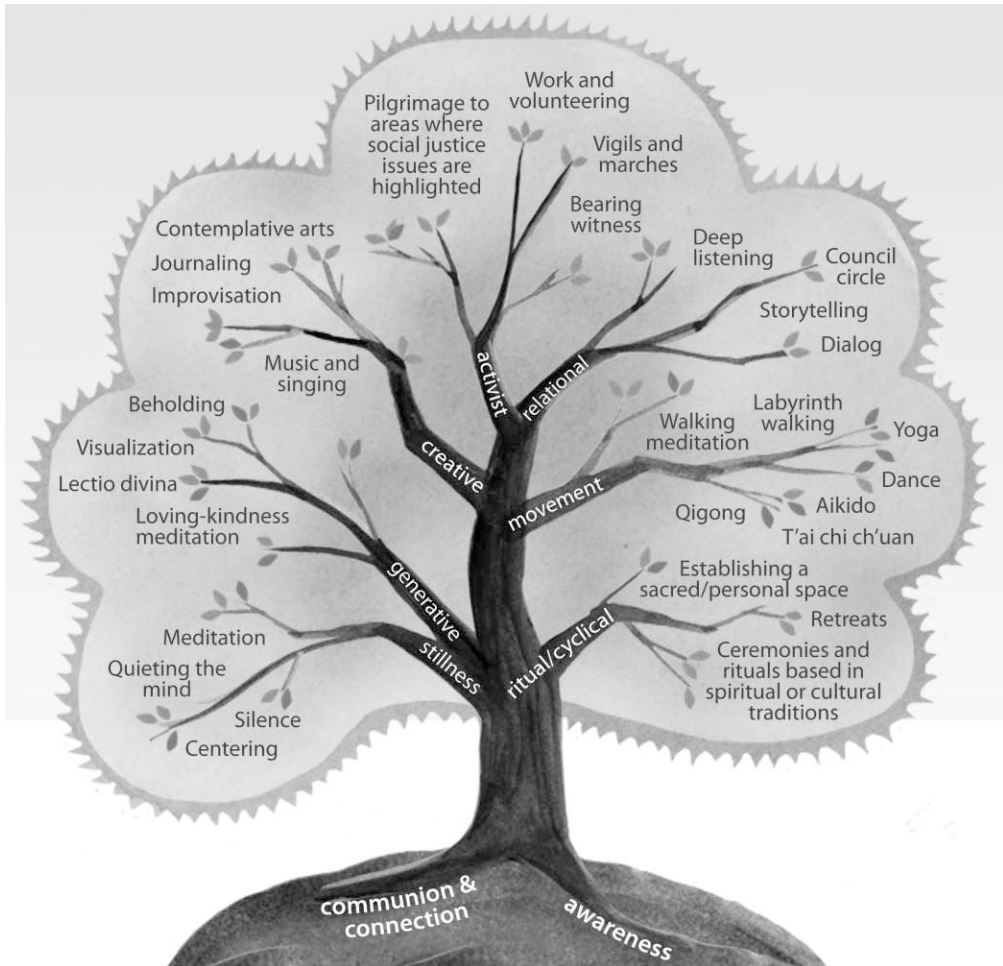
care of your body pays dividends. This includes being in the best shape of your life and discovering all that gives you pleasure, sexual and physical. Your practices are meant to take you deeper into the trifecta that makes you, you: The Mind-Body-Soul connections, intersections, and potential transformations.

At some time along your spirit trail, accidents or illnesses may have derailed you. Ask why and set intentions to be the best in your body you can be. I am physically more challenged because of my history so I have struggled with this mind-body connection. Far too many serious accidents have derailed me but I experienced spiritual awakenings from each one, like the Divine gift of guidance. My sweet Womb-mate says my spirit likes to *just go up and have tea*. Sometimes, it is simply better to go out of my body.

When I look at my fellow travelers, I know I am not alone with the body challenge. Yet we are all perfect trifectas. Your body, like my body, makes the heart-mind and spirit-soul complete. I rebirth a new intention every day to befriend my body as I sit on my yoga mat and breathe and stretch. One of my most profound experiences is following the breath of life, in and out, it moves my diaphragm up and down. Conscious breathing is a spiritual practice for me and it oxygenates my blood. By this time you will have discovered, there is always more, the unfolding of life simply means, opening to more. Reach for the gap where busy-mind stops and peace floods in.

Approaching the decades ahead, through your 60s, let's explore what is meant by practices. By now you likely know, but this is for your sisters who do not. I include yoga as a practice, in all its lovely, lively forms. Meditation is a practice, sitting quietly or walking quietly. Chanting and visualization are practices. You may be a runner, that is a practice. Hiking to the top of a mountain may be a practice. Standing before an easel, writing song-lines, studying stream flow, silently watching birds, listening to music, these are all practices. Sorting and releasing my over-abundance, this is a practice. What consistently brings you joy?

## Nine Passages for Women and Girls



Maia Duerr created this Illustration as The Tree of Contemplative Living<sup>12</sup>

Personally, my practice is diverse. I meditate every day in a different way. Some mornings I sit in silence, other mornings I chant to the Goddesses, tantric style with Sally Kempton, and most days I walk as Thich Naht Hanh has taught, with my feet kissing the Earth and a quiet-mind for walking.<sup>11</sup> You are still the actress on the stage of your life. How do you connect to the places you dwell, both your inner and outer places?

Amazing as this sounds, we think of food at least three times a day, and no wonder, it's our fuel. Along the way, I have learned only a couple of things about growing food, it's a practice and a hard one at that. Those who devote

their Soul energy to growing fuel for others' bodies, have earned my deepest respect. Before I turned 60, part of my Saturn return was to question the origins of food, how to grow it, and all that is involved. This deep inquiry has provided delicious dividends. Medicinal herbs became my second true love. I know you have loves in the plant kingdom. Take a moment to name yours and send little blessings. Yes, you can send blessings!



Hot Food Grown by Children from the School Garden

Consider the entire food distribution system. Can you believe, asparagus in October and February? Well, those far-away farmers cannot be hugged as can our locals who grow for the Farmers' Markets. I love the experience of peeking into the hard-working lives of those who grow food for a living. Do you know that 100,000 different products might be offered in the largest supermarkets? Can you believe this crazy abundance, all coming from Mother Earth? Obviously there is more to this story. Know your food sources so that you can know yourself better. Food is spirit and body medicine. But you already know this from all of your lived days.

As you have claimed a place on Earth for yourself and your family, have



you become a stakeholder, part of the grassroots to make your place better? Show your young people—grandchildren, nieces, nephews, cousins and all your adopted/extended family—that they can count on your wisdom. Bring back letter writing both for the connection and to deliver a little keepsake for sweet ones far away. I still have my Grandmother’s letters from decades past. Be as grounded and dependably available as possible. This rootedness offers a practice of being present to yourself and your relations.

I have filled a beautiful cookie jar with Almond Sesame Crackers as part of my practice, it feeds my giving side. They are made with a rolling pin and when I offer the jar, I say to visitors of all ages, “Take one for each hand.” I adore practices, they are earthy, healthy, and steadfast. Can you name your top three relationship practices?<sup>13</sup>

If you agree that this is an age to be open to more, what is on your list? Recently, joy has risen to the top of my list as a measurement. What truly gives you joy? Do you read voluminously? Who do you share those good reads with? When someone loans a book, do you take time to talk about it later? Do you have a flair for something domestic? Are you teaching anyone to help you? Do you love international travel? How do you share your adventures with others?

## YOUR PLAYFUL WISDOM TRADITION

Consider all that you have experienced in your spiritual life. Acknowledge the many ways you have received Divine guidance. Maybe you didn’t ask, but you did receive. Tosha Silver calls this her Divine guidance spirit trail.<sup>14</sup> She tracked back through her life and discovered stories of where Divine guidance had intervened. This recognition caused her heart to leap with joy and recognition. She also gathered stories from her friends so, *Outrageous Openness: Letting the Divine Take the Lead* is more than observation, it is truth and wisdom for our time.

I loved this book because it reminded me of what I have ascribed to

the mythic Coyote character in my own life. This rear-view inspection of where miracles have occurred returns me to a mindful practice of observation and wonder; Guides and Angels are always here. Every Soul comes in with a Guardian and more energies come as needed. See how this concept of Divine guidance has worked in your life and notice how remembering feeds your Soul.



Free Form Child-play is the Best for all Ages

I have mentioned this before but when my old Mentor, Joe Meeker, asked me to write my play history, I was astonished at my lack. He talked a lot about play, but always ended his thoughts saying, “Poor play.” I wanted to know why so I studied play. Like any awakening, in my heart I discovered play had been waiting patiently for decades. To me, play means being lost along the creek, inspecting the nature of stones; it means not thinking, just wandering. In solitary play, I relish the company of spiders, butterflies, rabbit tracks in the

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snow, while I dance with my Soul. One-on-one with all of Nature, I belong to the planet and this recognition has had a deep healing effect on me. Through play I have found joy again.

Thank you Joe, I am able to give my granddaughter 100% attention while she draws me into her play, I feel newly teachable through her child-eyes. I have found a practice, a meditation through play that I couldn't have imagined earlier in my life. If I had just one wisdom tradition to pass onto her and to you, one legacy, that would be play. All of my cells are happier when I take time to play with myself, with the planet, with my dog, and with one or ten children at a time.



Muse of Inspiration

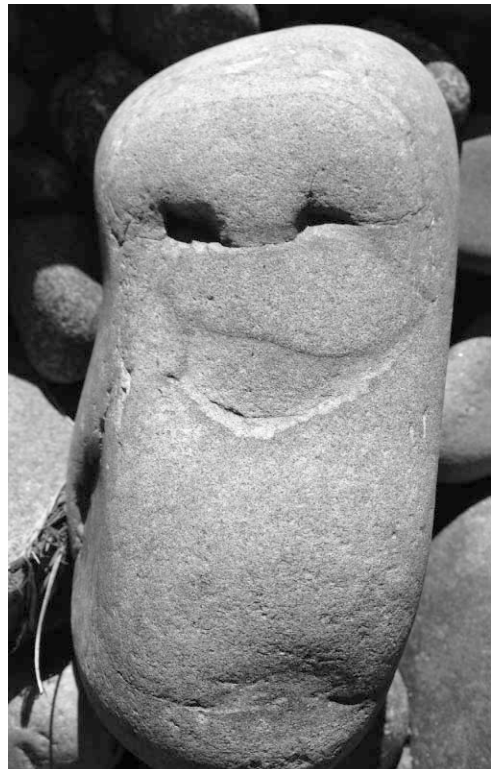
In this sweetness, play has a diffuse focus, a relaxed and non-demanding

air. Play has no agenda and if you try, in your highly skilled way to play with an agenda, then play will vanish for another day. With the great awakening that begins around nine months old, play offers to human animals what it offers to all beating hearts: We each are given the opportunity to become wholly true to the design intended by Great Mystery. Even though I lived for years on the 19th floor, I have learned that I am most human in the natural world with pure play surrounding me. This core philosophy was born out of working for corporations. The transformed me who walked through fire to invite change, insists that playing for myself, being playful with others, discovers a spiritual experience through play which infuses energy into my creativity. Pure play has the ability to reset every cell in my being.

I use my brain for its distillation capacity and its ability to receive transmissions of inspiration. I laugh out loud when I am visited by the muse of intuition; messages of Divine guidance are joyously abundant out in Nature. I have been walking for a few years to directly connect with the Divine Feminine energy of inspiration. You can too.

To create your own storyline of Divine guidance or minor miracles, you may need to track your beliefs through the filter of your life's events. Be sure to include your history of play and magical time in Nature. When I created an events timeline, a simple exercise of "this happened, then this happened," I was able to visually *see* how my beliefs developed and all the ways my life has been guided.

Dispel any downhill slide metaphor with your witchy-wand; exchange



Stone Invites Playfulness

all such metaphors for one long peak ascent, getting better, wiser, and personally more powerful each day. Embrace all your friends who are growing older with you and often, lovingly, joyfully and definitely playfully. Probably you will nourish one another's legacy story. Be playful in your assessment: What do you long for before you cross the Elder Encore Threshold? How do you need to prepare yourself to continue building on your wisdom tradition? You know much more than you think. One sign of wellness is the thirst for knowledge, clearer understandings, and ease in creative explorations. Another sign is light and joy in your being. You have healthy relationships if you realize unlimited opportunities for growth are alive in every opportunity and people around you mutually support growth.

Become friends with Energy workers: Herbalists, Reiki Masters, Seers, Shamanic Practitioners, and Doulas. These people are Medicine for our culture. If you are stuck or stumped, energy workers women and men will help you unblock to understand the pathways your Soul longs for and your spiritual life needs to take. Follow your intuitive messages and your growth will accelerate.

## A FIRE CEREMONY

Please gift yourself a ritual created with folklore and inheritance. Some catalyst of change, perhaps offered by your Soul brought you this moment of maturity. Probably only you know. Summon a ritual for yourself, candles, silence, good Earth and Sky, use a drum to return a fire ceremony to its place in your bones which remembers the need for a celebration. I imagine for you an honoring event to acknowledge change as part of your life's wholeheartedness.

Call on the Ancestors who hold the symbols of the 4 Sacred Directions. See how the Above and Below and Center energies of Earth and Sky quicken your Soul. Symbols blend with the rising and setting of the Sun and the Earth moving through her seasons. Reach into the sacred toolkit held by your adult self and find your symbols for Earth, Air, Fire and Water to help you.

Your substrate may be both solid and needy, you have smiles and tears, and so much water has flowed beneath the bridge you are building. May I suggest this cleansing ritual to release your pain? Smoke cleanses, salt cleanses, water cleanses, what do you choose to help you stow your healed memories safely away into your heart pocket?

You cannot really be mindful and present with joy until you burn through or release the painful hooks of the past. Transformation is an action verb and an alchemical process. Many never heal their pain. This sad truth has a bright side. The wounded can become wounded healers. All of us who walk this path have used diligence and intention to transform our worldview and personally evolve.

When I finished my graduate work, I could only exhale. Right then, a year apart, I buried both of my parents. My mourning felt intense, overwhelming sometimes, the tears were automatic and flowed privately. Then I would “buck up,” something else my Mother used to say. At age 50, I had gifted my Mind-Body-Soul with questions so large I was stumped and engulfed in grief. Integration took quite some time.

This is the question I held: I had something to do, what? I was essentially on a sabbatical without awareness. Claim your rest, see if you can do nothing. All Thresholds are agents of change. If you need rest more than anything else, you are not reaching for a change. Not yet. You are still integrating, be patient with yourself. Surrender to play.

## RELEASING AND FINDING LOVING INFLUENCES

The great space of years ahead is where simplicity reigns. So many women now practice simplifying, de-cluttering, and downsizing, it has become contagious. This may be the time for you to find that balance for yourself. We must all come to resolution with our possessions. Along with the material challenges ahead, there will be spiritual challenges. So often the choice to

simplify includes a geographic move. If you are one who loves deep roots and you decide to move, you will step out onto a wide emotional-spiritual wave. Detachment will become your spiritual focus, but keep standing up on the wave and you will eventually reach the shore and solid ground again.

When I look at my Grandmother's old rocking chair, sitting alone in a corner holding a basket of maps, I think of the poetry of that. Maybe I could plan a trip with the maps or sit and hold the basket on my lap to imagine spaciousness enough to stop and write poetry. Will I give myself permission? What does your stuff inspire? Does it hold a silent call to action for you?

### GRANDMOTHER'S ROCKER

*She comes to my thoughts unbidden but welcome  
I feel grateful for her intrusion enough to stop.  
Gamie's softness and her laughter come back easily  
The feel of her, the sound of her causes a giddy up  
In my heart, fluttering in love with her jerky or biscuits.  
I pine for a woods walk with her looking for morels  
If I ask her nice we could make donuts this morning.  
Instead, I lift the basket of maps and sit down to rock  
Asking, where could we go if only in our imaginations  
Me with my Grandmother who's gone but very present.*

© Gail Burkett

With maturity comes a natural ability to ease your grasp and release. I want you (and every woman) to appreciate how big your *influence* is and continues to be, in ever-wider circles. You are the ripple on the pond. I invite you to think of influence as a spiritual concept. From the womb, you have been influenced, guided, taught, and indoctrinated. You have learned to unlearn or dispatch some of what has stuck to you. Now is the time to use great curiosity to peer into all of those influences radiating inward and outward. One way to understand all that has shaped you, consider your big choices and their conse-

quences on you. This is an inside-out view of influence. Compassion without judgment, please; life is wholly a Soul experience.

Influence is power and strength, it is the ultimate connecting thread to your past. As you follow this thread of inquiry, you will naturally turn the influence around to see your spirit trail of influences on others. Own this. Examine it for its gems and nuggets. Can you see your ripple? This is self-esteem building; mature women need this as much as teen girls. Tend to your needs by giving yourself acknowledgments. Of course, recognition of your influence on others is wonderful, however, recognition of yourself to yourself, that is of a much higher order. Surely in the years ahead, absorbing the holiness you discover, you will be that Divine woman who listens and influences many others by your model of living.

Once you understand how this concept of *influence* has shaped you, offer yourself a releasing ritual. As one who has walked through fire to release the influences of addictions, abuse, suppression, and oppression, I believe in this personal work. Release is incredibly potent with a personal ceremony. Retain those influences that belong and release all those that have hooks. I hold all of my own answers inside, so do you.



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Moon Sculpture: Work with Silence to Find Guidance

Very carefully and deliberately release the emotional charge that some influences still hold. Move aloft with your spirit, pour a cup of tea, view your stories and their patterns as the great teachers they have been. When you can realign with gratitude over all that has influenced you, the dim and the bright, release them all. Become an empty vessel who lives in the present moment, the one who understands her wisdom is coalescing with each passing season. Be the one who offers guidance as influence to all those coming up, all the Youngers who need your wise woman's council. You have remembered how life moves, always in a flow, sometimes as a quiet eddy and sometimes falling over a waterfall. This is true for everyone.

I have been fortunate enough to see and feel this Divine guidance of influence work through me. Your life stories also offer this lens. If you begin the list of interventions of Divine guidance in your life, you will understand how those holy influences shine through the decades. You will feel less alone as your path unfolds. Review your stories, share with your friends as a way of releasing painful ones. Hold the joy to your heart and allow it to expand. This is an act of gratitude.



Goddess as Model for Divine Feminine

If you are in the wide concentric circles of my tribe, Nature calls to you. I take my influence from Nature. Mother Earth is our home away from home. I feel my intuition is ignited by wild Nature and her critters, those sentient beings who share this planet with us. Outside, moving across the landscape with an empty mind, I often receive exquisite messages. Certainly my relationship with Nature spills over to my relationship with all other beings, all my loves, and returns me to peace. What do you do to ignite your intuition?

I am a behind-the-scenes activist, watching everything and contributing to many good causes. This is my legacy from early Women's Circles. Thousands of women also carry this legacy, probably millions. Do you touch enough wildness? Have you worked to protect the wild? In a groundswell that begins local for each one of us, I urge you to become a stakeholder for your

place on Earth. This is our collective legacy, the united wisdom tradition we hold together as a force of Initiated women. We understand influence.

## MODELING

You need to be a rock for others, so who is your rock? Think of a woman in the stage or two stages ahead who will hold a space for you to grow. Describe your life to this holy woman. This relationship has the potential to grow into a deep spiritual experience. Give it time and focused attention. You will both feel lighter from this telling of your life story and inspired by all that you have done. Each woman benefits from deep listening, but what you will find fascinating is what you have to learn by sharing your spiritual heart with another. You will probably find direction by listening to your own words.

I go beyond the traditional view of modeling to include more than role modeling. Women have one another for this, the role model of every archetype, the Mother, the Grandmother, and all the Goddess archetypes. We even have a variety of witchy archetypes: Good Witch, Green Witch, Kitchen Witch, Bad Witch and Magic Witch. Within our Souls, we each have touched down into and experienced a wide array of these human templates. What are we going to do with all that makes us smile?

A great deal of research is available on archetypes or template personae, and terrifically good reading.<sup>15</sup> I suggest Carolyn Myss online and her book *Sacred Contracts*. Jean Bolen's books *Goddesses in Everywoman* and *Goddesses for Older Women* explores the true natures of your practical intellect, how to view yourself as a mystic, spiritualist, or Nature intuitive through the lens of the Greek Goddesses. Another favorite teacher of archetypes, explored through the cross cultural lens of Hindu Goddesses, is Sally Kempton, a prolific author and workshop leader. I have used these wise women to develop my heart and inner world. There are others, ask around your circles. Helen Luke will lead you to the Divine Feminine. Helen calls this the tender new growth of consciousness. This energy inside of you is part of your unconscious until

you begin to know her.

Whether you use this language or not, your inner Divine Feminine is your psyche's source of female presence and energy, receptive and nurturing. Much like patriarchy has been a global meme, the collective power of the masculine has been dominant for centuries. Inside of women, the Divine Feminine is awakening in women's psyches to restore the future with balance and healing. As the Earth turns and seasons change, the mystery and primal power of our Madre Grande, our Great Mother has modeled this feminine power multiple times in your lifetime. Remember the Divine Feminine is the unconscious in us until she becomes known through intentional practices and reading. Ultimately, we have been taught how to hold quite different perspectives such as wild and nurturing, destructive and creative. When I think of the energy potential inside of you, the Divine Feminine, I imagine a starburst, a sparkling ray of aspects and potentials. By this time in your life, age 60 and onward, all of these shining facets combine into your Elder wisdom. Claim the Divine Feminine in yourself, allow her images to swim to the surface of your consciousness.

I finally understood how the many sides of womanhood have influenced me. The search for the truth in my feminine nature took years of dismantling my masculine nature and more work to deconstruct my armor. The modeling you reveal to your different circles, your family and friends, includes your personality and psychic imprints from all that have shaped you. When events call on your nurturing side, for example, your Soul as Divine Feminine, knows what to offer another through your practices of cultivating and cherishing relationships. This modeling is now a result of you making conscious, deliberate and creative choices. First we please ourselves, then we show to others what we have chosen. This gets much easier over time. Finally, we might grow in agreement, modeling the feminine reveals that our practice is our way of being.

When I think of my portrait in the culture, the image I am modeling is Elder, receiving inspiration through deep listening, and planting seeds in the

moist soil of women. I have made this my practice now. This is the spiritual experience you are preparing for also, nurturing and patiently waiting to receive inspirations. To be part of Earth's recovery, women must recover our symbolic life and begin dreaming the Cosmos. In *The Way of Woman: Awakening the Perennial Feminine*, Helen Luke elucidates these thoughts.<sup>16</sup>

*"Yet, the instinct of the feminine is precisely to use nothing, but simply to give and to receive. This is the nature of the earth—to receive the seed and to nourish the roots—to foster growth in the dark so that it may reach up to the light. ... If we can rediscover in ourselves the hidden beauty of this receptive devotion; if we can learn how to be still without inaction, how to "further life" without willed purpose, how to serve without demanding prestige, and how to nourish without domination, then we shall be women again out of whose earth the light may shine."*

A pinnacle, this is the magical peak of all of your life experiences. For my heart connection, I look to other Elders to see how they wear their mantle. Those in my purview are cloaked as intelligent, judicious, and sagacious beauties. We live for ourselves first. This has been our hardest lesson, how to end both the narcissism and slavery of our younger years. Stand in your power first, allow it to overflow naturally to serve others.

Certainly your experiential beauty and wisdom combine in unique and glorious ways to be shared. Please understand how the culture has dismissed the Elders in the generations immediately older and still connected to the Millennial Elders. Our Mothers and Grandmothers in their old age may have been waiting for permission to be rather glorious and visible. Some of these magnificent old women barely connected to their Divine Feminine. They grew old and older and were devoured by the patriarchy.



Women Making Ceremony

## Nine Passages for Women and Girls



Next Generation of Initiated Elders

We, you and I, are going to be the first Initiated generation of Elders in centuries. We have had our labors and they have shaped us. Through recovery of your Moon visions, your relationship with Mother Earth, you understand the difference between doing and being; you feel serenity and security in a balance between self-care and service. You have found your practices, what returns you to balance, what feeds your Soul. When you are spiritually satiated and the Divine Feminine is alive in your consciousness, you can model this for other younger women.

## INITIATED ELDERS

In my book, *Soul Stories: Nine Passages of Initiation*, I offer a guided journey of self-reflection for a year as a pathway to honor and find the epiphanies in the stories of your life. When you journey with other women, our collective blend of spiritual practices will grow exponentially beyond my suggestions. Let's foster this idea of a generation of Initiated Elders.

In our shared her-story, we have knowledge of the Goddess cultures of old Europe from 30,000 years ago. Marija Gimbutas'<sup>17</sup> very courageous and edgy work brought the figurines from the culture of peaceable women into our collective consciousness. Women of long ago inform the culture of women today because they left us clues about peace and devotion. Women also have knowledge of the Burning Times. Even though we have this knowledge and these evolutionary genes in us, maybe in our Soul-selves, we each need to find our way to creation energy to express all that is uniquely ours. Expression of my Soul-self is my purpose and probably yours as well. I use these ancient threads of connection, the symbols of women's collective her-stories to remember how our gender has been brainwashed, crushed, and hushed.

Now we are living in the midst of great changes, a time called the Great Turning where the edge of the industrial age meets the era of life-sustaining and Earth-loving awakening. It is our time, a moment when we can claim what is ours to give the world. What gifts do you receive from your Soul to nurture?



Goddess Symbolizing the Divine Feminine



Where does your Genius lie? These questions can only be answered in silence, in walking, in art, in journaling, and finally in sharing the images of your deepest passion with your most intimate friends.

Let us take a moment here, together. This is the stuff of imagination Dearhearts. We can only write a new story. Nowhere in any of the references or literature is there a mention of a culture of Initiated Elders. Nowhere have these words been put together for women to rise up through our life stories and claim our Elder Shawls. The essence of the oldest generations, finding our internal power and standing together, this is an imaginative, fictional thought unless we choose to make it real.

Of course all things begin with thought. If you hear only two things, I say go on a pilgrimage to recover your wandering Soul parts, come back to wholeness through the deep harvest and healing of your stories. Close with this commitment to yourself: Receive all that belongs to you and give what you are meant to give. Nothing more. Heal those rough edges wherever they jab you. This journey will produce an essence of yourself you have been looking forward to but didn't quite know how or where to find it. Go ahead, this is why Encore is the Passage title, become someone you barely dream to be. When Initiated Elders model this for the culture, everything will change.

## STEP INTO YOUR PLACE

For every person in the culture to receive their gifts of maturity, older women need to step up, initiate as Elders and begin to blend our ideas in Wisdom Councils. When women step into this naturally powerful stage of life, men will heal also. It's not a matter of question and certainly not coercion; it's a modeling that women have always done.



The Seventh Generation is Here, the Time for Elders has Returned

Elder is the age that all others look up to for leadership, wisdom and guidance. Reaching down the generations, you will feel the power of pure love when a granddaughter or a grandson comes with a desire for connection. You can share just the right story to help untie a knot; you can offer solace and a listening ear in a way that no parent can. This is true for all children who cross your path. I didn't understand Elder role until I adopted an elementary school and started receiving hugs from little ones. It is possible to overcome all barriers to discover relationships of the heart variety. When a year old child, just taking her first excursions, toddles toward me across the barnyard, my heart opens wide. Innate and instinctual for connection, the only response I have needed is kindness and devotion. When I give a child attention, she gives me attention, so I lean in. All women of a certain age become Grandmother to all children.

## Nine Passages for Women and Girls

When we were 10 and 11, we learned a skill that has never left us: We learned to observe and compare. Beginning around nine months old, this skill blended six senses and grew into your personal sensory antennae, which you perfected before puberty. We become great watchers, filters, and interpreters of culture. Every woman must be watchful for imbalance and offer help there. Then we become makers of culture.

Standing as an Elder, especially beside other initiating Elders, our collective purpose floats over us like an umbrella, challenging, inviting, and daring *us to be* what the world needs. The culture is dependent on how the Elders are portrayed and valued. As our families contribute to regenerating the culture, it's up to each woman individually to practice the modeling of an Elder.

Closing with the concepts of influence and modeling, ask when the young girls throw their scrutinizing antennae toward you, will they see the model of a woman in grace who also feels whole in herself? Will they hear clarity and feel your nurturance? Will they feel gifted by your presence? As you ponder the long road ahead, Elder women with gorgeous wrinkles and stunning grey locks will populate the top tier of the Life Spiral. Are you preparing to consciously model what it means to be an Elder? Has your Women's Circle considered this enormous cultural change, where you live long—time-binding the past and present into collective Elder wisdom—preserving the future?



A Beautiful Circle of Initiating Elders

## AN ELDER ENCORE STORY

What I learned by offering Rites of Passage ceremonies to women and girls aroused a wake-up call within me. I began to ask, what about initiation for all of us, myself included? We have all missed ceremonies because our culture lacks these traditions.

I feel gratitude for several dozen women who gathered around a fire altar with me to call forth ceremonies for First Blood, First Flight, and Womanhood Bloom. Leading this recovery effort, many somberly walked a Medicine Wheel. That ceremony captured our imaginations and that is what I continue to celebrate. We remembered how much change happens to women through decades of living. The change from Birth to Bloom takes 30 years, which is no less dramatic than all the changes from 30 to 80 or 100. Dear Souls walked the Wheel of Life with me to bring life to the Nine Passages Spiral; we knew silence would reveal, so we spent five months reviewing our lives, collectively and silently, before we came back together.

I offer a deep and humble bow to my friends. These women honored me because I stepped up. My scholarly search into our life cycles emerged as pivot points for initiation ceremonies for every woman who finds herself in the grasp of an agent of change.

From that first circle of Elders who helped conceive *Nine Passages*, an outpouring of Divine Feminine flows from each one of these extraordinarily beautiful women. Five years have passed now and the witness in my heart who watches is using my gift as Storyteller to move things along. I want to understand what the far side of our Elder Threshold holds. A culmination of this and many other ceremonies went into *Soul Stories*, a life review manual to initiate women and Elders.



A Winter Flower Ceremony for Grief

Women of this Elder Circle have pledged to grow old together. From my inner view, I watch my circle of friends with great love and interest. We will always be sisters of initiation. All of our stories hold that particular shimmer that contains delight, truth, and love. Just imagine how deeply rich and meaningful their symbols have become, after these years of modeling Elderhood.

At that final ceremony for initiating women, I found the grief in me to be bottomless. For the deeply spiritual process of honoring one's Soul and listening for Divine inspiration to awaken those gifts, only a very few women have received this blessing, an initiation to awaken their gifts. Most miss out and often never heal. I know this by listening to the complaints in the wind.

During my first Elder initiation, I spent five months writing a story about a self-initiation that happened as a sudden spiritual awakening. This was preliminary and personal, I had walked the Earth with the Grandmother Spirits and shed past influences. Both actions, the walking and the writing, were release ceremonies. I remember the dynamic opening which caused me to exam-

ine my life. It was the beginning, the validation of me, I began to listen for the messages from my Soul. I learned a lot by writing and reflecting on that story because fifteen years had passed. Those five months were just the next opening to my Soul-self. I learned to stand under my questions for understanding.

Something was lacking. I was not following a pilgrimage to become more acquainted with my Soul, I was not digging into my current or past pathology to find its source: I needed structure and guidance to make the initiation meaningful.

To link an intention to my purpose, the grief I felt lingered for a year or two; the language, the model, the philosophy, and the structure and purpose of Rites of Passage deserves an entire library of collected efforts as large as the body of publications for flowers and gardening. I have one voice, but I want company.

The desire for Rites of Passage is becoming a cultural meme. It is working! The pond has begun rippling with women's stories of initiation.



One who Knows her Soul is One with Earth

NOW HER STORY: JANIS MONACO CLARK



Meeting Janis Took a Couple of Years

When I ask for guidance about whose story to tell for this chapter, one story emerges particularly filled with delight; she calls it soaring. This is the story of Janis, the model of an Initiated Elder whom I deeply admire. I hope to tag along with Janis for all the rest of my days.

Janis said she remembers first seeing me at the local elementary school where, as a Master Gardener volunteer, she offered to help me in the children's vegetable garden. We talked on the phone about an article she was writing, praising our Edible Schoolyard; I mentioned the school was holding a Harvest dinner: The PTO feeds dinner to the whole, rural community for a very small sum.

“This will be the 58th consecutive year for this Harvest dinner, please come.” Janis is a yes person; she said, “I think we might come.”

Thus, our first brief encounter was in a noisy cafeteria filled with joyful people. She and I sat back to back, but she was shiny and I could see her essence: Wise, mischievous, wild, and loving.

When she was diagnosed with breast cancer, I told her my cancer story and how fear turned into empowerment. We both felt glad to share. Her life got rather small and focused intensely on surgery, radiation, and a heroic healing. We continued to slightly connect, but not quite. Timing had to be just right. Chemistry, magic, some combination of mystery delivered Janis to me when I most needed her juice. Our friendship has blossomed into truth-telling and compassionate understanding.



Grandmother Margaret Behan



We found another tiny opening, a way to connect, through the Council of Thirteen Indigenous Grandmothers. Janis called and explained that she and a couple of friends had seen Global Grandmother Margaret Behan<sup>18</sup> speak in Sandpoint, Idaho about the 13 Grandmothers, and knew of their upcoming gathering at Grandmother Margaret's reservation in Lame Deer, Montana in 2013. She asked if I knew how she might deliver 13 pairs of slippers that she and two friends had knit for the Grandmothers. What a wonderful and generous offering of heart and Soul. Suddenly, Janis and I were becoming friends. I invited her to the tipi pole peeling party, quite a little enterprise in my circle of women; 13 tipis were handcrafted<sup>19</sup> to be assembled at the Lame Deer Council, one tipi for each of the Grandmothers. Our bond was sealed. Then came the slippers, they were part of the handoff to Grandmother Margaret, that she would have another Pacific Northwest gift for the Global Grandmothers.



Slippers fit into Bags Painted by Children; and Slipper Knitters, from left, Charles, Janis, Michelle

As soon as I heard the keywords, editor and writing teacher, I asked Janis to read a draft of *Soul Stories*; I am so glad she said, “Yes.” I learned she had taught creative writing in workshops and adult education and helped people write their life stories, so I thought, yes, she would be a good reader and critic for me. Without a single bit of hesitation, Janis signed up to go on the journey through all of the Passages with me; she had heard the call of initiation. She knew now was the time to honor her own inner Elder.

I put Janis' editorial background to the test and asked her to be my Editor

as well as my journeying sister. She said, “Yes,” and “yes.” We have collaborated closely through Divine inspiration and very hard work for two years. Somehow and absolutely together, we birthed the first book, *Soul Stories*. Through the sheer miracle of grace and ease, we initiated one another as Elders.

Janis dug way down deep to create a space in her life to do these two things while I plugged into my own creative outlet. We chose Summer Solstice 2014 to be our Womb Threshold. That was bold, so bold, we could hardly stop and think. We just took the leap in great faith and inspiration that such an auspicious journey would fulfill our heart’s desire for Rites of Passage. On this pilgrimage to the Soul of ourselves, five other women came along in their own fashion. We all had the same rough draft of the *Soul Stories* manuscript to guide us along.



The Threshold Became a Guiding Force for Relationship

Wait, the liminal ground rushed up to meet us. *Soul Stories* said to mark our calendars with the Sun and the Moon, align with these cosmic energies and begin in a good, ceremonial way. Quite suddenly, we were, metaphorically and spiritually, in the wombs of our Mothers. The images are very rich. In our storylines, we followed a thread and imagined being back in the womb-space

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after more than six decades on Earth. Although this requires an active imagination and is purely illusory, the origin story of a Soul's life in a body serves as a unique way to remember the journey through time. Women know one thing unanimously, we all come from the stars; we are made of stardust and receive our inspirations from Source. Throughout life, creative energy continues to beam into our womb-space.



Janis with her Mom, 2015

Janis asked her Mother, “When did you first know you were pregnant with me?”

“At the opera, Aida.” As a lover of music, Janis jumped for joy.

Hers was a close Italian immigrant family, intergenerational and fascinating. All gathered around the table at huge celebratory meal times, laughing,

telling stories. Before this initiation journey, Janis had spent years excavating her family tree like a professional anthropologist. She had all of her Ancestor stories to support this inner journey. While she was in that womb-space, hearing the stories for the first time with her adult brain and body, those Ancestors came in close and became even more dear to her heart. Her Mother at 95 is still vital, the Mother-Daughter piece remains precious and palpable. As with many relationships, the clearing of sticky energies has freed Janis' continuing Soul journey. Her birth and childhood setting is storybook, she was raised in Hollywood, CA; I can barely imagine such an imprint.

We had notes to compare and processes to improve, so my journey included a daily visit out on my land and the quiet space of my candle-light journaling. Janis had her garden, a brand new Boxer puppy, and out her front door, the mighty Clark Fork River; we moved through the Passages alone and together. We talked weekly, often for an hour or more. My greatest joy throughout our parallel journeying together was an occasional visit across the state line to Janis' cabin. I always arrived completely filled with joyful anticipation. Comfortable in her body, she bounds down the Nature stairs of her front yard like a sprightly young woman.

For this pilgrimage we visited the days of our lives, more than 24,000 days. Never quite linear, our introspection felt circular, around to then and back to now. Deeply immersed, we walked in two worlds. We found our stories interesting, boring, and full of surprises only because the adult brain was reviewing. Janis is proficient in Tarot reading and Astrology. She worked with the I-Ching for many years, beginning right after her divorce took her away from her native Catholicism. Her ability to language this spiritual journey derives from deep explorations throughout her life.

From birth and before childhood unfolded completely, Janis' story was filled with joy and grief, with the angst and wonder of growing up. She was raised devoutly Catholic and educated throughout elementary and high school by sweetly passionate nuns. Janis remembered her childhood and wrote about

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each relationship as the people re-appeared in her life. This may be the finest and most evolved way to initiation, and especially to catch up our early Passages: People shape us more than time and more than self. Being thorough in this review, Janis remembered her first encounter with death, at eleven years old. That tender time was when her Grandfather died and she heard her Grandmother and Aunties wailing, so utterly grief stricken.



Janis (r) on the Beach with Ilse

Because she had such a vivid imagination, naturally there was a first time when trouble rained heavily down. That was a story of running away with a classmate. “I know where we can get some horses and ride to Montana” Janis fibbed. She and her accomplice were 12. Even though they didn’t succeed, and they did get in a heap of trouble, the possibilities of the story still fill a young girl’s heart with joy.

Her First Blood Passage is vivid, as are most of the times she shed her blood. Unlike so many women in the same era, no shame or disguise was present in Janis’ story of her Moon cycles. She simply loved her periods!

Janis told me she and her friends could be excused from class by asserting a so-called “menstruation emergency.” Then they sat giggling in the lavatory and thought how clever they were. Her early menses were her freedom. Quite honestly, the trials of living informed Janis’ best stories, as every good story holds conflict needing to be resolved.

Janis shared about leaving home; she remembers this moment very well. Her First Flight Passage was early marriage when she was nineteen. Contrast that to how the culture feels about teen marriages today. All of the hardship and heartaches have been gathered together in the bundle of stories which produce a Threshold of change; she resolved the pain of living without a trace of shadow carrying over. While she harvested stories between each of her Passages, I watched the cocoon of transformation spin threads of golden silk around her.

The personal spirituality that Janis had advanced through her life was well-formed before this Rites of Passage journey sparked something new, an opening that will continue to expand. When she says she is soaring, I know it and feel it. Even though her story includes many different jobs in many different places, Janis has gleaned the best from those experiences, especially the lessons, and views the shadows with a wise smile. Janis’ long journey through life has navigated many deaths, three marriages before thirty, children and very hard work, every single day. Her Soul-mate came later and they have been married 30 years.

I have been witness to Janis’ process that honored her Ancestors, those she knew and those she did not know. This has been a defining spiritual awakening. At the root of belonging, Janis discovered the legacy stories of her Ancestors, from 1605, births and baptisms, marriages and deaths, recorded in Italy in Latin. Hearing a few of those stories has caused me to look at belonging from that angle, we all come from a gene pool more varied than we can imagine. Peering into those Ancestors lives, going back to Italy to visit their homeland, meeting family, learning about the times they lived through, these

brightly colored threads have been a defining way that Janis has come to know herself, deeply. When she accepted the *Soul Stories* journey, she was ready to peer into her peaks and troughs, the light and dark of her glorious life, and find her Elder Encore.

Rarely have I met a friend so balanced that I feel better just being in her company. Let's look at how she got that way: Raised in West Hollywood, and nested in a multigenerational Italian family, Janis found her ways to see through life; she was gifted with an inborn sense for delight and joy. Did she turn sideways with the trials of life? Not Janis. At a young age she found her loves: horses and music. I remember her describing the stationary Palomino pony across the big street; she would take her dime and ride with the wildest imagination of a country kid. She found solace for her wild imagination at other times, too.

Janis' love of music drew her all the way into the world of concerts and musicians. "It was a great time for music in Los Angeles: the Ash Grove, the Troubadour, the Hollywood Bowl. I heard as much music as I could and wanted to meet everybody, and I did." Yes, that glittery world shaped Janis, it gave her the unending connection to the joyous sound of life, the dancing quality that her life has now, even the special lilt in her step. Throughout the highs and lows of sex, drugs and rock n' roll, she forged her philosophy about spirituality; it is delicate, deeply engrained, and easily damaged if not tended.

Through this guided journey of remembering, Janis realized that all these times of her life were real and fun, even though she did encounter trials and error like anyone. Yet, delight wins and commands her attention more. She has taught me to appreciate wherever you put your heart and mind, that is what becomes bigger. As the old story is told, which wolf do you feed?



Initiated Elder Beauty

When I asked the legacy question, Janis offered a juicy tidbit about mentoring that I cannot resist: This is the legacy to which all women could rise. She said, “I find that as an Initiated Elder, I want to share what I have learned along the way, help women into their power wherever I can. I want to be a Mentor, to share stories and define my Spiritual Elder time that way. The beauty of looking back now is that the pain is gone, only the dazzling memories remain.”



In this snapshot I realize how much there is to know about a long-lived and well-lived life. Our time together is organic, what rises is miraculous because it feeds us. I am not writing a biography, I am sharing about an initiation Sister who dazzles me with her brightness, intrigues me with stories beautifully told, and honors me with her curiosity. We have experienced the opening of our Souls, we have found the patterns that serve us and how marvelous it feels to release the energetic hooks of stories that once held pain and anguish. Joy is the option we choose because in our rear-view mirrors, Janis has helped me see that all of living is about how to choose well and choose again.

We continually touched in and shared stories. By walking with the Moon and following the seasons of the Sun, Winter Solstice marked the place on our timeline where we came face to face with the present moment. As a natural progression, Janis felt ready to complete the pilgrimage, but I needed to hold back a Sun sign. My marriage at the age 52 marked a transition if not a transformation and needed an extra month of appreciation.

By the middle of February, three in our group had completed our journey and four had not. We set a date to celebrate the end of our journey and close the portal, far enough ahead that the others might want to join in ceremony.

The story of our journey together has two threads, the part we shared with only our Soul and the part we shared with one another. The day was May 9th, 2015, a day to remember for the Divine energy that held us in a bubble and a day to treasure in photos. Janis arrived at Grouse Creek, a special place north of Sandpoint, all decked out as usual, ‘dressed to the nines’ we have said in our generation. One of the things I truly love is how she plays dress-up with me. It’s fun and so youthful. She brought her Goddess which set the stage for the day. I wanted to introduce her Goddess to my Goddess. We reflect on this now as inner and outer.



Two Goddesses Meet

As a gift from the world of stones, my Goddess washed up on the banks of Grouse Creek on Christmas Eve. Janis' Goddess statue came as a gift from a dear and spiritual friend. The positive recognition of the Goddess presence in our lives, inner and outer, may be the special mark of Elder. We walked the trail to the creek; Janis so reverently kneeled before the water's edge and washed her Goddess as in a baptism to mark the day as holy. The energy of initiation captured us and sent us into rapture together. When I introduced my stone Goddess to Janis, she placed hers beside mine so they could commune. I told

the story of the stone's arrival and how, through floods and the hardship of winter, this stone Goddess had insisted on staying with me through the initiation year.

We must have been complete after the Goddesses met because we wanted to simply sit and be. Their aura infused our hearts with togetherness, celebratory and initiatory oneness. We left the creek to greet our special younger sister, Laura, who joined the ceremony because she had been along on her own journey and was ready to greet her Deepening Womanhood Threshold.

To be in the midst of the wild woods in ceremony, I had put up a large tent at The Crossroads. This place was so named for the girls of summer who had their Rites of Passage at the same location. Our hearts were one with those girls as we were once girls and our journey through stories brought our inner girls back to life. It was lilac season, two weeks early as everything this spring. At the entrance to the tent, I placed the same smooth hide those girls had stepped across, some exquisite Nature creature gave her life for our Threshold. Another feminine spirit worked that hide with her own hands, we relished the gift. Sitting together in this tent, the three Goddesses of initiation smudged one another, prepared an altar to hold our stories, and made flower crowns for our heads and beaver-chewed Elder staffs to move us forward. Until we were complete, we shared about our long pilgrimage through the days of our lives.

When we left The Crossroads, radiant beneath our flower crowns, holding our staffs gifted by the beavers and wearing our Elder Shawls, I laid down my staff and invited my sisters in initiation to step across with intention. Our liminal portal closed then, nearly one year after we crossed the opening Threshold. We each felt complete at the end. Complete was a state of mind that lasted a few days. Another full year was required to integrate all of the change that comes on the far side of a Threshold. We have allowed that process to work on us in dream-time and when we were not looking. Stories make a life, and we got busy making more stories. We learned and truly, our stories matter.

Looking back, we have been pleasantly surprised by the shining that we feel radiating from our Souls. Whether it's soaring or shining, we feel different each day, more enthusiastic about life, ready for the challenges of our Elder years ahead. We rise each morning full of energy, in loving devotion, we cultivate receptivity and reach for JOY. Thank you, dear Janis, for traveling with me into the future.



Emerging From a Long Journey

## GIFTS FROM THE ELDERS: ELDER ENCORE

**Maybe your Soul** planned all the events of your life to happen the way they did. Consider your Soul as the finest teacher in your life. Embrace the journey ahead as a Soul journey! With maturity comes a natural ability to ease your grasp and release.

- \* How can you possibly release all that has come in but no longer serves? Very carefully and deliberately release the emotional charge that some influences still hold.

**When you look within** and without, do you see that you and all women are more differentiated than similar?

- \* From the place of wholeness at Birth to now, what do you believe and what more do you want?
- \* Who has been in your life, in deep or shallow relationships and what gifts have they brought to you, consciously or unconsciously? Light a candle, refer to the relationship wheel at the back and spend time with your relations on paper.

**You took that mighty big leap** of faith across the Deepening Womanhood Threshold: Those twenty years of adulthood held all of life and delivered so many opportunities to grow.

- \* What could possibly be ahead?
- \* You were born with a purpose. Search out your hidden gifts, you have something more to offer, something great. This is the time to set yourself up for that one big thing you came to do.
- \* What is it you must do and only you can do?
- \* How can you best deliver on the gifts you were so generously given?

**With your miraculous brain**, and across the timeline of your days, you were born with the ability to grasp the past, present, and peer into the future

nearly simultaneously.

- \* How will you mark your place in time?
- \* Are you learning how your heart guides your mind?
- \* Are you operating with all the information at your disposal?
- \* What consistently brings you joy?

**Harvest** personal and special sparks of joy from the story of your life. Look for your gratitude for times of trial from your shadow side. Crossing five, six, or seven Passage Thresholds with a ceremony for each has helped you find honor in your position, honor for all of your days lived.

- \* Can you take a long view of the past and examine how your body has changed as your thoughts about your body have changed?
- \* To create your own storyline of Divine guidance or minor miracles, be sure to include your history of play and magical time in Nature. Embrace all your friends who are growing older with you lovingly, joyfully and definitely playfully.

**Are you becoming more intimate** with your cosmic relations, Mother Earth and her elder sister, Grandmother Moon?

- \* How have your spiritual beliefs changed as you crossed over each Threshold?
- \* Astrology offers a language of belonging. I understand my place on Earth by paying attention to the sky. The information, both spiritual and psychic in content, is quite revealing. What does this cosmic language offer you?
- \* The cosmic energy of Saturn announces your Elder Encore Threshold is near with the second Saturn return: Are you prepared to give the gifts of your Soul?
- \* Saturn is like the pestering Coyote who asks, how are you progressing

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on the deliberate aim of your life? Who were you born to be?

**What do you long for** before you cross the Elder Encore Threshold?

What would you love more of?

- \* When I speak of legacy, of purpose, I wrap one thread around the Earth and another thread around the Moon to help you find your Gift for Gaia.
- \* Reflect on how your Moonpause is shaping you. How has it prepared you for this time.
- \* Have you claimed a place on Earth for yourself and your family?
- \* Have you become a stakeholder, part of the grassroots to make your place better?
- \* If you agree that this is an age to be open to more, what is on your list?
- \* How do you need to prepare yourself to continue building on your wisdom tradition?

**Elder is the age** that all others look up to for leadership, wisdom and guidance. The culture is dependent on how the Elders are portrayed and valued. Are you preparing to consciously model what it means to be an Elder?

- \* Contemplate, in your journal and in silence, the legacy all women are weaving for future generations.
- \* Gather the lessons and wisdom of your stories; see the patterns found in your relationships. Review of the delights of your life and you will find the honoring that your life needs to regenerate your whole self. What have you been training for your whole life?

## CLOSING BLESSING

This is only the seventh Threshold, your time ahead is long and lovely. Of all the threads to carry you forward, find the ones which satiate, follow those. To feel satisfied, a number of natural forces must blend harmoniously. The mind has wants, the heart has desires, and the body has needs. Humans are emotional beings; an intricate and wide range of emotions propel this ride through life, creating ups and downs. Elder is the age to see all these forces as loves. Seeing the dichotomy of joy and bitterness, choose joy for this half of your life.

- \* As always, listen to your Soul-self
- \* Walk in nature
- \* Spend time creating, perhaps with one or two other women
- \* Find babies to cuddle, little ones to play with, and teens to listen to
- \* Practice love, stroke yourself, stroke your partner, share hugs
- \* Spend time every single day doing things that satiate (gratify, satisfy, quench)
- \* Do your body scans, seek the help you need, seek pleasure as a healer
- \* Harvest your stories, because your life matters, your stories matter
- \* Share all of this with another woman who needs mentoring, this is our legacy.



## NOTES ON ELDER ENCORE PASSAGE

- 1 How can women of 40 or 50 or 60 experience something they missed at 12 or 14, at 18 or 29? My Women's Circle decided on an experiment we called double-tracking. By living fully in the present, we believed we could take a long life review and bring ourselves across all the early Thresholds. This made a beautiful story for two dozen women, and I share its basis in *Soul Stories: Nine Passages of Initiation* (2015). The story is posted on my website [www.ninepassages.com](http://www.ninepassages.com) entitled *The Great Catch-up Ceremony*.
- 2 Alfred Korzybsky (1879–1950) was the first to describe the two filters through which the world is experienced, the first is one's grasp of language and the second is the inherited structure of the nervous system. *Filters* means that the world is not experienced directly, but shaped, inherited from Ancestors, what they knew and taught through interaction with the environment. Nature and nurture are both components of time-binding. A good example is how often I use my Mother's colloquiums, such as "rest on your laurels."
- 3 Fascinated by brain, by how these two ideas wind around each other, time-binding and the triune brain, I introduce Paul D. MacLean (1913–2007) as the original scientist who explained the triune brain. As these notes illustrate, I appreciate the complexity of your life.
- 4 Christiane Northrup promotes women's health and well-being. By delivering one book after another to women, all that we need to understand our bodies better is here, in wisdom generously offered. These books were written for all of us: *Mother-Daughter Wisdom* (2006); *Women's Bodies, Women's Wisdom* (2010); *The Wisdom of Menopause* (2012); and *Goddesses Never Age* (2015).
- 5 I especially love the book, *Brainstorm* (2013) wherein Daniel Siegel highlights the teen-age brain, and the book that introduced me to the further work of Siegel and colleagues. *Mindsight: The New Science of Personal Transformation* is the integrative master work that hangs so many disciplines on the same web and illustrates how science and spirituality are woven together.
- 6 I have followed anthropologist Mary Catherine Bateson since I read the major works of her parents, Margaret Meade and Gregory Bateson. Two books, *Composing a Life* (1989) and *Composing a Further Life: The Age of Active Wisdom* (2010), have help deepen my thoughts about the life cycle.
- 7 I name and include one of my favorite astrologers, Teri Parsley Starnes, because I never fail to learn something remarkable from her newsletter: Starsdance Astrology is profound every week. Her website [www.starsdanceastrology.com](http://www.starsdanceastrology.com), may also be a teacher for you.
- 8 Long before I had my hands on this amazing *Nature Spirit Tarot* deck, I often visited Jean Herzel and she would reveal her progress. Her deck is stunning and poignantly insightful and I draw a card every single day as one of my practices. Who can resist the title of this reference that Jean gave me as a guide into the spirit of Tarot: *Spiritual Tarot: Seventy-Eight Paths to Personal Development* (1996) by Echols, Mueller, and Thomson. Jean Herzel's website: [www.naturespiritartarot.com](http://www.naturespiritartarot.com)
- 9 Dolores LaChapelle, one of the Ancestors now, was gifted as an interdisciplinarian and teacher of human ecology and deep ecology. She walked with me up the slopes of Mount Wilson in Colorado and helped me see what I might do with an advanced degree in Women's Studies. By her ex-

ample, I added Nature Studies to weave disciplines together because she demonstrated that new knowledge is found at the intersection of disciplines. With Dolores' help, I found old knowledge in Rites of Passage that insisted on a new life.

- 10 Raised as an only child, Dolores' son, David LaChapelle found his wisdom early in life. David wrote beautiful parables: In 1993, *Mountains of Light and Pathways of Love*; in 1995, *A Voice on the Wind: A Fable about Coming of Age*. Many other books can be found at the website set up after David crossed in 2009: <http://www.lachapellelegacy.org/Bookstore.html>. I love his final work, published posthumously, *A Hymn of Changes: Contemplations of The I Ching* (2009).
- 11 Meditation has come to the West from the East but perhaps it was here all along. All peoples who revere the Earth feel awe, often by walking in Nature. Now we revere teachers such as Sally Kempton, Pema Chodron, Thich Naht Hanh, and many others who remind us what some of our esteemed Ancestors knew: We must find our way to quiet mind for the great gifts that are waiting.
- 12 Created in 2015 by Maia Duerr; I love this illustration and asked permission to post this into *Nine Passages*. Crediting this illustration found on her website <http://maiaduerr.com/>
- 13 Sesame Almond Crackers are made with almond-flour and eggs, yummy and healthy. Ask me for the recipe: [gail@ninepassages.com](mailto:gail@ninepassages.com).
- 14 When I read this book, *Outrageous Openness: Letting the Divine Take the Lead* (2014), I cried over this simple validation. Divine guidance is the way people experience the miracles of life and now I know I am not alone in this worldview. Tosha Silver offers videos and workshops at <http://to-shasilver.com/books/>.
- 15 Unlocking most of my secrets, which is the reason for writing, Here I share my learned teachers. Carolyn Myss, online and in her book *Sacred Contracts* (2001); also every one of Jean Bolen's books especially—*Goddesses in Everywoman* (1984) and *Goddesses for Older Women: Archetypes in Women over Fifty* (2001). Other favorite teachers of archetypes, Sally Kempton explores the cross cultural lens of Hindu Goddesses and for the Divine Feminine archetype, Helen M. Luke is unsurpassed. Joan Borysenko is such a prolific writer, but I loved *Woman's Book of Life* (1996).
- 16 Helen M. Luke has come to me as a gift from an initiating woman. Thank you Laurie Evans for your generosity, I hope we can continue mentoring one another through our Elder years.
- 17 News often travels underground like mycelium; so it was that I heard many women speak fluently about the work of Marija Gimbutas (1921–1994). In her long career as a professor of archeology at UCLA, she excavated evidence of the Civilization of the Goddess of 30,000 years ago. Most women find hope in the fact that matrilineal cultures have existed before. Her three major works are *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe* (1974); *The Language of the Goddess* (1989); and *The Civilization of the Goddess* (1991). Her life was put in a documentary by Starhawk and Donna Read, *Signs Out of Time: The Story of Archaeologist Marija Gimbutas* (2003).
- 18 Global Grandmother Margaret Behan was once a member of the 13 Indigenous Grandmothers. In 2014, she told her story of hosting 12 other Grandmothers at Lane Deer while she taught her special sculpting techniques for making dolls of clay to a group of post-modern Elders. She is a strong woman leader of her tribe and a teacher of Cheyenne culture.

## Nine Passages for Women and Girls

- 19 A little historical footnote, now, the gathering hosted by Grandmother Margaret in 2013 at Lane Deer, Montana gave my Women's Circle lots to do for a couple of years. One woman, Debra Williams, handmade 13 tipis (see [www.sagebrush tipi works.com](http://www.sagebrush tipi works.com)) while the rest of us peeled tipi poles, hundreds of poles, and my editor, Janis Monaco Clark knitted slippers with her friends, the Slipper Knitters.

## 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.