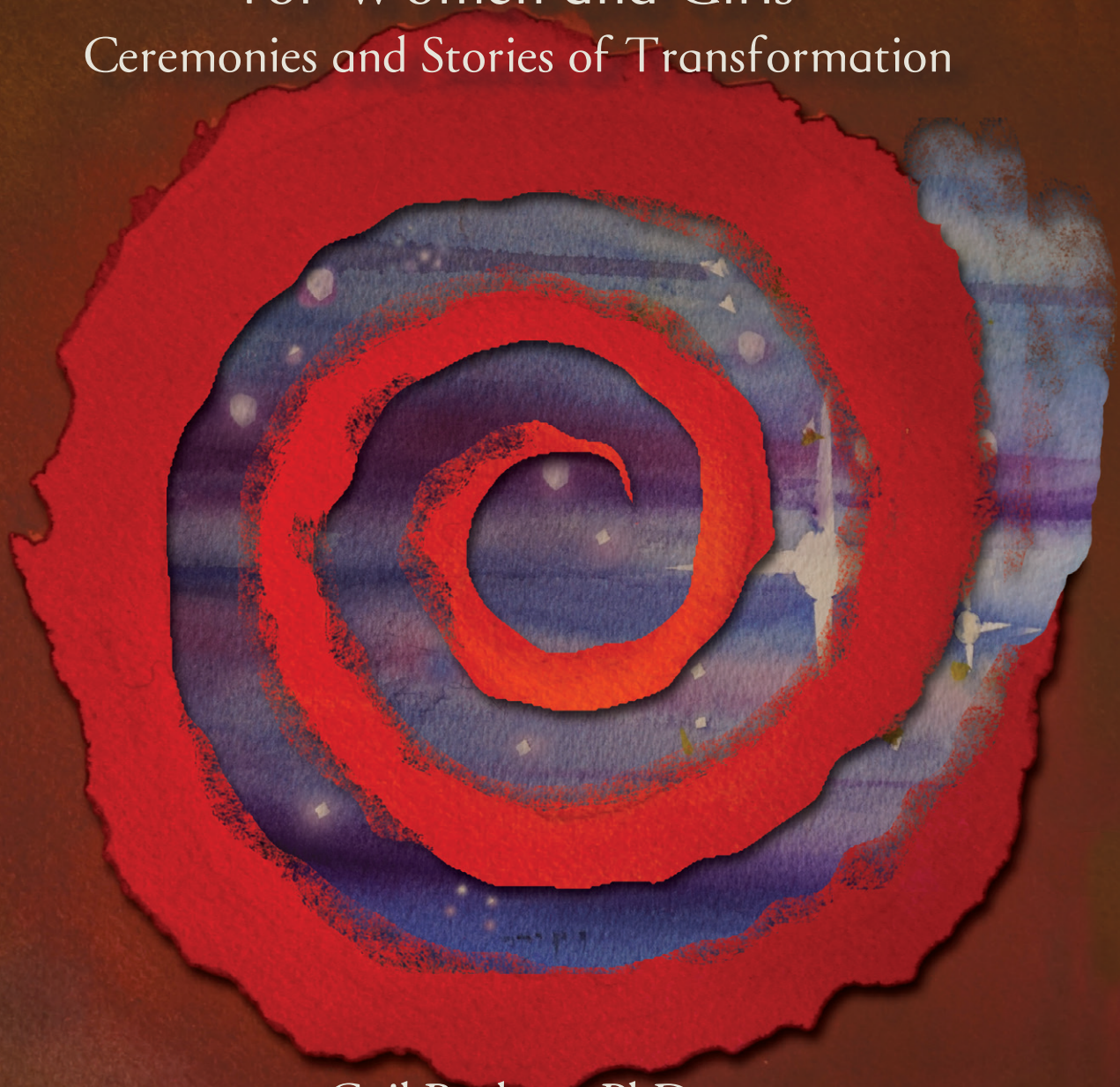


NINE PASSAGES

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](#).¹

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.²

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.³ 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.⁴

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

NINE PASSAGES for Women and Girls Ceremonies and Stories of Transformation

BIRTH AND MIDDLE CHILDHOOD

Each of our lives span Birth to Death and may be viewed in four parts through these *Gifts from Elder Mentors*. The Soul indicators or maturity markers reveal the growth signs as Child, Adolescent, Adult, and Elder. We call these *Nine Passage* ceremonies *Gifts from Elder Mentors* because the rituals are offered generously to help Mothers and Grandmothers identify the markers of maturity and offer their children the ceremonies of Earth, Moon, and Sky to deepen our experience of being fully human. Rites of Passage ceremonies encourage personal evolution and the expression of our true Genius.

Biology actually determines all nine stages of maturity, changes common to each woman. Passage thresholds contain the drama and surprise of our lives. Rituals help the next stage unfold with grace and enthusiasm for what comes next.

In this *Rites of Passage Stories for Children*, we guide Mothers and Grandmothers of girls to see the pattern of development through a new lens. To review the days unfolding from Birth to Middle Childhood, let's begin with the holistic Mind-Body-Soul perspective, revealing a myriad of strengths

to look for in development. Biological changes occur daily making all of childhood a visual circus of change. Birth is filled with wonder, Middle Child Rites are filled with play, and First Blood is filled with promise and drama.

For the Child's Passages, we offer the voice of the Guide rather than Mentor. We do this because celebrating Passages needs a gentle re-introduction to the culture. We encourage you to form a village around your child; it takes a village to grow us into experts on parenting. Aunties, Uncles, Grandparents and adopted relations offer different aspects of expertise so each child receives all that is needed.

Childhood is a time filled with magical thinking and for strengthening family bonds. We become our true selves before Early Childhood is over. The first dozen years create the very foundation of our being and on these roots, a life is built. This surely puts tremendous pressure on parents and teachers. Adding the spice of ceremony and ritual to stories, we offer the guardians of girls the ability to see the whole of their developmental journey. Parents are invited to pay special attention to all who hold and love their children.

If a baby receives a special ceremony in her first year, she will have that story her whole life. If an 8 or 9 year old girl receives a ceremony to celebrate her new responsibilities, she will carry forward two ceremony stories and look ahead to her puberty celebration. This is the truth to making a celebratory life. Birth, Middle Child, and First Blood: These are sacred events in every life; they are Rites of Passage opportunities to bring community circles around your daughter.

Maybe there is no mistake the word Rites accompanies Passage. It can be interpreted as a 'right' as well. Rites of Passage are ceremonies of Earth and Sun and Moon. They bring together the people who already love this Soul to observe her development. A Passage ceremony offers a celebration of gratitude for the extended family, the community or village who guided this child. All

through life, Souls need to be seen. Passage ceremonies are vehicles of special moments of intimacy, as into-me-see. For her heart, a ceremony weekend offers moments of spirit that a girl will draw on for strength. In the psychology of anticipation, she will know the next ceremony is her right and she will look forward to it like reaching for her unknown greatness.

Live to Celebrate

Here is your invitation to bundle these Passages into memorable ceremonies. For little girls, the three celebrations begin with Birth, when she is a babe in your arms, a ceremonial story becomes her personal mythology. Before and after Birth, baby ceremonies also recognize Mother for her remarkable task of creation. When the Village encircles a newborn, a bundle of stories begins to shape a gift for baby to carry into childhood. Photos, stories, mementos, these belong in the bundle. Birthdays, holidays, Earth days, Moon days, these stories belong in her bundle.

Different relatives retell different parts of her story so a celebrated tiny baby grows into a little girl with her own mythological story which flavors Early Childhood. All of her birthdays, where a new number designates her development like rings on a tree, hold pieces of this unfolding story. At age 8 or 9, Middle Child Rites raise a girl's personal esteem when she sits in the center of a Women's Circle. She will never forget that feeling. Mother-Daughter re-telling of stories will form the basis of her personal mythology, her Birth and childhood story.

When an impressionable child gets noticed and celebrated for her life journey, her Soul begins to blossom and her sense of belonging fans out from her family to her community. When the natural time for Blood to flow, her Moontime arrives, her Soul demands that her parents see her with new eyes. The remarkable change agent of Blood is like no other in a woman's life.

For the whole village, these Passage ceremonies encourage the observation of maturity. Ask, what challenge will she rise to and how can that be celebrated? The indigenous heritage of these ceremonies is varied and rich; ask your friends and relations, what can be done for your daughter? We could say this is a missing ingredient in every young life.

All the days from Birth to Blood make up a vast pool of psychic wonder. The memories, the lessons, and the heart moments, filled with joy and tears, are the well of renewal and continuously dipped into as the water of one's life. For all the rest of life, the ceremonial days make up her reservoir of spiritual incentive.

Imagine the heart of this magic: If First Blood arrives at age 12, then 4,400 days make up the foundation of her life and childhood ends. The stardust in her Soul transforms into a deeper mystery with each Moontime. She learns cosmic language and begins to track her own moods, emotions, and rhythms. One hundred Moontimes before she leaves the nest, free with her personal curiosities, will teach her all she needs to know about womanhood. Those belong in the next bundle: Adolescence.



MIDDLE CHILD RITES

THE INTENTION: MAKING ALL RITES POSSIBLE

I stand before the great unseen powers with a gift in my hands, feeling its nature, sacred and powerful. This is my root prayer for women and girls: Great Mystery, I ask for Divine guidance to bring initiations to all peoples in ways of old made new. Each Rite of Passage pulls a little more Genius into being, a little more of our gifts made visible as an offering from our spirit-selves. I call out to all the nature kingdoms to watch now and offer protection as we lift up our hearts, I feel especially grateful for this opportunity to walk toward consciousness.

Being part of Nature, I pause to express gratitude for our Great Mother the Earth and give thanks for all the plants and the animals, for the waters and the air. I give thanks for bugs, birds, and fishes, everything, in fact, under the swirl of the Moon and our great day star, the Sun. Do you also feel grateful for so much good, wild company? Touching my heart space I toss this bundle of gratitude into the air so this little prayer will be felt and heard.



Dear Mothers, Aunties, Grandmothers and Mentors:

I invite you to think ahead. When your girl encounters Middle Childhood—the ‘big’ half of childhood before puberty—she will silently cry out for recognition. I call this a Passage moment and your response of recognition will be a ritual. This particular ritual, playful and earthy, sets the stage for a whole life of Women’s Passage ceremonies. To hear the call of change heralding this new stage of development, tune your spirit in around age 8 when your girl’s female hormones are produced and enter her blood stream for the first time. This invisible event will touch your Soul in a way only a woman can perceive. Acknowledging that something is different will invite more growth and change for you as well as for her. A small, ceremonial space to embrace her precious memories will offer a release into the second half of Childhood known as the Middle. As she changes and feels ready to release her Early Childhood, please see the spirit of change. It is always good. Ceremony invites change. A girl’s Middle Childhood is completely exhilarating. Growth and change demand that everyone pay attention.

Between sleeping and waking, when change visits your daughter’s pillow, she begins a silent call for recognition, for initiation. You wonder why she’s cranky and she wants you to know she is different overnight. Change is the one great constant in the world. If we pay close attention to this call for acknowledgment and interpret it as a need for initiation, a celebratory life can be the way your family celebrates growth. Because Early Childhood is memorable our whole life long, a celebration honors these memories, and the arrival of Middle Childhood causes the spirit of this child to look forward to her next ceremonies.

Women’s learned experience suggests the observance of a ceremony to acknowledge the change between little and big childhood, the important coming-of-age ceremony for puberty will be happily anticipated. I ask that you consider this remarkable, because I do. Without this Middle Childhood celebration, the First Blood ceremony and puberty teachings are often denied, skipped, or excused.



Add Fire to Make Ceremony

How can you help your girl remember she has a special connection to the natural world? Here's one way to excite and awaken her to deepen that connection. Teach her about women's ritual and ceremony elements: Earth, Air, Fire, and Water combine alchemically, and in combination create every single sentient being. Take that thought to its natural conclusion: These elements also create literally every material thing on the planet.

A sacred ceremony container for a girl stepping into Middle Childhood includes relations, near and far, related and not. Her stories and your emotions belong in the container. Places she has been, passions she has revealed, photos that hint at the bigger picture, these are all items only you know about that will create a sacred bundle she will hold dear all the days of her life.

Nine Passages for Women and Girls

Gather in a circle with those who will help you. Take time to look into one another's eyes, check-in about each other's pulses and passions. Then ask, will they help you create this girls' ceremony? At this edge, where little girls become big girls, now may be the only opportunity to celebrate the Early Childhood years. Embrace the days of routine, of singing and dancing, and days of play. She will be a woman for every other ceremony of her life.

Who has watched this girl grow? What does her Father want to contribute? This will be a community gathering. Should you invite her school friends to be celebrated too? As you decide to build a ritual ceremony for one girl or a group, offer thanks to all those who know your daughter. They want to hear that her girl-spirit has grown and has been safe in their care. Include the whole community; these ceremonies are great bonding opportunities.

Lingering on this growing girl for a moment, we hear Mother say, "She really is growing fast, she is no longer a small child." It's important for you to see this girl with new eyes, she's a big girl now and has new needs. Many of her needs are specifically mother-centered, as in woman-centered. She needs to know you see the difference.

Continue to watch for all the signs pointing to her gifts. In a dream-world without life and death challenges, this may be true: A child swims happily in the froth and fantasy of early childhood, moving through stages of toddler and pre-school and early education until a fresh stage arrives. Early personality quirks begin to show through your girl's fantasies and innocent meanderings. She almost stands on her head trying to reveal her gifts to anyone watching.



Girls at the Edge of Transformation

In a macro-view, ontogeny is the biological timing of our human development and this quick look will help you remember what you are celebrating. There are brain indicators, growth indicators, and neurological coordinators. The force of change is present and churning, so let's step into her natural story. Her baby teeth grew in and she walked when she was good and ready, on her own time. Then she was potty-trained just about the time she talked in full sentences, again when she felt ready. She learned to say the alphabet and read, then her teeth fell out, then they grew back in, and she learned to write. Finally, when she asked to be helpful and accepted more responsibility, she reached this Middle Childhood stage. As a developmental marker without a numerical age, this Middle Child Threshold offers a time to pause and celebrate all of Early Childhood because those precious events can be bundled as in the past.

Her Middle Childhood is coming, if it hasn't already arrived. Soon it is undeniably marked by a discomfort of being called little, or being left with the

little ones. This can happen as early as 8, when those hormones enter a girl's bloodstream. Often, by age 9, the signs cannot be ignored.

Be not alarmed, this child is still very much a child. However, all the indicators reveal the Middle has arrived. This short, peak stage lasts until the signs of puberty overwhelm her with a distinctly personal biology. Right now she is ready for her Middle Childhood ceremony, because you read the signs and she asks for more responsibility. She becomes your helper of first choice. Because she has recently demonstrated this willingness, you gladly allow her to stretch her capabilities and applaud her accomplishments.

She grows more complex with each passing day. As a Mother or Grandmother of a Middle Child going through your own changes, you can hardly keep up with her changes. Awareness of change is made possible with regular check-ins to attend to the feminine in you both. For this Middle Childhood stage of development, change is less biological and more behavioral. Her spirit is expanding right before your eyes. New Mother/Daughter distinctions appear; almost daily, she differentiates in small ways. She has been your reflection, soon her Soul's job will be to become very different from you. We are often too busy or not well enough trained to notice every subtle change. Suddenly, it seems like she misses nothing and absorbs everything about adulthood. Her growing awareness is one of the charms of this stage and she celebrates noticing things you've missed. Girls either want to be grown-up or want nothing to do with the adult world. Which leaning does your girl have?

Beliefs may be a subject of intense curiosity for her. Do not be surprised if she questions and challenges your beliefs. If you prove to be inflexible, she may take it like a dare. All this depends on her personality. Your young daughter, to better understand her own edges, may begin to find and test your edges. This may be true for beliefs, morals, integrity, and your very IQ. Feel flattered if she interrogates you, but she may also test your intimacy. She wants to know you and as she throws out thousands of questions, notice that she wants to be engaged in full conversations. Mothers, decide where your boundaries lie.

Together with this expanding being, you will learn how to make those personally edgy choices.



Changing Girl

This may be an opportunity for deeper teachings about choices, and how making mistakes becomes the grandest learning experiences. Remember, this is a highly foundational time, her curiosity will be rewarded, but she is also tender and vulnerable. Teach her that fear is a healthy emotion and we all feel it every day, but courage is the antidote which comes from within. Often, fast growth literally produces growing pains that are real and cause discomfort. Times when she shows sensitivity in her spirit are good times to demonstrate the practice of stillness.

Several things are born of the new level of maturity she is showing. The first may be the discovery of your girl's shadow side. This is the collision of Nature and culture; your shadow self also appeared at this age. An easy way to view this initial shadow appearance comes through her story. You may use your own lenses of doubt or criticism to see hers and share from this common link. Does she have the brat, a princess, or perhaps the drama queen archetype? Find out as soon as you can what is beneath any shadow expressions. What quirks

make you wrinkle your nose? She may drop the act once it's exposed, but she may have a deeper wounding that needs to be healed. She may also hide her shadow in the good-girl archetype. Notice if she tries too hard to please you at her own expense.

Shadows shape each one of us. Following the lead of shadow-selves take us to an honest and airy place we must look to know our true selves. Both shadows and bright lights belong in the bundle you create to help your girl remember her Early Childhood days. Mother and daughter, together, can take representational memories of dark and light, such as bullying or extra drama, and use the magic of ceremony to place any psychic pain in the past tense. Linger here with your trusted friends; ask for help if this resonates for you or your daughter.

In ceremony, a girl will meet her Higher Self as an aspect of her Soul who walks with her and challenges her to be better, smarter, fair and true to her newly forming ideals. Because Higher Self walks with high principles, each girl, indeed each woman, hearing and heeding this trumpet of conscience benefits from this learned skill. Every child has a conscious and a subconscious mind and this time of early maturity provides a great opportunity to begin exploring what that means. Through ceremony, a girl will have an opportunity to see herself new again, as her days of Early Childhood are remembered and celebrated.

In addition to shadow work, this developmental stage may awaken negative imagery common to both genders. Early signs seem like a weakening, declining self-esteem, increasing doubt, ungrateful expressions, and self-criticism. If your girl has none of these issues, at least they are named and you can stay alert for future places where her strength may be compromised. The sooner these issues receive your attention, the sooner you can repair the breach in her spirit. Sometimes the repair may be as easy as action: Take her to a soup kitchen to volunteer, or go pick berries, or walk along the beach gathering stones and shells. Think of what will represent a playful action that will take her mind off her negative feelings long enough for her to gain a fresh perspective. Provide the opening, the invitation to talk it through. These and other action steps will shift

her energy, her perspective, and raise her up out of a false-funk. Talk to her about how to shift energy instead of focusing on the negatives that are born of faltering confidence. She will be glad to possess the skill of shifting her energy.

In many different ways, your daughter may face vulnerabilities of her rapidly growing and changing spirit. Call forth her courage with yours—vulnerability is a strength. Continue to explore the subjects and hobbies where she expresses passion, even if her passion-of-the-month seems exploratory. She's young, and unless she's a prodigy, her gifts are still coming into form. All her casting about at this stage will actually support her self-confidence as she eliminates things of little or no interest.

The future developmental stages ahead, pre-puberty and puberty, can be tricky to maneuver. Let her know you are always going to be her loving safety net. She knows that, but wants to hear it from you, her dear and closest support.

Truly when your daughter (or son) reaches the stage of Middle Childhood, the highest value to your child comes through your acknowledgement that a change has occurred. As the age of responsibility and accountability, Middle Childhood provides a symbolic opportunity to use the teaching tools of ceremony to mark this change as the prelude to puberty. Dare we look forward to that stage, the great and intense change from childhood to womanhood? The notation of this Middle Childhood marker, makes celebrating the arrival of puberty more likely. I merely repeat myself for emphasis, as age 12 rolls into age 13, a girl unfamiliar with women's ceremonies will more likely cave into peer pressure. One of the risks I wish to avert here is peers raising peers.

The act of celebrating markers of development, especially as a rite of initiation, is new in this culture but draws from old, old times before writing, before memory. I believe, searching through the oldest parts of our brains, we can remember. We come together in response to longings as old as those times out of memory. Each one of us knows how and what to do.

Let's make a ceremony! What is this particular ceremony? Her signs of

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growth and change reveal a spiritual maturity, indicating a new awareness and a soul quickening. This daughter is emerging out of her pretend world, taking exploratory steps into the fully abstract adult world. For each girl, her Middle Childhood ceremony celebrates the appearance of brain expansion more than bodily development. World religions have also recognized this age as something of competence. It's much more than a single word.



Before Ceremony Prayers

Making ceremony arises from heritage more than memory and encourages you to stretch to your future Elder-self. The ceremonial part of your heritage may be lying in the dust like mine was. If so, call forth the sacred in your imagination. Think of what might create a special day for you and for your daughter. You model and teach through your imagination, that doesn't change. As always, you lead the way and set the tone. A women's gathering to mark a girl changing from Early to Middle Childhood provides an opportunity to impart wisdom, to begin traditions like giving handmade gifts. You might offer a charm or a bead that will connect to future initiations. Remember, initiation honors growth and brings the spirit of recognition and a celebration of change. Commemorating the Spiral of Life developmental markers with a ceremony, whether it's simple or complex, will create your personal acknowl-

edgment that her spirit longs for.

To open your spiritual response, say yes! This is the call of Rites of Passage. After the idea enters, initiations unfold in three steps the Indigenous peoples shared in the last century. The *first* is separation, *second* an ordeal or a test that proves the stage, and *third* is integration where the change feels most obvious in one's inner world. This last step, also called reincorporation, may last a full round of 13 Moons.

In every other stage, when the Initiates are older, a true separation would be a physical parting. Because this is a child-ceremony, psychic safety comes first, so separation may be in keeping with her fantasy world. Put a blindfold over her eyes and she separates without fear. An ordeal or challenge may be the central unifying force to effect change, only a little bit of energy is needed for this Passage. Her child's life review may be the perfect change-agent for honoring. Find the surprise for yourself in this review of her first three thousand days, and make special note of any of the places where she was wounded. Revisiting those ordeals already healed provides an esteem bump, see how you came through that ordeal, daughter? This ceremony time provides grounding threads her Soul will pull on her whole life long. This collective effort pulls her Mind-Body-Spirit together.

Gather with family and friends to let the child-spirit know that her maturity is noticeable. You will be gifting all her moments known as Early Childhood. Now cast as a group of memories, this bundle holds the many days since her first Passage, when she was born into this world. This pivot place of celebration serves everyone to recognize change. It's also the time when families heartily and cheerily tell the finest and happiest stories about the child so she remembers she was carefully watched. I feel passionate about how time is used for initiatory acknowledgments. Be sure to take enough time. In close communities, this first conscious ceremony could elongate to a potluck, but please, something more than her last birthday party. If this one ceremony tests your ceremonial mettle, start small. An initiation needs a separation and

an ordeal. Super simple would be her blindfolded while relations recount her complete history, with everyone speaking about the obvious change they see in your girl.

Commemorating the entry into Middle Childhood as an initiation causes this girl to see herself differently, and after this ceremony she will be different. The final step in this three-step ritual alerts all who know your daughter: This step of reincorporation involves her close and extended family, everyone needs to declare how they see change and probably more than once. Like seeing into her whole self, acknowledgements coax her body-mind to follow the lead of her spirit. Do be patient, please. Some releasing of her little child self and accepting of her middle child self will break through its lingering resistance within a couple of months. Resistance is the doorway to the Divine, we simply must push it open. Integration, depending on how much work the spirit has to do, may indeed last several months.

Mothers, Grandmothers, Aunties, you are the guides; your child's first ceremony would best be instigated by a collective of you, and deepened by her community of family and friends as she integrates change. Here, I want to emphasize the extended family, the community that cradled this child from birth and continues to hold fast. Please let everyone know that our learning curve is a collective process. The next ceremony, the welcoming to early adulthood, lends itself to forming and strengthening, repairing and re-knitting community.

Watching girls (and boys) move through their Passage markers invites Elders to create ceremony. This is the way to circle back to remember our heritage as ritual expands our experience as it did for our distant Ancestors. Maturity rituals are offered in a zone apart from religions, beliefs, and those rituals. Ceremonies to mark biological maturity include mental, emotional, psychic, and spiritual development that have evolved over tens of thousands of years through tribal appreciation, recognition, and trainings. Incorporating ritual promises to slow us down, something everyone could use. Extended families notice one another's maturity moving through seasons together. When we

watch with a consciousness, Passages will bring wholeness to our communities. There is great power in doing a ceremony to culminate all the watching and all the attending everyone has done. This recognition is one of the true gifts, another is the Soul's response.

For you, the women in a young girl's life, consider the essence of self, how often do you see the world through this Middle Childhood lens?

PREPARING FOR CEREMONY

Preparing you is step one. In the sense of having something you can give away, adult to child, do your own Middle Childhood ceremony. Start from your Birth Passage up to this Middle Child Passage, those 8 or 9 years, many characters crossed your path. Remember them. Consider what you believe. Right now consider this question, "Where do babies come from?" Where did you come from to be born from your Mother's womb? Walk yourself through your own Early Childhood. Imagine where you felt the awakening of your Middle Childhood place. Your memory of how you navigated this personal Passage is an important prelude. Keep in mind the wholeness you seek. Who will you choose to hear your stories? These ceremonies bond spirit to body and mind, so acknowledge this first level of maturity of your child-self; heal yourself deeply, and your circle of women friends and relations, through sharing stories. When you summon your own stories, something opens in you. Take all the time you need. These ceremonies are spiritually so essential no one should feel rushed.

Women and men make ceremony by stepping away from routine and by using ritual symbols. Please know, for your sons, these are easily translatable. First Peoples often used five elements: Earth, Fire, Air, Water and all of changing Nature; other cultures have included Metal and Wood. What do you choose? Women engage sensory delights: Candles, music, aroma, billowy colors, pillows, other women. Always, in our women's ceremony, we include food, culinary squeals. For commemorating all the great moments of your

daughter's early history, I think a photo collage is a super gift idea. I wish I had one. Keep it simple—four photos, eight maybe. In our modern times, photos hold that memory record, but must be transportable too. I also like the idea of a precious little hankie to play the role of bundling tiny objects, symbols, and stories to tuck the whole of childhood safely away. The away-place is a visual image like a heart pocket or a physical bundle.

Everyone should agree if more than one girl receives this ceremony.

Consider what we have in the natural world that mimics and offers metaphors for change. A snake shedding its skin does so in its own timing although it may take an undetermined time to fit back into that new skin, which is different, fresh. Your newly Initiated girl comes through ceremony with an unfamiliar skin; she may not feel like it fits perfectly. When she feels comfortable with her change and her new status, she will glow with a luster you haven't seen before. Hold her close, she's about to surprise you with her most extraordinary essence. As you watch, even though this may take days or weeks, her spiritual portal will close and change will vanish. Your job as her ceremony leader is complete until her puberty comes knocking.

Five girls in the midst of their Middle Childhood ceremony found more than a dozen snakes, including skins. I call that metaphor writ large. Here is their story.



A STORY: FIVE GIRLS WELCOME MIDDLE CHILDHOOD

Before we could even dream this tender celebration of so many Early Childhood moments passing into memory, one Mother had to hear the call of one daughter, *I am different*. The great blessing of consciousness is the multitude of paper-thin levels of awareness available to each one of us. Moments that come with this silent call for recognition, a call from the cosmic spirit of change, produce life-changing choices with life-affirming results. Feeling no need for details, this woman from a far-away land, held tightly to her dream of an initiation ceremony for her daughter.

Hearing the call that penetrated the first level of consciousness had the possibility to create a Mother-Daughter, Grandmother-Granddaughter bond with spiritual adhesive for maturity and change. Right behind the first call, four more Mothers said their daughters were also ready. These women created the potentiated mystery of initiation by answering this first call for ceremony.

Within days of opening the window of opportunity to visit me, the one who stands as Elder, a perfect circle of girls attached a dream of their own. Throughout their busy spring and summer, five girls committed and held strong to their dreams for an initiation ceremony gifted to them by their Mothers and Grandmothers.



Preserve the Wild in Girls

READY OR NOT

Ready is an interesting concept and I spent some time on the phone talking about each girl's readiness. I found I did not disagree with any single assessment. How she walked in the world was my inquiry. Still, through interviewing Mothers, I learned only a little about each girl.

The magic of change enveloped everyone. Mothers, Grandmothers, and ceremony leaders worked through the process of design. Not even one of us had received this Middle Childhood ceremony when we went through our own portal of change from little to Middle Childhood. In rather dim memories, we could see change when we pulled out dusty, curly photos of our little Soul-selves. Beyond connecting to stories of our ancestral lineages, mystery had wrapped our former selves in cloaks of almost gauzy obscurity. We have no language for how our Soul remembers a few details but not others, bad

feelings over good, or if there was a glimpse of now in that long ago time.

All together, the women leaders, the Mothers, and the Grandmothers considered the importance of our collective opportunity and the importance of setting the stage. In order to gather, everyone needed to travel far which offered time to reflect on their child's Birth story. The Birth Passage is the most dramatic for Mothers, and remembered often as life changing. This is the remembering place for the girl-to-woman series of Rites of Passage until adulthood arrives.

Each Mother agreed to share her girl's Birth story during drive time. When I work with symbols, as I have done with this stone Spiral, I begin with Birth as shown at the bottom. Follow the spiral around to each of the Nine Passages and you will find your place and see how far you have come. Whenever a young girl hears how she came to be here, that story informs and deepens her belonging to her family and to the Earth. Her very own Birth story transcends words and opens her spirit to a mystery dance between her small self with her Soul-self from the unseen world.



The Life Spiral begins at Birth

Most cities have open spaces; perhaps for ceremony, a small place in the corner of a neighborhood park needs to be claimed. Use what you have, this is the basis for ritual. When I lived next to a creek and a lovely river-rock bar, I used stones on the sandy beach above the creek for nine years of ceremonies. I used the Spiral for my own initiation when I wrote *Soul Stories*.¹ I believe in the intuitive messages received between Father Sky and Mother Earth, use what you have and it will be memorable. Photos and crowns, gifts from the Elders, these will integrate into a memory that will last her lifetime. Your daughter will feel like a fairy princess; that is the point.

Remember how the swirl took shape: Five girls and ten women. Suddenly everyone's personal tapestries began weaving with their future selves by using clouds of love, hope, and promises. With my spirit eyes, I could see this. Places where destiny and fate meet and play together, in the future, remain sealed in the nameless chapters of each girl's accumulating life story. This ceremony begins a life of awareness for change, where the intersection of development and circumstances open to her next call, and her next. For my grateful heart and the girls on their altar, women opened their hearts, their minds, and their spirits to the promise offered in this first ceremony. Stories matter, ritual makes them real and memorable, taking time for this pause to integrate changes, this could change the world. Mothers and Grandmothers will be alert and awake to the next call and the next.

FIRST STEPS

It was brilliant to bring our leader minds together the day before anyone else arrived. The three of us, Lorene Wapotich, Cassie Faggion and I, entered ceremony space ahead of the others and created a liminal bubble that everyone else stepped into. Our exercise of writing down a plan was good for our Western minds. We probably could have-should have ceremonially burned it. Spirit led us exactly where we needed to go; all we had to do was show up with a little trust. As we danced around the tipi, artifacts of past ceremonies

came out of the box. I placed colorful, symbolic masks atop prairie sage bundles tied to each tipi pole. Our leader spirits harmonized one with the other. We felt prepared to create this earthy offering infused with a feminine spirit, backed by deep research.

Behind the scenes, in my prayer time the week before, I thought of each girl. I didn't know how her Soul had been welcomed to Earth, but I trusted love and good parenting. The Ancestor-realm offered a bit of fairy-dust to calm my imagination. I know well the spirit of the child self who peeks round Mother's legs and then quickly passes right into this Middle Childhood stage, boisterous and joyful.



Shy for Only Five Minutes

Our ceremony guests arrived along with the energy of Coyote (in Indigenous stories, Coyote is known as the trickster) and we felt laughter from the very beginning. Once the laughter started, Coyote who enjoys a good time, wanted to hang around for the whole weekend. Of course this is a metaphor, but a true one. As always, being well guided, laughter makes a better Plan B; women can always flex and improvise.

As we gathered for this Middle Childhood ceremony, I clearly saw those spirits emerge from their long car rides. One dear Soul ran toward me and placed a bunch of roses in my arms. Oh Allie!

Because my home invites play, I knew the girls, and the women too, would feel welcomed by my place on the planet. Everyone's faces told me they were ready for their first ceremony; I wanted to provide a ritual that would secure a marker in their conscious memory. With these threads to shape our tapestry, our weaving began.

Our design for this initiation included separation, a ceremonial altar, stories, a challenge, and two layers of integration. Wrapped all around and through our design was ritual like candle lighting and process, taking time for the story of emotions. Rather quickly, Initiates and women became playmates; we believe in plans that include play. As leaders who have lived and breathed Rites of Passage and initiation for ourselves, we told the women this was a teaching ceremony. We would lead the Mothers and Grandmothers through a little memorial Passage of their own and then they would wrap the bundle for their girls. The design was genuinely beautiful with the teaching piece that included a Middle Child experience and ceremony for each woman. It was filled with mystical surprises. We knew that once the women remembered how it felt to be 8 and 9, they would have hearts opened in the morning to gift the ceremony to their daughters in the afternoon.

THE GIRLS

Like the differences in women, the girls showed up for this ceremony displaying early signs of individuation. We were graced by two girls who were 8, two who were 9, and one girl who had been 10 for a couple of weeks. Differences in age seemed rather prominent to my eyes, but to the girls, experiential differences mattered not one little bit. Each one felt a readiness to step into her Middle Childhood. These girls showed excitement and nervousness to be in a girls' Circle surrounded by a women's Circle. Everyone's senses showed signs of alertness to learn about the mystery of a ceremony not yet in our culture.

Their ages and their girls' spirits made them fearless explorers. Mostly, they wanted to explore my intriguing woods' paths with the added thrill of a great creek. In August when cold water runs nine miles downhill over sun-warmed stones, it becomes delightful to play in. We gave them an orientation map as soon as they arrived, with no other instructions. None were needed. As a bit of a trick, we also invited them to go on a scavenger hunt to find the old

tree house, a tent in the woods, and a tree with dark berries. Several of them made up their own game, crossed off items not found and wrote in items they did find.



Summer, Great Old Soul Just Turned 10

I watched them check in with their Moms again and again. They were big alright, as they went exploring on their own, yet one foot remained tethered to the careful conditioning from their little child days. I looked for the girls' collective readiness; they all displayed a desire to be recognized as a big girl. They squeezed around the women preparing food and wanted to be helpful. Yet, they were happy to chase back and forth to the tipi for this or that. They were edge-walkers, on the edge of being little and big, stepping with

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grace into both places. This is a tender time of life, but each girl felt completely ready to bundle her Early Childhood safely away.



Filled With Passion, Aresa

As I looked into one girl at a time with my Elder eyes, I saw the oldest was especially ready for prepubescent years of exploration and being in her body. Her name suits her perfectly, Summer is an earthy little Soul. When she looked out of her spirit eyes and into mine, we both knew she was going to have a good time with this next developmental step. She has an elfin smile, there's a trickster awakening in her. I thought, she will laugh her way through life if nothing wounds her spirit. Maybe we can teach her to heal any wounds that do come in, so she can stay light and in love with life.

The next oldest was Aresa with truly amazing red hair showing me her

fire in wiggling and toe tapping. I saw how badly she wanted to run wild and free. She is a bit young to have such an expression, so she holds herself back. Actually, her lack of experience holds her back, but that won't last long. She's definitely got fire to work with as a metaphor. She will find so many facets when she looks within, she may have trouble choosing. I felt a kinship with her and immediately released her to the care of the matriarchal lineage that surrounds her.



Introducing Alethea, Horse Lover

I felt my heart go out to the girl with a love of horses to match my own. I smiled deeply within and swooned over the big red roses she gave me, her kindness touching me from the moment she sent her spirit out to greet mine. With the name of an ancient Goddess, Alethea will overcome whatever others

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deem an obstacle. I was not able to see her with spirit eyes for long; she has good boundaries and shields which prevented penetration from afar. There was a heart attraction that I still feel; I noticed her horse charm on a chain and knew we had a lasting bond through our horse friends. I want to say to her, “Let’s be friends,” even though more than 50 years separate us.



Aubrey, Heart of the Party

Another fire symbol showed through the fourth girl, I think she will burn her way through complications. Over and over, she revealed a volcanic force and then quickly hid behind it. Nick-naming her Beauty because that is what I saw when I peered inside, Aubrey seemed like a girl with endless personality who would add her comic relief and be the center of any party. Life is hard and Aubrey knows it. While she feels the whole spectrum of emotions, she will laugh all the way through, because her superior intellect will show her the underlying absurdity.

Always there's a youngest, this girl was happy for that spotlight. Immediately, I wanted to wrap Lena up in my arms and not let go. If there was one who would tough it through, but not feel good for even great accomplishments, it was this little fairy-queen, Helena, also named after an ancient Goddess. I believe she will outgrow her temporary setback of esteem issues. She is far too strong to be stopped and the force of her will lead straight into her watery passions. I have faith in Lena and her future and want to share my private action theory with her dear relations. Almost any altruistic action or creative act will serve to build self-esteem, action is a main component.



Introducing Lena (Helena), Youngest

I discovered a faith in every one of these girls; each one of them was my favorite. Their future selves need training for this world we have created, we of the older generations. As part of that training, these girls showed me how

much girls need straight talk and kindness. I saw urgency in their emergence, they would soak up our well-oiled Elder skills and stories if we can only find ways to offer ourselves. Here is their sweet story about bundling their Early Childhood years and celebrating the arrival of their Middle Childhood.

We assembled in the beautiful tipi, the teaching lodge, crafted by Tipi-Lady, Debra Williams,² one of the Grandmothers bringing a girl to this ceremony. I asked the girls if they wanted to light the candles and the telling signs of helpfulness showed up right away. Still, they all dared to do something formerly forbidden to them and that makes me sigh with pleasure. There are just some things little kids do not get to do; one of them is play with matches. Big girls, asked to help with something formerly prohibited, received an immediate and unspoken sense of the change they were about to celebrate. They realized that I saw them as big girls from the first moments of our ceremony time and I am happy that such symbolic gestures appear. With the altar lit, we could begin.



Author, Sharing a Moment

Years ago, my husband gifted me with a long-fringe ceremony shawl, a Pendleton. Wrapping myself in it, I said, “I love to swirl this gift around me at least once a year.” I asked everyone to stand with me to greet the Seven Directions and the guardian Ancestors in a salutation to invite in our sacred inheritance. My young leader, Cassie, drew from the Mohawk tradition offering their Thanksgiving Address³ and sent it around for every person to express gratitude then send it on. Like other women’s gatherings, this one was filled with old friends and strangers alike, so we introduced ourselves once again. This time around, we each offered a story-morsel from our own childhood years.

I gave thanks to Arianna Husband,⁴ the Elder who gifted me with cornmeal and explained it was enlivened by cornmeal ground by the hands of an Apache maiden for her Moon ceremony. Wrapped in my shawl, loving the dramatic effect, I took the cornmeal and explained how the altar was set up as a Life Spiral. I said, “This is the reason for gathering,” pointing down to the Spiral altar. “There are many ceremonies ahead and I want you all to see the whole picture.”

“First, a Birth arrives in the East. Where that spirit comes from, we all want to know.” Looking up through the tipi hole to the evening sky to emphasize the mystery, I said, “Many think we come from the stars.” All around the tipi there was a nod in agreement. “That means we travel far to have this great opportunity to learn lessons through a life on Earth.” I left a pinch of cornmeal at the tip of the little marker for the East gate.

“Then comes this Middle Childhood time; the Threshold, once placed in ceremony like this one, marks maturity and invites a release of more than three thousand days of baby-hood,” I motioned to the space on the Life Spiral between Birth and Middle Childhood. “After this ceremony, those baby stories will be safely tucked away in your heart pockets.”



Altar with Candles, Grandmother Stone, Womb-bowls, Circle of Friends Center and Cornmeal

Moving to the marker for the South, I said, “This whole space,” gesturing from the Southeast marker to the South, “this playful place in the summer season represents all the days before puberty. The Coming-of-Age ceremo-

ny offers each girl a path of monthly visioning, a practice of sitting quietly through the time of her Blood to reflect and plan. There is much to learn from that quiet time with our deep selves.” I dropped a generous pinch of cornmeal at the tip of that marker.

Motioning from the South to Southwest slice, “This next space, often called the end of high school, offers a great training ground before your wings sprout for Flight. I call the ceremony First Flight, because sometimes we return home with adventures and stories of life beyond our home nest. Yet, the Flight is just that, a testing of those two great wings at our back, our clavicles. Still, from puberty, youth lasts through the whole next decade and is often referred to as young adulthood. I say we are in training for Womanhood’s Bloom.” Dropping a pinch of cornmeal at the Southwest place on the Life Spiral, I pointed to womanhood.

“This place on the Spiral, my friends, opens to motherhood, career, or just good self-mothering, because now we’re truly away from home. We must do everything for ourselves. Here we check in with the gifts we have to offer to the world and ask ourselves whether we are giving our gifts.” With a swirl of my shawl, a bit of an adjustment to let my words sink in, I drop a generous pinch of cornmeal in the West place on the Spiral.

“Next on the Spiral is the place for returning to yourself. I call this time, Deepening Womanhood, and like straight across the Spiral to Middle Childhood, this is the place of Middle Adulthood. Often this is an empty nest, which refocuses on gifts of self. It lasts as long as we say, as long as we feel not-an-Elder, because the next ceremony on this long journey is the Elder Encore. We have so much to give at all places around the wheel, but this is the place where we look behind us and see who is coming around the Spiral and needs our helping hands.”

I dropped cornmeal at the next two markers in a flourish and stepped to the place next to Birth. “We’d all like to reach this place, the Spiritual Elder place, and many blessings will be ours if and when we reach this delightful

place. We may be ready for a rest, we may have lots of friends and relations by the time we get here, but most of all, each one of us will have a whole life for our enjoyment and review.

“With a knowing in my being, I reserve Death for its rightful place, in the center of this Spiral. Why the center? Because Death walks with each one of us all along this journey,” I paused to let that reality sink all the way in. “If old Death comes early we call it a tragedy for all the other markers and ceremonies that will be missed, but through stories, we know Death does come early sometimes. We must respect the Divine and realize that we don’t know much, we certainly do not know it all.”

I sprinkled cornmeal around the center candle and stood still for just another minute. “Thank you for letting me show you the reason for doing this Middle Childhood ritual. This ceremonial mark on the Spiral, just past Birth, is the one to feed our conscious minds, as the first Rite of Passage, Middle Childhood celebrated sets the stage for all the others.”

Looking to Lorene⁵ for help at that moment, she stepped in on cue. I sat down feeling glad that I used the cornmeal in such a good and honoring way. She took us right into the introductions: Why we came, who we came with, and how we spend our lives back home.

Our life-story introductions effectively brought the girls into unity with the women who represented Mothers and Grandmothers, some present and some absent. With our memories synchronized, we became age eight or nine together and seemingly floated through evening routines. Each Soul went to sleep dreaming of all those days of early childhood.

CEREMONY DAY

Some of us had waited months for this day to arrive. It was much like a birth in that aspect and greatly anticipated. All of us knew that this was a rare occasion: So few ceremonies have been held for girls that none of the women

present had any idea what to expect.

I crept down to the tipi before dawn's first light. My dog danced in the dewy grass until she was all wet and then pranced around every sleeping bag to give wet nose kisses to sleeping females. What a grand sight to see the spiral mosaic of women and girls, mussed hair, happy faces, squealing at the dog. That tipi space was transformed the very next time I looked, and I could hardly believe the alteration from dawn to after breakfast. What had served as a bedroom, now looked and felt like a space for women's spirits to do ceremony for a day to invite and celebrate change.

Our breakfast was a royal treat, one family offered scrambled eggs, homemade granola, and kept the toast coming until we were over-full. My house smelled like coffee and toast and my husband felt so at home with abundant female energy. Our breakfast was scrumptious. Being treated made it easy to open my kitchen and home to so many energized and expectant new and old friends.

As leaders, Lorene, Cassie, and I knew this whole idea of a Middle Childhood Passage would work best if the Mothers received a little ceremony of their own, after which they would build on inspirations received to perform the initiation ceremony for their girls. I knew a great story would emerge.

After a night of sleep, a morning of coffee and talk, we settled into the tipi space on chairs and pillows. For this Elder, there can be no more beautiful heart-warming sight than a large Circle filled with women and girls in ceremony. I was about to create this great story to inspire so many others—Mothers, Grandmothers, and other girls.

Our opening was soft and instructive. We sang rounds from a welcoming song offered by Arianna, our Elder sister far away and spoke to the anticipation visible on everyone's bright face. The leaders had a whole day planned but we revealed only the bare bones of our secret.



Girls Beading Gifts

Cassie took the girls away for the morning affecting separation—girls from women—one of the main ingredients for initiation. The youngers were going to spend some of their pent-up kid energy and make gifts. We have a few photos of the girls during this separation time so I felt like I spied on them. Each girl gave her full concentration to creation, they made gifts with a hidden meaning. I love this image, deep in the woods, the girls sitting with Cassie on a cloth from my Grandmother. As they strung beads, they were completely caught up with their creative selves. That focused attention with their muse will move all through their lives, as fire from their womb-space, their own creative spirit. If they stay open they will respond to many urges to create. I look at the photo images and can almost hear their chatter.

While the girls were gift-making in the woods, Lorene and I helped the women find the special spirit place of remembering details and specific feelings of being the same age as their girl. The bubble of early childhood sweetness and light, so alive in our imaginations, has already dissolved into a heart pocket before we arrive at this still tender Middle Childhood stage of life. Even

though we may have been perfectly parented, the fairy-image we hold for all girls gets shredded by something. Every little girl already knows that life is unfair and can truly be painful. Their wounds and traumas need healing through art, through talk, through the fire of creativity.

Like women can do when sharing and deeply listening, we used up time way too fast telling the story of our child-selves. It's entertaining and still too rare to sit in a circle of women and share stories about a single time in our life. That was where we shined the spotlight and it felt really good. Since this journey began weeks before and memories were stirred up, women reached back to their own big-girl time of life and brought photos and artifacts to place on the altar. As the stories built from one woman to the next, our altar filled with images and symbolic depth. When we think of what we wish we had done for our big-girl selves, the energy flowed from us and healed a gap in our maturity.

What I heard from the women removed the fairytale of all sweetness. Like my friends sitting in our Women's Circle that morning, my childhood memories, true or colored, were not always perfect. Remembering even little imperfections brought fresh tears of truth and pain, the tears themselves salve for our wounds. For the simplicity of saying gratitudes: All of these women felt safe, secure, loved, and by the end of their remembrances, balance returned. No one showed or told of compounded or lingering trauma. For all of those blessings, I am grateful. More than sorrow, although we felt true sadness, we also experienced deep relief to be feeling the Passage of our Early Childhood in a sacred manner in the presence of so many loving witnesses.

Much wisdom emerged from our little selves in that morning Circle, and I hold the truth of deep sharing of those confidential stories. We shed more than a few tears, which is one measure for the good place we reached. Running out of tissues was another good measure. Also, we could have gone on the rest of the day, which means we felt safe with each other. The whole time we were in a sacred liminal space held by ceremonial intentions. We gave the one who spoke focused attention and she received empathy, compassion,

and a knowing from every witness. That felt like pure golden love and was most healing. In our little way, we Initiated each other into this stage of life. Most importantly, we entered the frame of mind to be with our five girls.

Then, something magical happened. When we, the leaders, shared with the women that the girls would be back in only 45 minutes, every woman stepped up to the familiar pressure plate. In that very short time, we designed a plan for the Mothers and Grandmothers to perform a mystical ceremony for their girls, something both transforming and memorable. A professional face-painter sat in our midst and she made a kit for the other four women to use simultaneously. Masks have been a mystical transformer for millennia, so our girls' faces would be masked, honored, and revealed. We all agreed on the motion that would unfold after lunch.

Into the tipi rushed five flushed girls holding their secrets. In a quiet motion that said, "See this, don't ask," each girl went to her place on the altar and dropped her beaded anklet creations. The leaders had seen a metaphor for Mother's anklet holding all of her daughter's childhood memories. Each daughter would now step into her future wearing the second anklet. Back to the arms of comfort, the girls cuddled up to their Mothers and breathed excitement. They told more than they wanted and hushed each other.

I could see into the girls with my spirit eyes, how divine they looked at that moment. I had just been gifted a confidential download from their Mothers and Grandmothers. Now I could see girls about to step into their future selves. At this initiation moment, those girls realized they had been away and now they were different and that's exactly what they wanted and needed. The girls sensed their Moms had been through a change. They desired what we had in the tipi, a divinely feminine women's space filled with a spiritual stimulus that would be theirs.

Nine Passages for Women and Girls



Girls Returned: Women Hold a Secret

Here's what I saw: Coming back together allowed for time to breathe together, in silence. That was the gift from the Elders; we always feel it and know it when it comes around in ceremony. The transformative edge we seek comes in one second when the girls prance around the center to be seen-not seen. I know it's very rare to recognize it, so I am smiling into the reflection and feel thrilled that I saw it.

May we anchor the honor of her visitation—Changing Woman—both Mothers and daughters were altered in that very moment. I saw the shimmering of the invisible Threshold at the tipi door and how the girls had crossed over caused me to catch my breath. I felt highly honored to witness so many coming to their edge, crossing over in a second, and receiving their special gift of transformation.

In the flurry of women and girls with a common purpose, we all took a lunch break and every other kind of break. In less than two hours, loose ends bound women to creation energy. Food and party preparations held the excitement in suspension. We moved into the realm of festive celebrations.

Women and girls shared an incredible tuna salad medley, PB&J for non-tuna eaters, and all the trimmings. This was the edge. While we danced

around the kitchen, one Mother said she felt like she had been through an initiation. I patted her bum like she was a young girl, and said, “You have.” Thank goodness and thank the Goddess, our plan had penetrated superior skills of mothering and reached into her Soul.

I took an Elder Auntie out to my garden and we hastily gave thanks as we cut the stems to make five incredible prairie sage crowns decorated with flowers and ribbons. We had a really nice visit while we wove these crowns, holding rather delightedly the images of the five girls who would wear them.

On my dressing room mirror I had placed a sticky note to remind me of *empty presence*. The note was a gift from Arianna, my spiritual teacher who was with us in spirit. The holy and divine practice of slowing for that *empty presence* to arrive came while I changed clothes. That state of mind was a great gift and what I needed to bring the sacred back to the Passage ceremony of this day. This is the moment the girls were waiting for, the one they would remember long after their creek time melted into the puddle of play.

When I arrived at the tipi, I was probably a tad late, but I had *empty presence* with me and I was slowed. When I peeked inside, women were lined up in two rows, ready to make a portal of raised arms for the girls to move through on the way to their place on the altar. I put a match stick to my sage bowl, took my feathered fan, and smudged one round inside the tipi to dispel any negativity. Outside, the girls were held back so they didn’t realize the deep inner ambience being created for them. I put my striker to the sage once more and worked the flame into a good smoke. I asked for oldest first and Summer stepped up.

“Have you ever been smudged?”

“No,” she said.

“This smoke gathers your energy in a positive way and sends any negative thoughts or energies away. Does that make sense?” I waited for her nod.

Nine Passages for Women and Girls



Aubrey Tells the Others about Smudging



Teaching Girls about Smudging

“It’s an ancient practice, so I begin with your crown chakra, your soft spot when you were born, connecting this smudge smoke to your spirit. Then I just cover you with fresh sage smoke, the plant energy does the rest.”

All dressed up, little Summer had a blue flower in her hair and a hummingbird ally on a chain. She may be the oldest, but being petite, she had pixie energy. In the last moment before I released her, we shared a look that penetrated deeply through the window of each other’s Soul. We saw that we would be long-time friends. It was her honor to be the oldest and go first; she earned this right through banged up knees and a broken arm. She earned it by nurturing her spirit in the woods and fields. As her friend, I could remind her of who she was when the chaos of adolescence took her away. “When I call you about this ceremony time, do you promise to tell me the truth?” I asked. Under the influence of smudge, she had to say yes. I passed her to the smiling Elder who presented her crown of transformation.

Stepping into next oldest, even though she wasn’t quite the next, Alethea had watched the little smudging ceremony for her friend. When I asked if she had ever smudged before, she quickly answered, “No.”

“Yes,” one of the other girls shouted as our sacred bubble was distracted.

I put the striker to the sage to make smoke and started over. “I begin at your baby-soft-spot to connect to spirit, this is your crown chakra, and I use the feathers to smudge away any sticky negative thoughts or energies.”

Alethea almost bowled me over with her dazzling smile. She beamed in the light of focused attention. I asked her to turn so I could refocus, there was much to share, much to say, but this wasn’t the time. I sent my thoughts away and reached again for empty presence. I touched my lips and placed a little kiss on her forehead as a promise to keep our connection strong. I knew we had a lasting bond through our horse friends.

Behind my back, each girl received her flower-sage crown and a big hug from Kit, my dear Elder-helper. My attention returned to the smudge

bowl. This was a sacred moment for the girls, both in anticipating their turn and re-grounding their energies after lunch. They entered ceremony with the dazzle of wonder showing on their faces.

Aresa stepped up to the place in front of me and we looked into one another's eyes. It's impossible to describe what her old Soul tried to convey to me. I had set the precedence, so I asked, "Do you remember being smudged at Grandma Camp?"

"Yes."

"I will begin with your crown chakra to connect with your spirit." When I heard a hurry-up message from her that she did not speak, I intentionally slowed down, and reached for the striker to begin again. Lots of smudge smoke would help us both, I thought. I asked her to turn around to change the focus so I could smudge myself a little. When she turned back around, Aresa's old eyes still penetrated my Soul. I touched my lips and planted a kiss on her forehead and felt so thankful for her Grandma and Great Auntie. She is like many girls, already flooded by her facets.

Little Aubrey couldn't wait for her turn. She stepped in front of me, wanting to talk and I shushed her, "Quiet now. I know you like being smudged. Let's connect with your spirit . . ." I trailed off as I smudged her with a happy intention to bring her heart and mind to the present. This girl is really good at being a girl and has received the great gift of her adult brain emerging early. She finds herself at that funny crossroad of being big and little simultaneously. When I planted a kiss on her forehead, I felt sure I had planted a seed for her future days as a big girl.

Helena had waited patiently for her turn to come, and gave me her biggest smile. Standing in front of me was one little girl ready to be big and very excited about that opportunity. Here was a girl who liked her body and already knew how useful it could be. She would be a natural, all-around athlete just for the fun of it. In fact, she would like her body and forget her spirit, so I in-

tentionally upped the volume for her. “Smudging dispels negative energy, little friend, and connects your chakras in alignment with spirit. Can you remember that?” Oh, how her eyes sparkled. She nodded and as she moved beyond the cloud of smudge smoke, I turned to watch her receive her sage crown.

Gifted by that spirit-to-spirit connection with those dear girls, I followed Helena to the tipi opening and watched her pause at the portal opening to revel in the women’s welcome. She barely got past one or two raised arms when the whole portal of women’s arms descended around her in hugs and smooches. That was why we did this ceremony, that very edgy moment when one sweet girl felt loved more than any other day of her life. She would remember the feeling and see the photos; the memory will live on for her.



Girls on Their Altar

Girls sitting around the altar, expanded it, they became it. Crossed legs, with beautiful dresses illuminating their smiling and expectant faces, wearing flower crowns, and looking up at me; the whole radiant sight made me immediately weepy. The tipi circle had expanded to include several more Elders and Grand Aunties and Aresa’s two Great-Grandmothers. All around an altar filled

with candlelight, those five luminous faces beamed me directly into the realm of spirit. I realized they saw me as the Old One with the smudge bowl who had opened their spirits to this moment. I felt able and glad, and called forth to my purpose.

Blessed by two very capable leaders, they helped me with this moment when I needed to defer to them. I was overtaken by spirit so the blank I felt, I was supposed to feel. While I was left speechless and somewhat impaired, others stepped up. One of my Elder sisters was there in a supporting role as Grandmother to the youngest. When she stood in her glory, threads from all around the world emerged as a single golden strand from her heart weave. Her opening invocation, blended lands and beings that had touched her along her quest. Afterward, I fell to my seat in gratitude. All of my chakras had been awakened with her light and with the energies of girls on their edge. I love the re-grounding I received. I could only imagine that many of those dear old relations also needed re-grounding over the pageantry of the moment. The brilliance of ceremony rendered me invisible to myself, but I floated to the spiritual edge to observe how others were feeling and experiencing.

Fortunately, I also had the *empty presence* gift Arianna had given me scribbled on a sticky note. I lifted that note out of my pocket at this moment to pull me back from the edge. *Empty presence*, it said just enough. It could have said, breathe three times. I wanted this moment to elongate. Finding my voice again, I needed to be heard, because of several hearing aids in the tipi. So, connecting with many new faces, I said, “Welcome. Thank you for helping create that spiritual portal. These girls have entered the place of change and they know it.”

With all eyes on me, I felt connecting energies coming from each woman, each girl. This was such a special time to say, “We have a few new faces and I want to be sure you feel welcome and supported. There is an ancestral way to introduce that we like. It will fill this beautiful lodge with our lineage and all those Ancestors who love a good party. Naming our Ancestors will set the

stage and help the girls move smoothly across the Threshold we have created for them as they begin to integrate into their new selves.”

Settling into my chair I said, “I am Gail, daughter of Fern and Leo, granddaughter of Flora and Harry, June, Hedley, and Fred.” I motioned to the woman next to me, and around the circle our introductions preceded. All those who could see, noticed the tipi fill up with happy spirits.

Lorene, in her most elegant and welcoming way, spoke of the design that would unfold. That gave the women permission to position themselves and their girl in a comfortable space for sharing the stage simultaneously.



Aresa and Heather

This time of storytelling, when Mothers and daughters shared about each other’s little childhood, and mask painting was beautifully accompanied by drumming and chanting to a rhythm like Mother Earth’s heartbeat. What looked and sounded like chaos took over the tipi space but we all heard the drum. Ceremony leaders and our guests, sat around the edges and watched a magical unfolding. Dear friend and spiritual Elder, Eagle Woman⁶ has worked

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through several initiations ceremonies with me and I was grateful to hear and watch her weave her own ceremony with ours. We had powerful spirits present to guide these girls.



Aubrey Receives Grandmother Debra's Love

Then it was gifting time. Each Mother offered words and memories to cloak her child's spirit while she painted a symbolic design of many colors on the face of the changing girl sitting in front of her. Witnesses received tiny bits of the intimate sharing between Mother and daughter about younger years, and observed stories, photos, poems, and gifts exchanged. No longer her baby or her toddler, each woman was seeing her little girl grown up. For women and girls alike, this was the time of accepting change; the spirit of initiation penetrated every Soul in the tipi. Masks have been part of initiations for thousands of years. Behind each girl's mask, an emergence, a new being was lifted up to meet her new self.

We set up a stage in the tipi, beneath amazing painted flags for our awakening Souls that included Divine Girl Child, Blessed Maiden, and Sacred Mother, as if they had been made for this event. Sitting together on the stage, each woman formally presented her girl, telling a bit about childhood and what she sees now. The symbols she had created on the masked face of her girl helped each Mother to tell the childhood story and also expressed an excitement about meeting the new girl who would emerge from beneath her mask.

Each presentation was heart to heart, Mother to daughter, and a ceremonial sharing for all of us to witness. By watching, we felt the jolt each girl felt when she peered into the mirror. Just a little paint brought great expressions of approval and disapproval. One girl will never wear purple lipstick, she was truly aghast. Another girl wanted a whole new face painted right away; she knew just what she wanted, too. Along with being fun, as well as beautiful and poignant, those painted faces brought to the surface the conveyance of message from spirit. Every girl walked with her change already.



Alethea and Kelley

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Helena and Kara



Summer and Michelle

We closed with a little more gifting. I told the story of watching the transformation of one local girl from the time she had her Coming-of-Age ceremony. I named Kaeli as the great maker of Unicorns who made one special for each girl. They were beautifully different and could be tucked inside a new little

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hankie to safely hold all of the stories of childhood. As I gave each gift, I declared, “This will be the best time,” alerting each girl’s spirit to the road ahead.



Impossible to Count the Blessings



Unicorn and Crystal Gifts for Each Girl

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Songs of Gratitude

That gave the signal to sing a closing song and begin the integration of change. We had rest and play time, we had celebration food to display and eat and we held one more surprise for integration around the evening fire. In less than one full turning of the Earth, these women and girls saw inside themselves as developing beings. We recognized our spiritual needs and met them with this lift in our awareness. We saw that we could do this for one another.

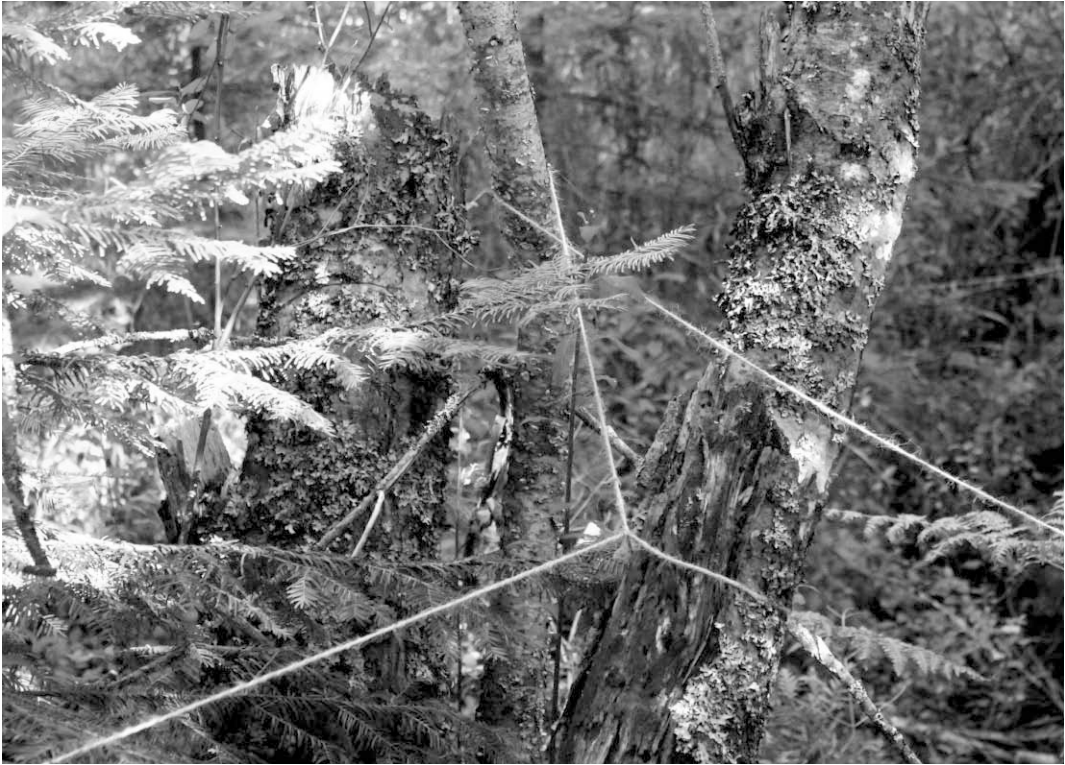
INTEGRATION: THE STRING WALK



Trees Hold Life's Stories

Saving the best for last, Lorene set up a challenge in the woods that began as a couple of balls of twine. She found one of my favorite places, an almost invisible trail I call CrossCut in honor of my sawyer Grandfather and Great Uncle. We reluctantly said goodbye to the visitors and Great Grandmothers who had attended the ceremony. Convening once again, we promised dessert right after and allowed the thought to trail off.

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String is like life — Full of Tangles

One Grandmother objected to the challenge. We promised great support, close watching, and rewards greater than dessert at the end of this challenge. Once again the women were left with me to sort out their feelings as Lorene and Cassie took the girls to the one place they knew well, the Crossroads where they had made their symbolic anklets. None of the girls had discovered the CrossCut trail which began at the Crossroads. Here they were blindfolded and told they needed to use the string to find their way back through the woods. Not one single girl felt overjoyed, they were all rather terrified.

Strategically the girls were placed five or six minutes apart along the string. They were told the string would give them all the help they needed and would lead them where they wanted to go. Each girl had a different experience. As an individual, behind the blindfold and in the dark, every girl received the blessing of doing one very intensely hard task to begin her new stage of life.

The string walk was a great gift from spirit. Edgy and challenging, absolutely, but nothing in their life will ever be more demanding with quite that intensity. The girls were held by ten women, they were held by Ancestors, and they were completely free of dangerous hazards in my woods. Several girls met their own inner demons and quickly overcame those unspoken fears.

Explosive adjectives were used to describe their experience. I was stunned to silence by the amount of drama we created in such a short time. Tipi-lady served up strawberry shortcake, the best of the season, with lots of whipping cream. Finally, everyone agreed, this challenge was as good as it gets. I love that we could produce a transformative memory so easily. The integration ordeal came as the first and best challenge of their new stage, the best stage. “This is the best time,” I said repeatedly and know it to be true.

In the morning, the girls could hardly wait to see their string-walk in the daylight and accused us of not following a trail. “Oh, yes, we did,” it was my turn to protest, “and you each met some of my favorite trees along the way.”

Everyone had slept hard with little dreaming and looked different in the light of a new day. We shared oatmeal topped with blueberry cobbler, feeling sad that our beautiful ceremony day lay behind us. I wanted to see the girls’ change in the light of day after dreamtime and Changing Woman began to work together. I created a closing Circle filled with accolades for my dear friends and able leaders.

We discussed with the girls how to talk about the weekend. This carries an old-word, reincorporation, and means integration. I told everyone there, “Wait until the passion rises and tell that one part. In a couple of weeks, sit the family around a table and tell the whole story. Make it an honoring.” These were all words of good cheer.

Offering one last tool, I spoke to the girls about paying attention to their inner voices and learning the difference between needs and wants this way. Boisterous girls are told to hush or be quiet. Their authentic selves are

threatened by their need for approval. Lost in this battle, the spirit of self no longer speaks up and soon these early adolescent girls have a new risk as emerging women who dare not say what's true for them or consequences will bear down. Cassie took the girls away one last time.

For the Mothers and Grandmothers, Lorene offered a bit of the research about girl's voices and the need for girls to learn to ask for their needs and wants. This provides the perfect opportunity for Mothers to teach about the difference between needs and wants, one more time. We prepped the Mothers for the girls' return; they would be asking for something that signifies their new level of maturity. We asked all the women present to lean into this request. The girls had a rare chance of asking for more attention. I was honestly amazed that each girl asked for nearly the same thing, more time with her Mother.

I made presentations to my dear leaders, Lorene for being the one who came the farthest, for staying my friend and colleague forever, and for believing in this Passage as the one that begins them all. For Cassie, when I wrapped her in a synthetic, but really wonderfully earthy blanket, I thought of the babe in her belly and smiled deeply that our shared place was going to receive this baby. I am the welcoming Elder and I feel so deeply privileged. It doesn't have to be a girl, because we both love boys, but either way, Birth is the Passage that begins the journey through all of the others, for boys and for girls.

Now that the program was over, I had the hardest time saying the end, goodbye, when will I see you again? Two Elders and Lorene were getting on planes, the rest were driving far. If I let them go before lunch, everyone would be home by midnight. I released all of them with big prayers. We made promises to one another to stay in touch.



Beginnings and Endings

POST SCRIPT

Four days later, one of the Grandmas felt a pestering that had worked all the way through her Soul. “I feel nine years old and I want to walk the string, can I? Cassie agreed to help.” Off they went to the enchanted woods, to the delightful place of self with self.

I, too, had wanted to walk the string. I, too, needed to feel the presence and absence of five beautifully challenged girls. I took my camera shortly after my Grandmother-Sister and walked with eyes wide open. I offer this for the girls, may you remember the inner strengths you discovered.

STRING WALK

*I saw at the beginning the gigantic spider root,
Come along, help if you will, weave a story here—
This twine being just jute, swims between the worlds
Offering euphemisms, life is dark and scary, that is true
Looking at the back of a bandana, seeing nothing.*

*Girls cried over this, life is more down than up,
I think an untruth, it's an equal amount of both.*

How about this one: if you fall just get up again.

*On this String Walk, many times gravity just pulled
The force of the ground felt compelling, even good.
Metaphors serve real life in ways worth considering
Like, what goes round comes back ten-fold, remember
How many of my favorite trees you met along the way?
Can you imagine doing this in six months with snow
How about snow two feet deep? You're mighty lucky
For that string guided you from the spider root
Through a wood's ocean of lapping, slapping branches
Many tricky steps and trippy roots, even spider webs,
Here's the truth, not all of life is that intense or that easy.*

*One thing for sure, as the Earth spins and the seasons turn
Those trees will still be here whenever you come back
For another try in rain and mud, see how luck guided you?
Filled with fortune, life over-full with metaphors, invites
Even compels challenges; now that you're fully trained, just
Add humor. There never was a right or wrong way to do
Any part, big or little. Bring your tears, emotions feel great
We will always believe feeling is far superior to not feeling.*

Ceremonies and Stories of Transformation

*Bring your joy, like seeing the string in daylight laughter
No, there was not a set path. You getting back up, letting
Branches slap you, there was no harm meant, none done.*

*Whatever your memory, good or otherwise, you learned
About challenges, now go out there, get good at being you
Then tell us all how it feels to be your best self.*

**September 01, 2013, two weeks after
This is offered with my great heart of love,
Gail Burkett, PhD⁷**

GIFTS FROM THE ELDERS: MIDDLE CHILD PASSAGE

Middle Childhood rituals will be **playful and earthy** as they set the stage for a life of Women's Passage ceremonies. Because Early Childhood is memorable our whole life long, the Middle Child Rites celebrates those memories.

The arrival of Middle Childhood causes the spirit of this child to look forward to her First Blood and First Flight ceremonies. This change releases Early Childhood.

Gather with family and friends to let the child-spirit know that her maturity is noticeable. This **pivot place** of celebration is the time when families tell the finest and happiest stories about the child so she remembers she was carefully watched.

Prepare for ceremony by stepping away from routine and using ritual symbols. What do you choose? Create a special day for you and for your daughter.

Consider the **essence of self**, how often do you see the world through this Middle Childhood lens? As the adult, try to walk in your own eight-year old shoes for a day.

How can you help your girl remember she has a special connection to the natural world? Consider how the natural world mimics and offers metaphors for change.

Teach her about **ceremony elements: Earth, Air, Fire, and Water**; these elements also create literally every material thing on the planet. Using these elements will help your girl stay connected to her Spirit and Soul.

At this edge, where little girls become big girls, now may be her only opportunity to celebrate the Early Childhood years.

Continue to watch for all the signs pointing to her gifts. Early personal-

ity quirks begin to show through her fantasies and innocent meanderings. She almost stands on her head trying to reveal her gifts to anyone watching. Help your girl open her curiosity, where she finds her fire.

She is ready for her Middle Childhood ceremony because she signals she is ready for more responsibility; she becomes your helper of first choice. Several things are born of this new level of maturity. The first may be the discovery of her shadow side.

Who has watched this girl grow?

What does her Father want to contribute?

* Does she have the brat, a princess, or perhaps the drama queen archetype? Speak about sexual predators, can anyone tell a personal story?

Do you see early signs of declining self-esteem, increasing doubt and self-criticism? These inclinations of pubescence can be derailed through a service project, giving to others really boosts self-esteem. The repair may be as easy as action: Think of what will represent a playful action that will take her mind off her negative feelings. To shift her energy, she may need free time to be with her curiosities.

Nine Passages for Women and Girls

Caveat: Throughout the budding years of Early Childhood, including infant, toddler, and 4-7, I recognize the cobblestones, how photogenic the stories are, and how crucial the foundations of these ages. Almost embarrassed, I confess to my own inexperience with the whole topic. I must relinquish Early Childhood to developmental specialists such as *Parenting from the Inside Out* (2013) by Daniel J. Siegel and Mary Hartzell (gender neutral) or especially for boys, this poignant research *When Boys Become Boys* by Judy Y. Chu with foreword by Carol Gilligan. For toddlers, Cassie Faggion, the mother nearest and dearest to me, suggests author Janet Lansbury's book *No Bad Kids: Toddler Discipline without Shame* (2014). My lovely friend Deb Hart Gift raised two boys and recommends *Big Spirits, Little Bodies: Parenting your Way to Wholeness* by Linda Crispell Aronson (1995).

NOTES FOR MIDDLE CHILD PASSAGE

- 1 While ceremonies swirled all around, I took the journey of double-tracking through my own personal stories guided by the drafted manuscript for *Soul Stories: Nine Passages of Initiation* (2015).
- 2 I have lived in cities much of my life. My calling is to do ritual to celebrate growth, and for five years I experienced the enormous privilege of using a magnificent teaching lodge tipi made by one of the ceremonial Grandmothers, Debra Williams (www.sagebrushtipiworks.com). When the tipi went to the Burial Grounds, we used the blue dome, the night sky, and the cool indoors fluffed with fabrics and pillows. For your girl's ritual, please use what you have and know that it's perfect, that is where home and comfort lie. Women need not cross cultures to do ritual ceremonies, I no longer use a tipi. I use Nature because the sweetness of the people standing between the Sky and the Earth is our common bond. Draw from your Ancestors and the lineage of your daughter. This is important!
- 3 Cassie Faggion, a deeply experienced leader in nature programs, learned the Thanksgiving Address from traditional teachers and offers respect by opening ceremonies with connections to First Peoples.
- 4 An Elder and Soul Sister, Arianna Husband has gifted many things, including the potentiated cornmeal ground by an Apache maiden for her puberty ceremony.
- 5 Lorene Wapotich came from Boulder, CO and Feet on the Earth programs to fill out the leadership team, www.feetonthearth.org. In 2009, Lorene introduced, through a master's thesis, a new model for supporting girls' development through all female mentoring for Rites of Passage.
- 6 Eagle Woman, aka Debra Duwe, a local Elder has worked through several initiation ceremonies with me. Trained by the Deer Tribe in the metis tradition, I pull her in again and again as a gifted ceremonialist.
- 7 Researching for my master's thesis, I interviewed Mothers and daughters about truth telling and sharing everything. *Gifts from the Elders* originated there, in that research, when I realized the closeness that Mothers hope for is best secured with an intimate and regular women and girls' circle from age 8 to 18. After I finished graduate school, I published my first Rites of Passage book, *Gifts from the Elders: Girls' Path to Womanhood* (2004). It is still available through Amazon.com.

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.