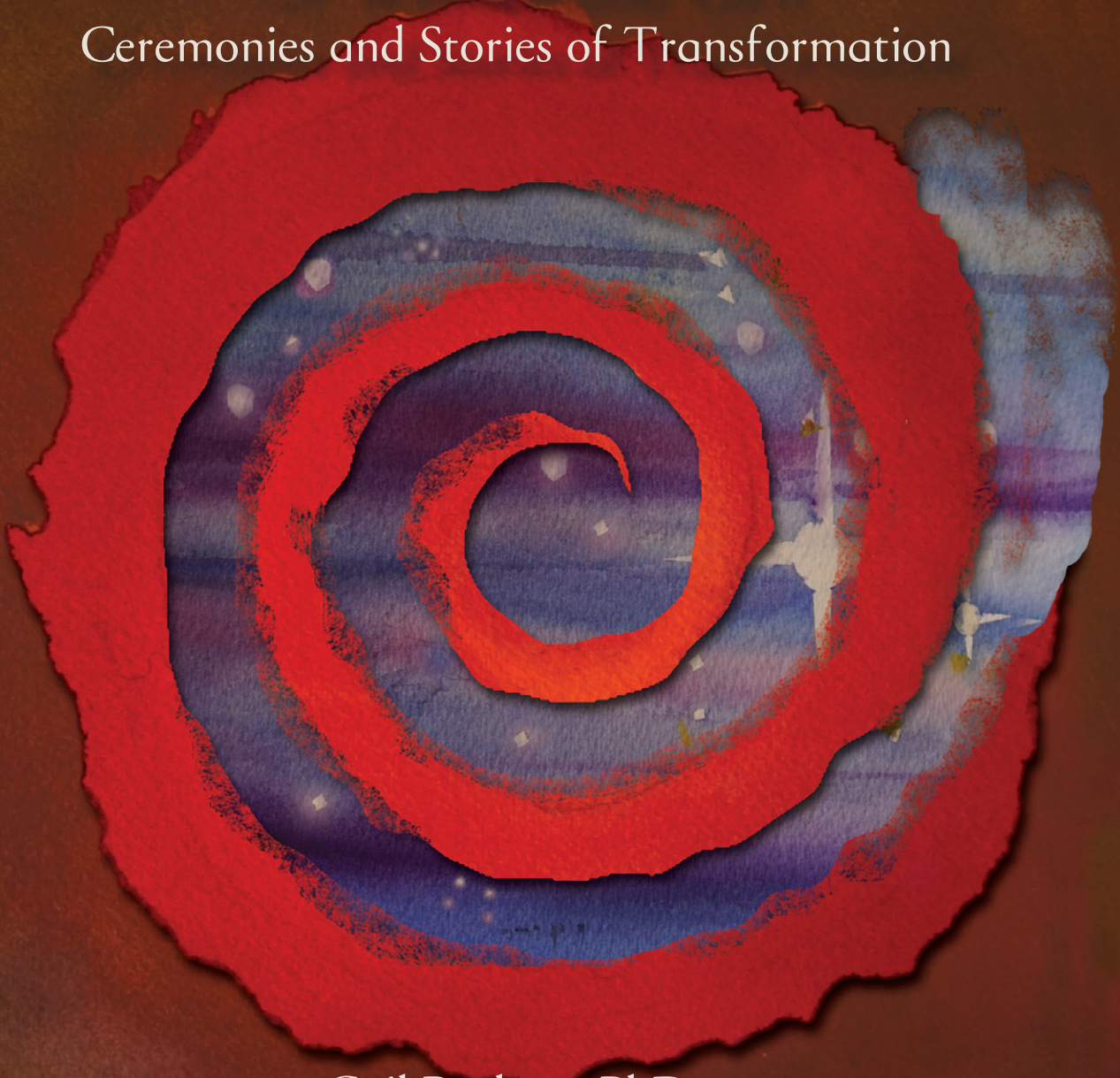


NINE PASSAGES

for Women and Girls

Ceremonies and Stories of Transformation



Gail Burkett, PhD

The Life Spiral



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**Turtle Moon Publishers
Sandpoint, Idaho 83864**

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Illustration credit: Laura Wahl

Photos credit: Kay Walker, Mason White, Gail Burkett, Arianna Husband, Judith Lay.

The Life Spiral illustration: Jean Herzel

Burkett, Gail

**Nine Passages for Women and Girls: Ceremonies and Stories of Transformation
(2016) 978-0-9913590-2- 8**

Boxed set

**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

ELDER ENCORE, SPIRITUAL ELDER, DEATH

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

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

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

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

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

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



SPIRITUAL ELDER

THE INTENTION:

ENJOYING THE LONGEVITY OF THE LIFE SPIRAL

A prayer for you: I bow to all your days lived, Elder Sister. Each name we use for the Great Mystery beyond—the One who astonishes, the Source—has been drawn into this prayer for the events and blessings of your life. God and Goddess, Divine Love and Womb of the Universe, I ask to share this embrace of you, my dear woman. I revere the walk of your life, dear Spiritual Elder. You are so God-like and so Goddess-like, we are all blessed to be in your company. Nested within your journey, we find hope for our own. We want to give you what babies need very much: They, like you, need quiet presence and focused attention.



Dearheart, I feel only reverence when I think of this pinnacle place on the Life Spiral. Most often, one image rises: You are a powerful, whole being between 65 and 100; you are a walking, breathing mystic who has found a zillion solutions to life's puzzles. You carry marvelous gems from your adven-

tures with Nature and family. The deep repository of your stories gives the rest of us great pause.

EAGLE'S VIEW

Life peaks here: An evolutionary miracle has made the glory of each life stage possible, Spiritual Elder is the eighth stage, the one before Death. Once you've decided to move from Elder to Spiritual Elder, or some catalyst of change has pushed you, you might easily find yourself in a kind of limbo space. Such transitions are truly deep initiations and require nothing from you, only savoring and not rushing.

Before you step across the next Threshold, consider which parts of your life need to be released. Only you know the threads you want to carry forward to place in your final bundle, your Spiritual Elder bundle. Release is a big part of this ceremony.

Like a long runway, your approach to this Spiritual Elder Threshold is mental, psychological and spiritual. Preparing for this tender time, you will clearly see the contents of your Elder Encore bundle representing all your early elder years. You are still savoring this recent storyline as the cobblestones that bracket both sides of the Encore Threshold: Review your Life Spiral and begin to recognize personas. When you are ready to release your many trials and joys along with habits that no longer serve your higher purpose, all these belong in your bundle. Begin to work with forgiveness to invite change which is outside of ordinary time; this will be a deliberation of your deeds, your needs and your wants. Surrender to the pure joy of being.

You hold an intention to have life your way: Just enough of the busy life, maybe less all the time; just enough of the Grandkids, just enough of your family. What other aspects do you choose? If you revere community, you will want the perfect blend of Youngers and Olders and you will want your girl-gang to flock around once in awhile. Design these years ahead with intention

from years of practice.

How do you nourish Mind-Body-Soul? You know all about good food and sunshine, and have learned about exercise and life-long learning. You have learned something more: Twisting the threads in your classic way with equal focus on Mind-Body-Soul has actually been the creative force leading to your longevity. Weaving your days with all of these colorful threads, you have been among the lucky ones to enjoy a miraculous elongation of this life stage before the debilitation of old age. Because you have focused on body-mind, you have learned about the neurological elasticity of your spirit. You have learned about the value and potential of your breath in meditation and you have connected with your Soul Guardians. In a regal but humble manner, you acknowledge, “if not me,” who will step up to be the Sage of your community?

When sleep leaves you in the morning, you spend moments with God and in gratitude. Your dreams are cinematic wonders that linger throughout the day. A well-captured dream gives you hours of pleasure while you puzzle the symbols. This practice before rising is the mystical essence and spiritual connection that brings excitement for each new day. You are a modern mystic and I am pleased to help you reveal the Threshold for your Spiritual Elder time.

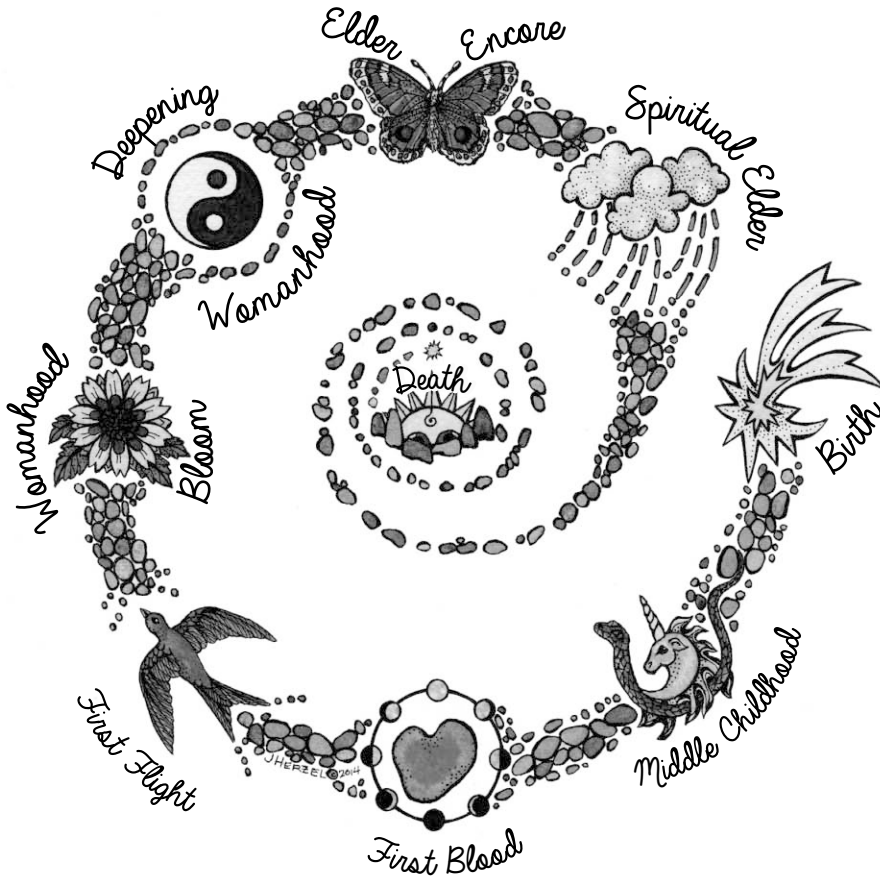
YOU NOW OWN THIS LIFE SPIRAL

Look again to the Life Spiral so we both understand this conversation. Peer into the cobblestones. There are many more ahead. After you cross your butterfly Threshold, an integration occurs. The cobblestones that bracket this butterfly represent your Encore time. I hope you dreamed big enough! Now you are preparing for the heart of your life. The great bundling of your life still lays ahead, the making of your legacy story.

I find that I can no longer Mentor, I can only speak as your friend also on the journey myself. We have been on a very long adventure together. I

cannot let you go, I cannot let me go—we are Evolutionaries™ using grace to model a good life all the way to Death.

The Life Spiral



An Intentional Study of Your Whole Life

You have crossed the Seventh Threshold, your time ahead is long and lovely. When you step across and put the Elder Encore at your back, feel the brush of those butterfly wings. This altered place just after your ceremony requires nothing of you except a rest.

Of all the shimmering threads to carry you forward, find the ones which

satiate, deeply satisfy you and play with those. To feel satisfied, a number of forces naturally must blend harmoniously. The mind has wants, the heart has desires, and the body has needs. You want adventures, you desire precious moments and, oy vey, your body always needs attention. Humans are emotional beings; an intricate and wide range of emotions propel this ride through life, creating ups and downs. Elder is the age to see all these forces clearly as loves and to finally find peace with the internal flame, the water works, and the biology of your nature.

In the first Elder stage, an Encore came alive in you. Sometimes you were overwhelmed by the spin of your mind and the desires of your heart. You may have been evolutionary, revolutionary, entrepreneurial, or all three. Spend time with your Soul; walk in Nature; wander around. Tend your little garden and feed your body with the finest molecules of the spirit of breath and whole food. This spiritual place, knowing a full life is in you and Death is in suspension, infuses you with grace-filled enthusiasm for each day. Your knowing, your story, your contract with life emphasizes the mystery of life. As a modern mystic, staying as teachable as you have always been, will bring younger women knocking on your door seeking your wisdom.

Many more stories, in fact, many more years yet remain in your long-life contract. We represent a unique generation, a first ever time in human history, when five generations are living and feeling amazing vitality. This conscious perspective has never been seen or experienced before on this planet Earth. Let's make certain the Earth benefits from our joyous long lives.

We are working together now –you reading and me writing– to define this evolutionary gift. I will make a giant leap to my faith place and claim that we were born for this gift, you and I.

As our guide through this journey, the Life Spiral has elongated into this Spiritual Elder life stage, which may be the longest by year count. It may be the most glorious as well because of your wisdom, distilled from your accumulated knowledge and experiences. This is serious news, this is a game chang-

er for everyone. I am celebratory and watchful: At 65, I am a late bloomer; I would like to be an Elder Mentor for two more decades. I have just learned what I need to know. Maybe the gift of collaboration with younger talents will provide the energy to become more philanthropic, a treasured volunteer in a school, a high flying adventurer. We can all make plans, we must continue to make a life.

LONGEVITY, A GIFT OF EVOLUTION

Since each decade has been different from the last, this rapid advancement of longevity has changed the culture from within, where it's difficult to see these changes. Mothers and Grandmothers of the early 20th century enjoyed an average age for their life span of 70. In *Composing a Further Life*, anthropologist Mary Catherine Bateson¹ reminds us that 30 years have been added to our life span in the last century and 20 of those years have been added since World War II. Seemingly when scientists weren't watching, women especially, began living longer, more vital and healthy lives through their 80's and 90's. In 2016, the second decade of the 21st century, long lives are no longer a phenomenon. Looking forward to 100 is becoming the norm. In ways mostly invisible, the culture is celebrating and adapting.

Can we truly delineate between Elder and Spiritual Elder? Elder certainly has her eyes on a prize, something more needs doing and she has the resources and energy to be doing the one thing that can only be done by her. Although she makes time for her inner world and cultivates a conscious relationship with the Goddess who constantly expands her Divine Feminine inside, she still feels ambition and drive as an Initiated Elder. This remarkable woman who flourished all through her Encore years is you. Through Elder Encore, you filled a niche in the culture because so much needed to be done. Maybe you traveled the world part of the time, and you learned that connecting to the youngest generation has been food for your Soul.



Ceremony for Releasing

Dearheart, the ritual of releasing, of finding your balance again, brings you down to the Earth, into the arms of Great Mother. The elements begin their work on you in this chaotic place between heaven and sky. Invite the transformative energy to hollow you out, to take you into an altered state. Here you will find the stillness between Heaven and Earth known as Peace in the I Ching.² Linger here for moments every day.

A change occurs, perhaps a crisis of some kind: The catalyst for change may come from the death of a beloved relation or a health challenge; divorce after 40 years of marriage is not uncommon. Waves of down-sizing and simplifying have deeply altered many lives. You may be your own agent of change. Once you feel loss and grief as your Soul directs, like a Phoenix, you will rise again and flourish. Any number of life-changing events will create an opportunity to rethink all your *doing* out in the world.

You embraced this change and stepped across the Elder Encore Threshold. You accepted being an Elder in your heart and the Spiritual Elder Threshold beckons, but not so fast. First, define and design this space for

yourself, this space between Thresholds, you may be here for a few years.

CASTING OFF A SPELL

Old age, perhaps caused by hard work and many babies, by unhealthy habits and little inner focus, threads through our memories as a cultural meme, an archetype. We remember our old Grandmothers, we watched our Mothers grow old. Many of those experiences left a hollow feeling in our power centers, our time will come but old age will not define us. You and I will help create the model for this gift of longevity.

As your life span continues to roll out in front of you, the paradigm continues to shift. Consider all of your body parts for a moment. Within this longevity you are enjoying, many things have already gone wrong with parts of your body. You can easily look back over the decades, do a mental body scan, and tell your body's story through its trials, ills, repairs, and challenges. You will agree, what goes on and even wrong with the body does not necessarily disable or debilitate. The body recovers!

Each time you suffered a crisis—something big or something little—you learned how your body has its own memory and its own mind. It knows how to heal, it knows what harmony and balance feel like. With this body-mind, you have been led to Medicine Women with healing hands. You have healed yourself. This is the evolutionary miracle of you, wise old you.

Many have found a niche in the practice of geriatrics, old age medicine for the elderly. I would like to point out the difference between an honored and Initiated Elder and an old, elderly person. Your attitude and your personal practices have shifted the paradigm: Your inner life and how you feel your spirituality daily, these combine to make all the difference. This spell about old age and ageism will be cast off by you and your friends. Set the burden of that label aside, it no longer serves the collective consciousness.

With the coaxing of integrative medicine and functional medicine, the

M.D.'s have advanced their practices; they have evolved with the times and with your needs. They were helpful to make those past ills of your body-story as good as new. Along with this experience of combining healing methods, many alternative healers evolved which led you to self-healing practices. Alternative modalities are numerous. Perhaps you dive into a self-care practice using plant medicines in oil. You might begin with basic massage by your own hands to help you connect into how your body feels. Many of us have learned to give self-message to our body parts. Our own hands are well informed and skilled to detect changes. This is personal integration.

If you are able to cast off *old age* as a spell, consider casting off, at least in metaphor form, *retirement* as another spell. If you knew for sure you would live three decades after your career, would you retire that whole time? Perhaps instead you might engage your imagination to understand more about the art of living. Add what juice or spice is needed to launch you into new stories. Surely you deserve to play, but I am one who prescribes that for every day. Carefully consider your needs, you have learned some of what it takes to be whole and happy with yourself. What else can you contribute to the world at this peak of your life? More than any other time in life, your word, your vote, and your voice carries considerable influence. Knowing how different you are from your grandparents, the tone of challenging yourself will not surprise you. In *Composing a Further Life* Mary Catherine Bateson asks, "How, in growing older do I become more truly myself, and how does that spell out in what I do or say or contribute?"

The great suffering caused by the idea of growing increasingly worthless and disabled has lasted decades too long already. That suffering has been a weighty mantle crushing attitudes and dampening the spirit of gorgeous old women. Only the women with strong family support or Women's Circle support have survived cultural stereotypes.

Here is their secret: Discover how the culture operates through interdependence and collaboration. In little bands of women, little tribes and cir-

cles, swirls a magic juice for thriving. Your opinion, your passion, your favorite cause may only need support, perhaps you will be a direct match with one or two others. When darling old women share from our hearts, the culture will follow. Youngers are always attracted to Elders. Begin an intergenerational circle. You and your friends create deep culture while the Youngers create pop culture. Both are mutually curious and attractive. I have witnessed life in adoptive families; they are wonderfully interdependent and collaborative without any hooks or barbs. You might adopt whole families for the exchange of gifts.

You have everything you need to slip out from beneath the old cloak of ageism. Purely a mantel of disguise, the culture has used marketing very well to obscure the vitality and wisdom of your peak decades. When you see how wide this divide is, you will want to join this silent revolution.

We have all suffered through the urgent demand to look and feel younger than what is absolutely beautiful and natural for our bodies. Inside the cultural niche of the old and infirm, marketing through the Internet has caused waves of sensation: Trainers and body workers promising eternal youth with their methods; peddlers of vitamin supplements are predators in this niche so our elegant age has become its prey. The vulnerability that goes along with this life stage is still wrapped around old age beliefs, surviving beliefs work through the cultural consciousness. You no longer need to seek what does not belong to you, that you know. Look inside your vulnerability for its hidden gifts. Long ago you learned to trust yourself and your body.

The seed question for your legacy is, “Do you have another chapter?” In your creative imagination, what will it be like? In your lifetime, the Women’s Movement and feminism have given way to the Divine Feminine. Even if you have been on the edges of this cultural meme, allow me to pull you into the middle now. I have offered mentoring rather lavishly. This continues to be the Divine Feminine spirit within me. As she awakens in me, I have felt the wind of patriarchy, of domination and control, simply blow around and past me. She has taught me kindness and vision. I still see patriarchy but with my heart

open to Divine Feminine; I no longer suffer domination or oppression of the unconscious variety. See if this is true for you.

This ability to *see* came as the great gift of early circles of women, a pool of energy now for all women to draw from as our heritage. A long time ago, in the 1960s and 1970s, women gathered in consciousness raising groups. This was the seed of activism continuing from the 1910's and Women's Right to Vote in 1920. Remember to hold the sacred practice and rituals of your Women's Circle inside the circle. You and a few others may work *outside* the circle for a grassroots effort to change the culture. No matter how much we have already done, there is always something more that needs done.

YOUR RITUALS

This is another training ground: You have navigated so many already. Be in your silence with Source energy. Before you are called home, can you imagine this space filled with beauty? Can you offer your tranquility to a harried Mother? How do you hold your Soul Sisters when they reach out for help?

Allow Earth's elements to help you: Watch emotional attachments melt away like falling water; let fire illuminate the value of your days--maybe you need to remain quiet for a while longer; invite air to radiate light, send a rainbow of chakra energy shooting out of your crown. Allow time for your own energy to mingle with Divine Love. As you breathe, feel the shower of kundalini stardust return you to wholeness and back to the Earth. The Threshold



Elder's Hands Observing Silence

for Spiritual Elder rises when your heart and eyes turn their focus inward for longer periods of the day. You will always love to do, but a catalyst of change such as this one is rare and worth the notice.

Much about life needs processing again, the story of your life waits to be gathered into one elegant bundle. If you have not yet completed the healing of your emotional and psychic self, raise your consciousness to do this quiet review with grace and ease along a timeline of comfort. Summon your Eagle's view and your spirit self to help you with any remaining emotional knots. Linger with the edgy places until you can smooth them over. Use what you already know—perhaps you will write to process, or talk or weave or paint. The physical part, your body, is an equal partner in your wholeness, and must feel completely ready for your Soul to move you forward.

Plans need to be made to organize your life and at a time of your choosing, you will know when to make a ceremonial presentment of your spiritual memoir. You know you have time, perhaps you know exactly how much time. Perhaps you are beginning or you are in the middle of your Spiritual Elder years, you will have many years before you cross into the last 13 Moon stage of life. I have referred to the Death Threshold as the last 13 Moons because every single human experiences this; it is the final thing we all have in common. During the 13 Moons before we cross over, our differences melt back together, unity actually arrives and we release ego, preparing to return as One to the Source of all, home, God, heaven, known by these and other names. This final year or perhaps two years while the body releases, that is when *old age* finally arrives.

Until that time, as a new culture of wise and Initiated Elders, we can harvest the riches of our future place together on the Spiral with our Elder Sisters. Elders are the ones to bring honor to those who cross over the Spiritual Elder Threshold. Women together are the ones who are going to change the world. We need one another through all the easy times of joy and laughter, through all the times of tears and despair. No one escapes from these realities.

There is much more to life yet to come. Your life will be defined by you all through your 80s and 90s. This is a new phenomenon, this Spiritual Elder time. It's new in the culture because of the longevity of so many Elders. The longevity of thousands and millions will cause a revolution in everything the culture itself knows and does. You live among a generation of game changers, on an evolutionary edge right now. History is being made by you. You were born for this.

Imagine the crossing of this Threshold for yourself: Is your ceremony with your kindred spirits at a garden party, a tea party, or gathered in a tipi or a meadow? Circles of Elders can simply gather in a living room. This generational phenomenon of initiation and honoring may seem much like a dream, but in the Eagle's view, women are the ones who see, we are the ones who know. For the culture to understand what we are about, for the culture to bring ceremony and ritual into everyone's lives, our family, friends and adopted relations look to us for how we hold this pinnacle of our lives well lived. To shift the paradigm of the culture, each woman must step more into her story.

Life is an art form, not a linear, predictable process. We live to the hilt and then we rest. Each woman does the best she can at each potential turning point, given the information and the self-knowledge she possesses.

SPIRITUAL ELDER NOTES

We are the imagination of ourselves,

Someone said this.

I ask: Who am I born to be? What do I know?

I know I'm lucky to be alive! My Guardian Angels worked overtime.

*Some friends passed on, through no fault of their own, while others finished
early*

Their work done, and others just in the wrong place.

What I do know is immediate: Reframe current and past Thresholds

And pay good fortune forward.

It is time to tell a different story, rewrite the script

Nine Passages for Women and Girls

*What I know as absolute may not...
Be present to what is actually happening, ditch illusion
Get ready to be Spiritual Elder, the deepest work yet!
Why am I still here when brighter stars have fallen?
Let me show gratitude to Madre Grande for leaving me standing.
Time is a Great Beauty.
I fill the corridors of my life with mirrors and view
Opposite sides.
Where is the comedy in my tragedy?
Where is the joy in my sorrow?
Meanwhile, I will share my lifetime's harvest
Before dancing and singing my heart to heaven.*

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A LIFETIME OF HABITS

Longevity is a fact of your life now, so look closely at your personal formula for success. Certainly your interior life feeds your exterior demeanor. They both work together. The more you integrate all of your good habits, the more you raise your awareness about their spiritual power.

When your practices become sacred, your personal secret becomes obvious to you. Your daily practices and how you break routine with a surprise for yourself, how you move your body, how you feed your body, these all combine into a self-care secret because you practice integration. How these practices have become interconnected deserves your mental awareness. They have become your secret to peace and happiness. One of the Laws of Nature: You grow your own seed, you are what you think and eat, your body speaks of care and love. All of this you share with your girlfriends, invite them to talk about their secrets.

Boomers turned 30 before the personal computer hit the marketplace. You have driven the information age. Think of all you've learned through this

spread of information. You and most of your beautiful friends 70 to 100 and beyond have practiced some form of meditation. The miraculous spread of silence and meditation may be because the Internet has become one of our tools for raising consciousness. Do you walk alone, garden alone, sit in silence with an empty mind? Do you meditate with your friends? These practices have evolved your spiritual life. You have caught the meme in the culture about brain intelligences and have learned that meditative practices of all varieties expand your inner life, manage stress, and help you to hear from the entities that surround you who help you on this Earth walk. You have introduced your gift into the culture and have demonstrated an awareness of how everything works together. Celebrate what has been offered you, an integrated life.

One of the great lessons of all, humble and true, is this one: There is more to learn, there is more to experience, even on the days when you say “no more,” you know there is more. Living life perpetuates a hunger to live life. If only because you can name the peak experiences of your well lived life, you know there are peak experiences to look forward to in the days ahead. You know the increments of time well and treat yourself to joy and adventure each season. This anticipation is part of your secret. Like a string of pearls, the ventures you look forward to are precious and have kept you involved in your life.

Now you have time to read, so make it a practice. Give reading as a gift to yourself, it’s the truest form of leisure. You might like to go for a walk listening to a book. One of my wise Spiritual Elders sparkled when she shared with me her favorite author and story teller, Jean Kirkpatrick.³ After listening to three books of the dozens that Jean has authored, I want to share the spark. These many stories are about the pioneering life of the mid-1800s. How marvelous that Jean has recreated these stories so the time comes alive. Then-to-now reveals the great change in women and the places where we melt back into one another.

This can be the highest form of sharing with your friends, what has inspired you and why? Perhaps you do not need a book club because your read-

ing rate and diversity are different from the group. Still your friends want to hear the good juicy tidbits of what you are reading. Obtaining digital is freely available from your local library. I add this reminder only to keep your neurological pathways elastic. The easiest exercise for your mind is imagination. Do you have a fictional story in you? Do you dream in stories?

One of my favorites and possibly yours is the spiritual practice of relationship building. I have learned for a fact, that everyone I meet has a chemistry that matches mine, or not. Those that do have the magic juice deserve nurturing. For my beloveds, I remain open to receive what they offer me. They remain open to what I offer them. You remember this Law of Human Nature: Balance comes through giving and receiving. Women especially, have given, given, given until it has become an expectation and another cultural curse. Not you. In your longevity, you have learned about receiving, you have remained spiritually open to gifts that simply come as love. It's the love you thrive on and have put into your spiritual practice.

Women have this deep knowing in common. Others have stated this as one of the exclusive nuggets for how the Universe operates: What goes around comes around; what you put out comes back ten-fold. In our stories, each of us holds many examples of this spiritual truth. You practice this balance in your relationships—you open to receive equal to your version of giving. How does this great pearl of wisdom express through you?

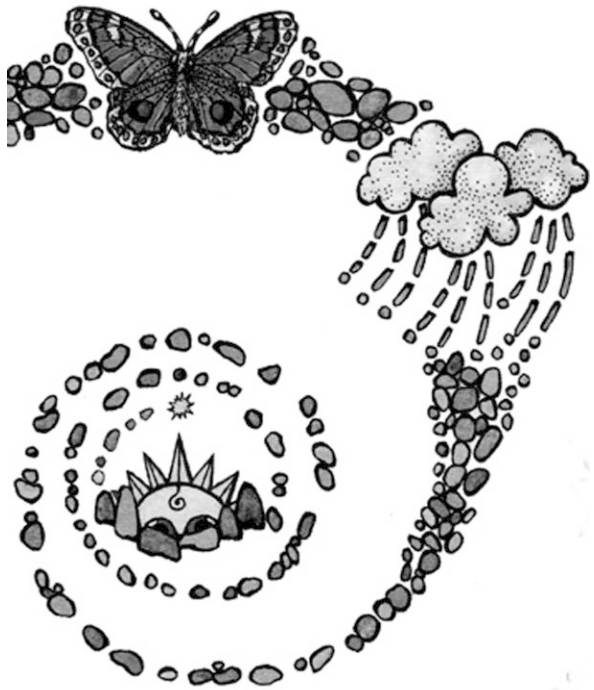
WELCOME YOUR SPIRITUAL ELDER THRESHOLD

When you feel the Threshold coming, when the call arrives for you to give your legacy gifts preparing to return to your star, invite your beloveds to gather around you more often. This Spiritual Elder Threshold follows the Encore performance and signifies a time for reflection, for harvesting the pearls of your life and for sharing intimately with your beloveds.

If you gaze into the Life Spiral you will begin to understand the signif-

icance of this stage. Do not hesitate to create a ceremony for yourself when you feel you are nearing the end of your Encore projects. Many adventures lie ahead as you can see by the largest number of cobblestones of any stage. Very likely this could also be the longest in number of years and in spiritual experiences. By adventures, I do mean great fun; I also mean introspection and collaboration. This is the time of life when Youngers seek you out because your wisdom has unlocked so many of life's closely held secrets. For the sake of evolution of the future human beings, the ones just coming to Earth, find the encouragement here to be open, to share your magnificent stories. The children of the Earth will benefit by your sharing. This includes your relations, your tribe, your Village and all stages younger than you, now.

Take great care, moving from Moon-to-Moon, to continue your practices as an ultimate modeling for others in your Village. This is how people in the culture benefit. We all look to you for clues about the trajectory and shape of our own lives. You have already helped to cast off a spell that has haunted all women of a certain age: This spell diminished the experiences of the old. Focus only on your fullest expression of the interior you, your mind and body and spirit. Do not for one minute entertain the myth of becoming less when you feel such fullness for your holy story. You want more life out of life, not less.



Elder in Three Parts: Encore, Spiritual,
and 13 Moons of Death

When change can be fully embraced, your Soul dances with joy. Change little things first like rearranging your kitchen drawers, then change bigger things. If you are still working, know that people of all ages are watching you. You are a miracle because you have a certain glow, a certain magnetic aliveness. This is your ultimate modeling shining through. Your attitude toward change as creation will be made visible.

As an Elder for so long, probably since you were 60 or 65, you have re-invented yourself at least once, perhaps twice through the remarkable pinnacle of your Encore. You have been practicing rituals and doing ceremonies all your life. I am happy to surprise you, another is coming.

I am honoring you with this special life stage review. As a perennial researcher and culture watcher, my eyes can see this evolutionary moment. Academics have written about it: All the other stages, the other generations have recently elongated. Acknowledge these evolving dynamics and become the first generation to create a legacy out of your life story.

STORY AS LEGACY

You have learned what every Elder learns, it is lonely on this Elder pinnacle and it is sweet. All that life has offered you, all your peak experiences coalesce into each sunrise. Those dear ones who come around, younger by generations, cannot appreciate all that you know. All of your peers, like you, are vast storehouses of experience and wisdom. This is the nature of long life: Your knowledge and experience has accumulated into greatness. You may know this already, I say yes, it's true, your Genius is showing.

I suggest expression. Your stories are so sacred as to be God-like and they need something from you: Honor and respect. This is a form of the balance equation, you receive respect when you give it. Give your stories respect. All that lives inside of you is needed by the rest of us. Make time to speak or write your stories down.

Remember what lives inside of your holy bundles from each of the Life Spiral Thresholds—she who was you, in her many former versions. She was you as little child, big girl and the darling who learned about Moontime and survived the hard school of the 20s. She has been your champion who stepped up bravely and learned how to do everything. Through every peak and every trough, she was your companion who presided over family traditions. Now it's your turn to shine the light on these former selves. They created you. They are all inside of you, cheering for your victory lap. Please tell the whole story of how you became the woman you are today.⁴

Women in circles and sharing tea at your kitchen table will help you strengthen the new genre of writing called spiritual memoir. Remember Alfred Korzybsky⁵ and how time-binding works? Do not leave your marvelous stories locked inside your heart. Tell us about your memories and we will give you the gift of delight for all that you share. Your relations will return your gift with one of their own—time-binding will carry your stories forward.

Chronology is only one key to this holy exercise. Your story holds the magic of your life, the miracles, all the Divine Guidance. You might work from an outline that follows the Life Spiral or you can chose to delineate by decade. Within each decade, look for how change worked with you, in you, through you; these are a few of the stories to tell.

One of your personal secrets lies in creativity: How have you created this life filled with stories? It's personal, juicy, and took decades to evolve. How has the act of creating many things of beauty, your precious family and so many other things that please you, how has all of this evolved into the breathless piece that awakened your spirituality, your beliefs, and made sense of your foundation stones? Creativity surged through your blood, in your unique way, will you tell us how? Some call this your juice, your magic juice: Follow a thread back to Birth; your creativity lives within the stardust you brought from your star. You live in a generation that has given itself permission to be wildly creative. Be a pioneer who breaks out of the mold that the culture believes about the infirm

elderly. Cast off wrong messages like, “You can’t, you no longer have what it takes.” I say, “You can!” Until your last 13 Moons you have more than enough to live your wildest creative life. Express! Your story needs to be boldly told.

If this suggestion feels vulnerable, that’s very good. If it feels like too much shame will come, then that is where your focus needs to be for a while. Read the series of books by Brené Brown.⁶ We all feel shame, our lives have been warped by it. So many masks were created for hiding what we believed others would judge. This is the time to reveal those masks to yourself.

There are masks waiting for me to reveal to myself, this is the essence of initiation. I do this to honor the time I lived, what that cultural story had to offer me and my generation. I am honoring the scared and lonely little pubescent girl who woke up her inner judge and critic as guides for her life. I have placed the light and dark events on a timeline so that shadow has equal opportunity to be present in my story. I am interested in the dance of my inner Animus because for too long, masculine energy and patriarchy were the driving force I felt from my Aries Moon. How my inner Divine Masculine dances with the awakened Divine Feminine, this is like a crack in the world.

Women are rapidly evolving. Working, even playing with our interior lives, I am one of many women who see how patriarchal energies, so present and obvious, have seeped into thoughts and deeds. Seeing is the key to dissolving the power of domination that secretly lurks everywhere. Now old women’s stories will expose the truth about how the evolved and balanced inner masculine and inner feminine are going to be the driving force of awareness and change on our dear planet. We are of the Earth, we are of the stars, we are celestial beings. What legacy, what story might we leave for the Seventh Generation to discover? What is obvious and present in your interior life?

With integrity, I will share my story: First I am writing for myself to honor my life as a legacy for those who have loved me. Perhaps I am also writing for Mothers who have daughters, perhaps I am writing for my peers. That love is precious, I feel it. Writing is my way to return respect.



An Elder Crossing called herself a Single Drop of Dew

RESPECT AND REVERENCE

Respect is an energy that first we give to ourselves and then to others. As a form of love, out of respect, we open to receive love and return it like a boomerang. This is mutuality. An early Mentor of mine, Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot,⁷ used Indigenous ways to reclaim respect. She teaches that our differences make us equal. Sara helped me understand, by close observation, that women and men have misused the power and meaning of such a sacred word like respect. Can you see how different a respect-filled worldview differs from darker times when power over respect formed the hierarchical triangle? In the former way of perceiving, respect was paid because of some assumed and lofty position of power. Now I see women's collective works in the world are causing a major change in thinking, the beginnings of a paradigm shift returning respect to its sacred place in relationships. Out of respect, which translates into love and mutuality, all peoples can elevate respect for one another into reverence for Mother Earth.

Slowly, women are reclaiming this mutuality from our deepest emotions. Rather than seeking power over, I respect you because I feel you respect me. Feeling your respect is such a different perspective, but we can place our awareness to helping this paradigm shift and we can claim it and love it for its Divinely Feminine quality. Respect is energy common among friends.

When we are able to see and practice respect as a Divinely Feminine quality, it becomes larger. In its exponential form, respect becomes awe which becomes reverence. This is a thread the world needs us to weave. Now that many have left domination and oppression somewhere in our back stories, women naturally lead the way for respect to return to the culture in its bigger forms.

Reverence is the quality that shows deep respect for someone or something; it is completely missing when troops go to war. Reverence for the gifts of Mother Earth is completely missing in the extraction businesses. Women can slowly turn this around because we feel deeply about the Earth and her innocents. By speaking more clearly about respect and reverence, we will be able to cause the pendulum to swing back to more Indigenous worldview where we are one with Nature because we are from the Earth.

As a journey, your spiritual memoir can offer endless hours of enjoyment. You will learn about your evolution and discover new information about yourself. Perhaps one reason to write is to see and respect the patterns along your memoir journey. The keepsake of your life's adventures, your hardships, and your spectacular joys will teach the generations to come—relations and others—all will delight in sharing many of your secrets. These stories should not die with you. I love what Wayne Dyer said and practiced, "Do not die with your music still inside."⁸ I am suggesting, one of your great giveaways at this pinnacle of your life is your very spectacular storyline that includes your treasured photos inserted into your story.

Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot responded to her own Mother's age in a holy way. For two years the two women sat together telling and hearing stories and a biography was produced. Daughter tells Mother's story in *Balm in Gilead*:

Journey of a Healer.⁹ This treasure of a story came early in the Elder's years when Margaret Morgan Lawrence was 74. There are few finer ways to honor the Mother/Daughter relationship than sharing biographies, where stories of mutual respect touch. As is the case for many of us, this was only the beginning of the Elder's journey; in 2016 she is 102 years old!

In June 2002, Margaret said this in a commencement address, an Elder speaking to the heart of Youngers:¹⁰

Identifying one's own gifts means that you are able to use them for your own growth and enhancement. And in addition you may use them in the world, in your relationship with others, both personal and work-life. There will be myriad opportunities to assist others in calling forth their gifts. You can easily see how this process of identifying gifts builds on itself. At your graduation, I now charge you to have a major concern for your own gifts, from this day forward. I refer to gifts, which I might speak of as ego strengths ...

Now that your reflection has begun, harvest your life-long gifts. The memory of you is your legacy gift, like this amazing centurion, Dr. Margaret Lawrence. May I say, if you diminish your life story, you diminish the gift of your memory when you are gone. Self-respect is ongoing all through life, and will be greatly enhanced by this whole look back into your life.

Keep the spirit that lives within you moving, one of the best ways is to share your story with your peers, do this for each other. Share your story with your heirs, this is your personal legacy and will live far longer than anything else inheritable. In addition to raising your self-regard, story teaches awe, wonder, and joy. These are the riches of life. Naturally, no life has all light, and some of the greatest teaching moments travel along a darker thread. Still your story is yours and will be told through your generosity. I promise you will learn something, maybe quite a lot, when you write your spiritual memoir.

How you have come to your own consciousness about your spirit life

and your relationship to the planet Earth, this is the radical difference between you now and other generations of women who formerly occupied this pinnacle place on the Life Spiral. You caused this shift by casting off stereotypes and discovering your ability to see. Your involvement with the new level of consciousness was needed to make radical changes in all other stereotypes and assumptions. We are intrinsically connected because sometimes we can see and feel the Spirit that moves through all things. As often as Great Mother Earth demonstrates this, you have been reminding us that every living thing is connected as one thing—we are a living, throbbing ecosystem.

SPIRITUAL CRISES

I would like to acknowledge one of the more difficult paths for coming to consciousness occurs in a crisis known as the dark night of the Soul or the Phoenix Process.¹¹ Your stories need to be told, for within them lives an alignment with the greater flow of life from Nature. The connecting thread between women is very powerful because we survive such Soul challenges. Perhaps you would not call yourself a mystic, but I will because the forces at work invited by your Soul came from the Universe and gifted you with a deep spiritual experience. If you go into this story, now that you are out of the crisis, you will see how your consciousness shifted. You will learn that all of Nature worked with your Ancestors to gift you with expanded consciousness.

A crisis state is never fun or funny. When it's completely past, an opportunity will arise to search out the answer and understand why this happened to you. I speak from experience.

Several times in my life a crisis rocked my world, tossing me out to sea. Now safely encapsulated in a story with almost no connecting threads to pull me back under, I am able to find the gifts inside the experiences. Only Divine Guidance pulled me through and the same grand energy delivered the real gifts: Expanded consciousness, true fellowship with others in crisis, compassion for human suffering, and a deep, loving kindness without boundaries. I

feel so blessed by all those trying experiences.

Women who survive suffering can personally benefit from this Soul-cleansing journey. Write to learn more, write to help others through their own dark nights and deep oceanic journeys. People hold remarkable stories of kinship that will benefit us all.

So you see these two paths—the first is a slow and steady opening, the second is an opening by crisis—essentially gifting all of us; we are a generation of living mystics. When you see this path of Creation, how your Soul travelled from a star, experienced life and prepares to return as Soul to that same home star, you have the vision of a mystic. Because there can be mistaken interpretations, we probably will not say this aloud to many, perhaps only to each other. Your spiritual knowledge about Oneness, this is what will heal the planet. Put that in your story. Your story will help others evolve and open their consciousness.

You can make your memoir small and modest if you wish, if that is your way. You can make it poetic and picturesque. You can co-create with one of your children or grandchildren. I am in the habit of saying, “Do this, please leave us your story that we may learn about you, that we may remember your life, that we may be filled with wonder about your longevity.” You will cross the Threshold for this Spiritual Elder stage and find great freedom for more living and more joy and adventure. Use some of that time to become a storyteller, your beloveds will feel cared for if you leave your life story as your legacy.

YOUR LEGACY GIFT

Each woman will offer her legacy gift in a unique way. These suggestions may only plant a new seed in the beautiful clamshell that has held your life stories, certainly they are fluid and flexible. You know yourself and you know how to accept help. For all your loves, and there are many, you want to leave behind something of yourself when you cross. If you sweetly lift off the planet without this final giving ceremony, then that is your way.

Nine Passages for Women and Girls

Being ever more conscious women, we learn that those lessons experienced are one of the reasons for this Earth walk. In your young pre-pubescent bundle, you practiced judging and critiquing. These are two of the most common discernments from your large brain capacity. In your First Flight bundle, you learned to compare, then you put people, things, even yourself in categories. The usual dualities—good or bad, fun or boring, happy or sad—entered into your thoughts and your language. For your Legacy story, this is the time to unwrap all your Spiral bundles, those sacred packages you assembled when you journeyed through early Life Stages and crossed many Thresholds of your child-self, your youth and adult-self. This easy summary will follow your life chronologically until the sacred place when your consciousness opened. When you discovered the secrets of the Universe within you, you learned you are the Universe and we are One. This worldview inspires you to share how the stages of life opened you, invited you and finally revealed your inner divinity.



Your Beautiful and Blessed Lessons

May we say, every lesson is a pearl? Your lessons found their natural place in your story. When you string these lessons together, when you highlight the events of your life, you will see in all new ways how your Soul has been with you all along. You will also see the trajectory of your journey from the beginning to the end. This is the time to string all your pearls.

APPROACHING THE LAST 13 MOONS

As we have shared all along this journey, embracing change is a high calling, sometimes more than a challenge, and the only way to find grace. Remember how, from the Bloom of our womanhood through our timeline, we have each become radically different in our orientation and our world-views. This is the Threshold when all of that merges into wholeness and finally into Oneness. You have always been One with Source. When you crossed this Spiritual Elder Threshold, you rejoiced in acceptance. Life has been glorious, it has been a struggle filled with suffering, but more than any description I could choose, you know best, your life has been all yours.

You can see ahead, only one Threshold remains and at some point, you will need to consciously begin detaching from the earthly pleasures and possessions. Naturally, the loves who remain behind after you cross over, these tender hearts are the hardest to release. This is the holiest of all your earthly experiences. My dear friend and Mentor, Shirley's story follows as the one who taught this by example. Her words about detachment, as an action verb, taught me how to approach the last 13 Moons.

To enter the realm of conscious dying in this century, change is coming rapidly; your beliefs are as sacred as ever, but the language is evolving. Measure what you believe against what Elizabeth Kubler-Ross¹² found in her 1965 research. She presented the 5 stages of dying and went into great detail to explain how, in the last century, this was the model: Denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and then ultimately acceptance.

Eastern thought has influenced a new way of thinking in the West, helped by the Midwives or Doulas of the hospice movement who offer an evolved service of care and devotion for those who wish for a conscious death. Learn how Death may be only a doorway, talk about how it has been revealed in your life, how Death has influenced your spiritual maturity. Find a Doula to talk to about how to evolve your own thinking. You might even ask her to attend your Threshold ceremony and come for a Moontime visit that will begin

Nine Passages for Women and Girls

your personal vigil and ceremony for your crossing.

You will remember the particular catalyst of change which waltzed you across your Spiritual Elder Threshold. I have shared many cups of tea with you and you have taught me acceptance and joy and wild diversity of character. I say this knowing we are Source energy, you and I, we are of one Source.



A Ritual for 13 Moons

SHIRLEY HARDY'S STORY

I first met Shirley in 2007 when I was a newcomer in town. For more than 20 years Shirley had been the behind-the-scenes coordinator for the Gardenia Center in Sandpoint, Idaho. I am sad that I write in past tense, for Shirley's time on Earth ended in 2015.

With an unmistakable radiating energy, the Gardenia Center became a spiritual hub for our little town. Shirley barely had a title although she had a long list of little jobs. To post on the announcement board or into an email newsletter, everyone worked with Shirley. Every time I did, she explained it was not supposed to be her job, but it was.

My second winter in Idaho's Panhandle, a weather anomaly happened. Before New Year's Day, the snow piled high along every country road and by the first of February 2009, the Panhandle had received 6 feet of snow on the level, and snow-blowers had created 8 foot tunnels. In the midst of these continuous weather events, I had lined up activities, which included weekly lunchtime talks at the Gardenia Center, called the Brown Bag series. Shirley was out with the weather, too, much more than she wanted to be. While I was dipping my toe into the community, all that weather gave her the catalyst she was looking for to pull her whole self out of responsibility and involvement. This is the paradox of age, as I learned from Shirley. She and I talked about this: We are given the dual gifts of capacity and days; we do what others call us to do until the number of days require us to do for ourselves. As Shirley demonstrated so beautifully, something else called her to be a quiet presence before she was called across her Spiritual Elder Threshold.

Shirley and I became friends in the springtime when she invited me over to her little garden plot. I began to see her story as a picture. Once married and Mother of two children, Shirley loved to go way back in time and tell her little child stories. I loved that her inner child was always present. She marveled at her early beginnings, how idyllic the farm life had been for her and her sisters. Her parents were gigantic influences. She loved to reminisce and she loved to spin her memories into snippets, little stories.

Both of us were busier that we wanted to be, but I could see that I was gathering some of those little stories about Shirley. Before she moved to Idaho's Panhandle, she was the driving force and organizer for the Siddachalam Ashram in New Jersey. She had decided to follow a Jane Monk, Gurujii. His name was Acharya Sri Sushil Kumarji Maharaj and he refined, some would say perfected, the science of sound behind the Namokar Mantra. This part of her story is for others to tell, as I lack enough details to relate how deeply this shaped Shirley's life. She talked about it more as a container for spiritual development and practice than in the story form of her young adulthood. I do know that she was the worker bee behind the scenes.

The suffering caused by divorcing and separating from her beloved family soon dissolved into a need and a special ability Shirley found inside of herself, to help build a new ashram, from the ground up, into a spiritual center. Practicing and teaching yoga were supportive roles for her, and she met a woman who continues to anchor for both of us. That is Maria. After Maria left the ashram and moved to the Panhandle, so did Marilyn Chambers and so did Shirley and so did I. Soon I found my yoga-swami, Maria, by neighborly geographics at the same time as I found Shirley. The two have been essential for my feeling of belonging and sense of awakening to my higher self, my inner mystic.

Shirley gave some of my questions of attachments a wave of her hand. We had reached her age of detachment and she really heard God's message. Now I know that she had completely processed each part of her life and left it to rest. What a grand teaching, being with our Elders as they release. This is an ultimate demonstration of mindfulness and how we can stay present with one another and in the moment.

Sometimes I like to take an Eagle's view and see the patterns. Much more is at work than we can understand, our Soul's orchestrate far beyond what our imaginations are capable of doing. Isn't it a marvel that I moved to the Panhandle to find Shirley, after she had been here with her friends for so many years? Not lost in the pattern of this orchestration, I say, isn't it a marvel

that Shirley and Maria are such long-time friends? My connection is just as my Soul intended this to play out for me.



An Old Stack of Stones as Vigil for Becky

There are more layers: Becky Kemery was another one. Shirley and I also had Becky in common as friends although we never formed a tight triangle; that is, I was never in their company at the same time. When Becky crossed early, Shirley pulled me in closer. We both needed each other to grieve but Shirley wanted me to finish Becky's work. I love Becky's work with the feminine and masculine coming into balance with Earth energies, but my work is separate. It connects I agree, but while Shirley was still living here in Idaho, I found it difficult to talk about my work. My thoughts had not yet fully formed and I was just coming into alignment with the gifts I had to offer.

ELDER ENCORE

Shirley had an encore in her early Elder years that was deeply satisfying for her. She had acquired a computer program and machine that would rec-

reate the frequencies of most earthly blends of plant medicines and minerals. She would charge distilled water with these frequencies, making homeopathic remedies. I completely believe in homeopathic medicine, less is more and intention to heal is the power behind the belief. I had personal experience with homeopathic medicine and remedies before I met Shirley.

To gather more of her stories, a while after Shirley left the Gardenia Center for her Elder Encore, I quit much of my busy-ness in our little town, 15 miles away. I found time for many lovely visits to her little rural cottage and a couple of homeopathic cures. Through many common threads, Shirley and I became fast friends. On one of her excursions to visit a friend in Washington state, she took me with her. I have never felt so thrilled to peek a little further into the lives of two old friends. Friendship is a marvelous adventure of the heart. I see how it nurtures spirits of women and I always want more of that juicy and deep connection.

Shirley held my own journey up for me to see, she even talked about it with others. More than anything, I was clearing the way for a future version of myself as Elder Guide where I would show women how to see their Soul more clearly. She sat and listened to me when I told the story of the *Great Catch-up Ceremony*. Twenty-five women, including Maria, stepped across a Threshold to spend the winter of 2010-11 with our stories, in liminal space and time. This initiation was co-led by our mutual friend, Becky. It was spiritual because we had carefully set the stage by storying the major change events of our lives, it was liminal because we entered a metaphoric bubble with a beginning and an end. Becky reluctantly took her Elder Shawl in ceremony because her Soul guided her to before she crossed. Shirley and I talked long about how Soul surrounded each person and received reminders to guide our earthly adventures. I see now that Shirley mentored me through story and by example, by presence, and through great love that grew between us.



Shirley's Departure

SPIRITUAL ELDER

You could say I was shocked when I dropped by and Shirley was packing. She had visited her family in Massachusetts the season before, she had a great granddaughter climb up on her knee and say, “I miss you Grandma.” A more powerful change agent cannot be found, those words worked on Shirley until she spun into action. The Threshold of her Spiritual Elder appeared before her, she did not hesitate to step into the action of liminal space, although she probably did cogitate a fair amount. What I saw was the most graceful move I could ever imagine.

When that Threshold appeared she merely floated over it. For one long season of 90 days, she packed and snipped all her ties with people in the Panhandle. Those days were liminal for her as she described them. She was

Divinely led to each step through each day and found the golden wonder in her experience. Everything was Divinely directed, God-guided, from listing and selling her little house, to releasing her land and her much loved possessions. She kept only what would set up a little apartment in Massachusetts, she sold her car to the woman who took her to the airport and she was gone. Her possessions went by container and were waiting for her when she arrived. Swoosh. The magic of transformation wrapped around her and everything changed.

I tell this story because of her example of the God wrapped grace she felt. She used intention and courage, tightly woven. She used every skill she had accumulated in her years of living. Her Soul needed the experience of being near her family and relocated her one last time. We shared many phone calls, sometimes for two hours at a time. Telling our stories takes time.

I asked her to be my Elder Mentor while I journeyed through a year long initiation and she was glad to be a part of that process. She always wanted to feed me information, she wished I was part of the Gaia network, but I saw Shirley clearly. She was plugged in and absorbing all of the old material being presented in new ways and delighted with every single day. Our last communique, she sent me the YouTube for Gregg Braden, telling me that he is part of everyone's Soul cluster, one of our Masters. When I was with Shirley, I felt that she was a Master!

During the summer of 2015, Shirley's body began its release from the Earth plane. She had a stroke that would fill her with emotions she had not felt for decades, if ever. Under the care of good medicine, prayerful friends, and her very capable daughter, Shirley suffered her release until she could suffer no more. She passed on Saturday, September 19.

I will mostly miss her excited storytelling and her radiant smile. All of her wisdom crossed with her and reminds me that our stories matter. If I can glean what her example taught me, it is to live all-out every single day that we have, to share our stories because they do matter. Someone will remember that

we were here, that we polished the gifts we had to give the world, and when we complete that task, we released to cross in peace. As I write I find so much more to share, as with all of us, there is always more to share. Shirley shared her inner light freely; hers was a life well-lived.

Shirley had the deep love of family, hundreds of friends, thousands of acquaintances. Each one of us holds and tells a little piece of her story in our own way. She will be remembered long and now will guide from the other dimension when we need her. As her daughter said in the quiet announcement of crossing, may Shirley rest in peace.

To this I add, may we feel love and give it as freely as Shirley did.

Reverently, respectfully, and in my own joy filled grief, I bid you adieu again my friend. We will talk often. You have my great heart of love, Gail



She carried Buddha's smile

FAVORITE SHIRLEY HARDY QUOTES FROM HER GARDENIA
TALK IN JUNE 2014:

“We are all light beings sharing a similar vision and together we are part of a growing bubble of a living, loving consciousness that is touching everything existing around us as it continues to express itself.”

“Each and every one of us are to be commended for our individual role in carrying our torch and holding to our beliefs of a dream being created. We have joined many other communities around the world and the momentum of the worldwide communities continues to grow. Our individual light of consciousness has connected to all the others and we gather together in the loving acceptance of all who are participating in this wondrous movement as it continues to spread around this earth and far beyond into the future.”

“There is a higher order running this show and the vision becomes much clearer when we look down at the larger and greater picture. That is when the clarity presents a clearer view. Worry and confusion blur our view and diminish the perfection that is being presented. I accept the possibility that there is no limit to how far this can be directed as we put the limitations on ourselves.”

LITTLE BLESSINGS FROM THE OTHER ELDERS: GIFTS FOR THE SPIRITUAL ELDER

After you cross your butterfly Threshold, an integration occurs.

- * Preparing for this tender time, use forgiveness to invite change, which is outside of ordinary time.

See how you are one of many Evolutionaries™ using grace to model a good life all the way to Death.

- * Mind-Body-Soul has actually been the creative force leading to your longevity.
- * You may be your own agent of change.

As a modern mystic, staying as teachable as you have always been, will bring younger women knocking on your door seeking your wisdom.

- * Spend time with your Soul; walk in Nature; wander around.
- * Invite the transformative energy to hollow you out and to take you into an altered state.

Longevity is a fact of your life now.

- * If you are able to cast off *old age* as a spell, consider casting off, at least in metaphor form, *retirement* as another spell.
- * Youngers are always attracted to Elders. Begin an intergenerational circle. You and your friends create deep culture while the Youngers create pop culture.
- * Discover how the culture operates through interdependence and collaboration. In little bands of women, little tribes and circles, swirls a magic juice for thriving.

Please tell the whole story of how you became the woman you are today.

Nine Passages for Women and Girls

- * Much about life needs processing again, the story of your life waits to be gathered into one elegant bundle.
- * How have you created this life filled with stories?

As a journey, your spiritual memoir offers endless hours of enjoyment.

- * Tell us about your memories and we will give you the gift of delight for all that you share.
- * Your stories are so sacred as to be God-like and they need something from you: Honor and respect.

Continue your practices as an ultimate modeling for others in your Village.

- * There is more to learn, there is more to experience, even on the days when you say “no more,” you know there is more.
- * You grow your own seed, you are what you think and eat, your body speaks of care and love.

Shirley asks us to remember, “We are all light beings sharing a similar vision ... There is a higher order running this show ...”

NOTES FROM THE SPIRITUAL ELDER PASSAGE

- 1 By writing *Composing a Further Life*, anthropologist Mary Catherine Bateson reminds us, so well, that times have changed. Now the life cycle is different from 100 years ago. The magic number seems to be 100, the new age we all want before we cross. We do live in a miraculous time and we can hold the archetype of old age off for as long as we are able; we will know.
- 2 David LaChapelle produced such a lovely volume of the I Ching, *A Hymn of Changes: Contemplations of the I Ching* (2009). The place between Heaven and Earth is known as Peace, the 11th hexagram.
- 3 One of my wise Spiritual Elders, Loie DeLaVergne, sparkled when she shared with me her favorite author and storyteller, Jean Kirkpatrick. I love a good story, so I have devoured 3 of these marvelous historic novels and will read all of Jean's work, woven in with my favorite non-fictions.
- 4 May I recommend a work of fiction that illustrates the idea of a spiritual memoir. In *The Boston Girl*, Anita Diamant's lead character is asked this question, "How did you get to be the woman you are today?" I consider this book a superb template for women of a certain age to tell our life stories. Sharing our stories will cause our traumas to lessen and our authentic identities to step forth. Life events may seem ordinary to us, but to the next generation, our daughters and our granddaughters, stories that shape us will be historical references and important models; our girls will experience challenges we cannot imagine.
- 5 *Science and Sanity: An Introduction to Non-Aristotelian Systems and General Semantics* was originally published in 1933. In it, Alfred Korzybsky (1879-1950) was the first to describe the two filters through which the world is experienced, the first is one's grasp of language and the second is the inherited structure of the nervous system. Filters means that the world is not experienced directly, but shaped, inherited from Ancestors, what they knew and taught influenced by the environment. Nature and nurture are both components of Korzybsky's time-binding theory.
- 6 Master sociologist, Brené Brown from the University of Houston, has changed the face of shame, vulnerability, worthiness, courage, and intimacy. She continues to publish her research for readers: *The Gifts of Imperfection* (2010); *Daring Greatly* (2015) both meant for self-discovery and *Rising Strong* (2015) brings the conversation about shame and worthiness into the wider spheres where life revolves around others—home, work, church, and community service.
- 7 *Respect: An Exploration* (1998) was written by Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot, a much more comprehensive examination of respect than I'd bargained for, but it stands the test of time. Brilliant.
- 8 I began asking, "Who were you born to be?" in your teen years, and repeated this as the message from Saturn at age 29 and 59. In 2001, Wayne Dyer wrote *10 Secrets for Success and Inner Peace* (2001) based on the most important principles he wanted his children to live by. The one that replicates my question and rolls off one's tongue easily is, "Do not die with your music still inside."
- 9 Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot uses the voice of Daughter telling her Mother's story in *Balm in Gilead: Journey of a Healer* (1995). Margaret Morgan Lawrence was 74 at this telling, but is 102 at this writing. Women needed the barriers cracked; Dr. Margaret was the first African-American woman to achieve degrees from both Cornell and The School of Medicine at Columbia to become a physician in 1933 when most white women and all black women were turned away.

Nine Passages for Women and Girls

- 10 This irresistible quote was found by searching Margaret Morgan Lawrence, a wonderful example of a Spiritual Elder. These words are found in the middle of a short commencement speech given on June 1, 2003. <http://www.swarthmore.edu/news/commencement/2003/lawrence.html>
- 11 In author Elizabeth Lesser's book, *Broken Open: How Difficult Times Can Help Us Grow* (2004), she weaves her own spiritual crises around others' stories she has labeled the Phoenix Process, as the mythological bird who rises from the ashes. Many, if not most people experience a darkening event linked to the Soul. With raised awareness, we can find the message from Soul buried in the ashes.
- 12 Elizabeth Kubler-Ross wrote her seminal book *On Death and Dying* in 1969 and the conversation began. Over the past 40 years the paradigm has finally begun to shift toward consciousness and dying as a natural combination.

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.