

Embodying the Crone:
Transformation and a Woman's Rite of Passage

by


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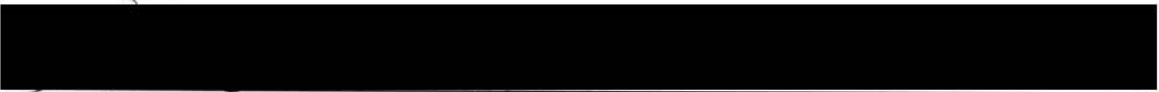
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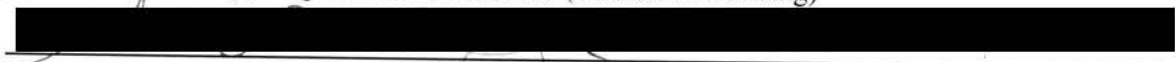
Abstract

This study, based on Interpretive Interactionism, explores transformation connected with the Croning rituals of four women. Through private in-depth interviews, women shared their deeply contextualized stories of Croning. Based on the interviews, a narrative--including points of transformation connected with her ritual--was created for each woman. As a coparticipant, I have shared how my own story may have influenced my interpretation of and interaction with these stories of Croning.

From the narrative themes--“Creating a Positive Aging Experience”, “Crossing the Threshold into WOMANhood”, “Process of Acknowledgement and Clearing to Make Way for the New”, and “From Mother to Crone, Embodying the Crone Energy”--two main themes sprang: Womens’ Rites of Passage and Embodying the Crone Archetype. These themes are discussed and information is offered from both the popular and academic literature, about ritual, transformation, Croning, Archetypes , and Rites of Passage.


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CHAPTER 1

You use your critical perception to draw forth perfection, not tear it down.
Card from "The Transformation Game"

Chapter Introduction

Among other things, the people involved in a conversation bring with them their own unique keys to understanding. We have just entered into a dialogue in which I will share my thesis process from start--although who knows where anything starts--to finish, and you, the reader, will interpret for yourself the ideas presented. As you read and interpret you will be interacting with the ideas and will assess them for personal--and perhaps academic--validity. Since this is not a face to face conversation, we will lose the immediacy of response through which meaning is created by the people engaged in dialogue. We will, none the less, create new meaning together as you engage with the ideas presented from your unique place of understanding.

Conversations don't usually begin in the middle. If they do, we usually need to stop and clarify for each other our keys to understanding, and why and how the topic of our conversation is important to us. Such clarification on my part is the purpose of this chapter. Among other things, this thesis conversation is about research, ritual, transformation, and Croning. Since these topics may be unfamiliar and/or may be approached from widely varied paths, I will introduce them--fully expecting you to blend the information presented with your own understanding. Allow me to begin.

Introduction to The Crone

In the Kitchen of a Crone

Standing in the kitchen, I held a picture of two women who identify themselves as Crones. They are cousins. As the first and second female children born to their family in over 100 years, they are deeply cherished. The picture was brought out to show me the necklace one of the women wears. It was a gift to her during a Croning ceremony in which she took part three years before. The necklace is indeed beautiful but I was completely captivated by the faces of the women--one dark eyed, vitally alert and engaging, the other fair, deeply lined, and smiling with a shy, gentle dignity under a crown of rosebuds and Baby's Breath. It's the day of her "Croning", a ritual held to recognize, name and celebrate her being a Wise Old Woman.

Such a positive identification goes counter to the prevailing societal image of women who have moved past menopause into the third stage of their lives. Rather than being referred to as Wise Old Women, they are more commonly dismissed as "sweet little old ladies". The label "crone" is usually reserved for not so sweet older women who are challenging or nonconforming. Many older women now proudly claim the right to be outspoken and self-confirming for what they regard as their own well-being and the well-being of the Earth. To make and mark their stance, they call themselves Crones, sometimes doing so within a Croning ritual.

The *New Merriam-Webster Dictionary* (1989) succinctly defines a crone as a "witch 2", and "witch 2" turns out to be "an ugly old woman". Curious whether there had been any change of definition in the last few years, I sought the most current dictionary I

could quickly find. The *Canadian Oxford Dictionary* (1998) states a crone is “a withered old woman”. While both are over 65 years old, the two self-identified Crones in the picture are neither withered nor ugly but weathered and beautiful.

Crone Gatherings

As I began to write my thesis, 200 women from all over North America and other parts of the world prepared to meet in Colorado for the seventh annual “Crones Counsel”. The name was deliberately chosen “to signify the intent of the gathering as a place where older women could share their histories and counsel with each other” (1998, Registration Package, Crones Counsel VI) . Ceremonies of Croning are held at each Counsel gathering.

The first Crones Counsel was held in 1993 in the United States. That same year the first of four annual “Amazing Greys” gatherings was held on Vancouver Island and nearly 200 older women attended (1994, Press Release, for Amazing Greys II) . Even though it was originally meant to be a local event, each year women came from all over to take part--some to be celebrated as Crones.

The Crone Zeitgeist

Crone gatherings are obviously an idea whose time has come. The Crone Zeitgeist is also apparent in thriving magazines, newsletters, and web sites. Older women from around the world are taking part in on-line Crone “chat” groups sharing their stories and thoughts. Some women are holding private rituals of Croning with their friends and family. Many older women are meeting in small circles for support and discussion much like the consciousness raising groups of the 1960s. The development of this social movement--perhaps as Bolen (1991) suggests, a natural extension of the women’s movement of the

1960s and 1970s--can partially be explained by sheer numbers. As McIntyre and Loewen (1998) tell us, "By the year 2000, there will be roughly 75 million women in North America over the age of 50".

Return of the Crone

Beyond demographics, there is a deeper process afoot. Women are reclaiming the long suppressed Wise Old Woman or Crone aspect of the ancient triple Goddess (Eisler, 1988; Walker, 1985; Conway, 1994; Reilly, 1995) who "walked" in our world before the rise of male dominant rule. Walker (1985) states that the Maiden and Mother facets of the Goddess have been sustained in our patriarchal society and culture--albeit in distorted ways--but the outspoken Crone, Goddess of death and transformation, was too dangerous for patriarchy to tolerate. Her archetype was relegated to deepest collective unconsciousness where she has waited to be remembered--some would say for 5,000 years (Eisler, 1988).

Why is memory of the Crone surfacing in our culture at this time? As Walker (1985) suggests:

Perhaps necessarily, the Crone is being rediscovered by a world that male systems appear to be pushing toward a brink of disaster without parallel in history or prehistory. It has been said before, that archetypes suppressed by any culture will tend to arise again and again, threatening the establishment that suppressed them. (p.14)

By all appearances, the Crone archetype is arising in women of the dominant cultures of North America and Europe--if not in women everywhere. As more and more older women consciously identify with the Crone, She is being revived in and through their lives. Croning rituals are not child's play but the intentional and transformative work of

Wise Old Women.

If Walker (1985) is correct, it's high time to reclaim the Crone. The final words of Frankl's (1984) book, *Man's Search for Meaning* speak of the destructive capacity of our culture. Urging us to do our best and to become more than "decent" people, he says, "So, let us be alert--alert in a twofold sense: Since Auschwitz we know what man [sic] is capable of. And since Hiroshima we know what is at stake" (p.154).

Crone's Commitment

Crones most certainly know what is at stake. This is reflected in the following portions of the statement of commitment from the Crones Counsel: "Our Counsel is an acceptance of responsibility for continuance of life" and "We consciously intend transformation" (1998, Registration Package, Crones Counsel VI).

Ritual and Transformation

Definitions

I have yet to find more clear definitions of ritual and transformation than those contained in the registration package for Crones Counsel VI (1998). Ritual is described as "action done with intention. Any action can be a ritual if it is done with an awareness that helps you connect with some aspect of yourself or your world. Ritual is the means of connecting". This definition can be expanded to include connection with the numinous--the infinite, energetic, spiritual realm. This realm is variously named God, Great Mystery, the Unified Energy Field, and forever on. In this thesis, I have referred to it as "Source".

For McLaughlin & Davidson, (1994) the connection with Source is an essential part of ritual. They describe ritual as being:

...basically the rhythmic use of physical forms--sound, light, color, music, incense, dance, chanting, words of power, and so on--to invoke, transmit, and anchor spiritual energies from higher planes... .When conditions are right, energetic lightning strikes through the resistance of matter, and spiritual power is released... and thus creates change in the physical world . (p.402)

Ceremony is described by the Cronos Council (1998) as “a number of rituals that are woven together into a whole. Both ritual and ceremony can facilitate release, renewal, centering, inspiration, insight or celebration”.

The Cronos Council IV (1998) information sheet goes on to explain:

All energy in the universe comes into form and changes form (transforms) through patterns or systems. Ritual and ceremony are meta-systems for the conscious transformation of energy. What matters is not so much the particular form that a ritual or ceremony takes, but the authenticity of the presence and the clarity of the intention of the participants.

Purpose of Ritual

Ritual helps clarify and focus intention. It also serves to “embody abstract truths in forms that enable the mind to comprehend them” (McLaughlin & Davidson, 1994, p. 402). These truths are represented symbolically in ritual. A symbol, Shorter (1987) tells us, is “a falling together of two meanings” (p.46). In marriage, for example, a single candle may be lit by the joined flames of two separate candles brought to the altar by the bride and groom. On the surface, there are merely three candles burning, but the candles are used to symbolize that the bride and groom now combine the light of their previously separate lives. Among the layers of meaning, the candles represent their transformed state from single to married.

Importance of Ritual for Transformation and Healing

The Crones have declared their intention for transformation. I stand with them. Since ritual is one of the ways through which transformation is achieved, it seems crucial to gain a better understanding of ritual for our own well-being and the well-being of the Earth.

This is echoed by Somé (1993) who asserts, “Where ritual is absent, the young ones are restless or violent, there are no real elders, and the grown-ups are bewildered. The future is dim” (p.28). Joseph Campbell, cited by Flowers (1988), seems to agree when he advises, “If you want to find out what it means to have a society without any rituals, read the *New York Times*” (p.8). I understand this to mean that Campbell believes newspaper stories of organized greed, murder and mayhem, addictions and hopelessness reflect a society bereft of ritual.

Points of Transformation: Epiphanies

Life is change. We fear change, grow weary with it, and, at the same time, long for it. Denzin (1989) states that “interactional moments that leave marks on people’s lives...have the potential for creating transformational experiences”. He refers to these moments of crisis as “epiphanies” in which “personal character is manifested and made apparent”(p.15). Denzin goes on to name and describe four types of epiphany: “the major, the cumulative, the minor and the illuminative, and the relived”. The major epiphany is a shattering experience in which a person’s life is irrevocably changed. The cumulative epiphany “occurs as the result of a series of events that have built up in the person’s life”. We are told that “underlying tensions and problems in a situation or relationship are

revealed” in a minor and illuminative epiphany. A person may also relive a major epiphany experience as if it were the first time (p. 17).

Transformation is continuous with or without ritual. So why bother with ritual? Ritual is the active expression of an intention to transform ourselves and our worlds. Through ritual we set our intentions in motion activating factors without number, energy without end toward ever higher levels of consciousness individually and collectively as well as toward a rearrangement of every aspect of our being(s)--physical, mental, emotional, social, and cultural--and of our world. (Driver, 1998; Fox, 1995; Starhawk, 1990; Grimes, 1995; Somé, 1993).

The Shadow of Ritual and Transformation

While I look to ritual to be positively transformative, I am cognizant that, as Driver (1998) advises, “Nothing in the nature of ritual per se insures that the social transformations achieved by it will necessarily be good ones, for this depends on the aim and will of the performers” (p.191). The transformative results of ritual depend on both the morality and maturity of those who are involved in its creation and enactment.

In his introduction to Somé’s (1993) book, Jungian psychoanalyst Robert Moore states, “...our culture is ‘possessed’ by the immature shadow-magician” archetype because we have not paid enough attention to the importance of ritual in our lives. Moore goes on to say, “When human beings use their magician potentials in the service of healing and community, the deconstructive and sociopathic energies of the immature magician--the trickster--are transformed into a mature, shamanic form that heals both self and the larger community” (p. 9).

Introduction to Thesis Process

If the presence or absence of ritual can have such an impact on our well-being, it seems a worthy topic of research for a nurse interested in exploring and supporting the ways in which people have enacted their intentions and consciously enhanced their connection with some aspect of themselves or their world. To support and increase the creation and performance of ritual in our society for conscious transformation may be an essential health promotion activity--and one in which Nurses are actively involved.

Purpose of Thesis Research

The purpose of this research project was to learn about the transformative power of ritual. This research was intended to deepen an understanding of how ritual is transformative in order to work with ritual as a healing modality in my nursing practice.

The Thesis Question

My question was "How is ritual transformative?" Beyond the literature, my source for the answer to my thesis question was women who have experienced Crone rituals which they describe in some way as life changing or transformative.

History of the Question

Transformation for my own well-being and for the well-being of the Earth is my conscious intention. For the last few years, I have dreamed of creating a nursing practice which would include interacting with people to create rituals for transformation and healing. I see it as part of my heritage from the Wise Women who predated the practices of medicine and nursing (Ehrenreich & English, 1973; Abrahamsen, 1997). If I want intentional, meaningful ritual to be a major part of my nursing practice, I need to learn as

much as I can about ritual and transformation. I expect that this will be a lifetime's work.

Health Beliefs and Ritual

For this thesis, I first considered connecting with individuals and families faced with disease and distress who have found ritual helpful. I explored the possibility of basing my research on the work of Wright, Watson, and Bell (1996) who have developed counselling ways to challenge, alter and modify people's beliefs which sustain illness, and identify, affirm, and solidify beliefs which support well-being and the healing process. These writers define a belief as "the 'truth' of a subjective reality that influences a person's biopsychosocial-spiritual structure and functioning" (p.43). In short, Wright, Watson, and Bell work to transform beliefs through counselling with the intention of supporting a person's healing. I wanted to build on their work to explore the use of ritual in transforming beliefs about disease and distress. Before I could do so, I realized I first needed a better understanding of how ritual is transformative.

Health Promotion and Ritual

As I came to understand this, I was inspired to talk with women who had taken part in Croning rituals which they describe in some way as transformative. Consideration of Croning as my thesis topic liberated me from a discussion of ritual within a context of disease and distress and moved me into areas of greater personal resonance. My nursing practice for the last thirteen years has been in health promotion and community health. I am deeply interested in how individuals and groups of people find their way to increased well-being. This, in my opinion, is exactly what Croners have done.

Health as Expanding Consciousness

Over the years of working in community health, I have been withdrawing from the medical model of sickness care with its orientation on solutions to disease and distress and have been increasingly interested in promoting health and well being. This seemed a much more productive use of my life energy until I realized that I was perpetuating a dichotomy of sickness versus wellness. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) succinctly note, dichotomous pairs represent “thesis and antithesis, from which some synthesis, dialectically shaped, can emerge” (p.93). Newman (1986) provides such a synthesis in her nursing theory, *Health as Expanding Consciousness*, in which she defines health as a fusion of disease and nondisease. Newman cites Rogers who felt that “health and illness should be viewed equally as expressions of the life process” (p.10). As we move through cycles of disintegration (disease) and reintegration (nondisease) we may connect with and experience transformation to higher and more refined levels of consciousness. Many spiritual thinkers believe this to be the reason for our existence.

Return to the Thesis Question

Beginning with the belief that ritual is transformative, my research question became, “How is it so?” While this may be somewhat ethereal, I believe it also to be grounded and practical. As Driver (1998) explains, “Rituals are primarily instruments designed to change a situation. They are more like washing machines than books. A book may be *about* washing, but the machine takes in dirty clothes and, if all goes well, transforms them into cleaner ones” (p.93).

The question, “How is ritual transformative?” can be taken two ways: “How does

ritual work to transform?” and “How is ritual experienced as transforming?” I explored the literature to begin to form an answer for the first question. To research the second question, I interviewed people who have experienced ritual as transforming .

Enter the women who have described their Croning ceremonies in such language as “liberating”, “deeply touching and meaningful”, and “life changing”. I asked for guidance from Source, was inspired to look at Croning rituals, and paid attention. Maybe it is what needed to be brought through from Source at this time; maybe it is simply timely in my own life--or both.

The Questioner: Life Shaping Ideas and Biography

The approach to research I selected for this study was *Interpretive Inquiry*, as described by Denzin (1989). One of the tenets of this method is that our biography dictates the way we interpret our experiences. How each woman I interviewed interpreted and related her own experiences was based in her biography. In turn, my biography has shaped my interpretation of the interpretations of the participants in this study. Because of this, my voice and my story are as present as the voices and stories of the women I interviewed. We are all coparticipants in creating an understanding of ritual and transformation. Readers of this thesis cannot help but add their “voices” when they interpret from their own biography the collective interpretations of the coparticipants. It seems important, then, to briefly outline some of my biography and the life shaping ideas which may have led me to writing this thesis at this time and which probably dictated the ways in which I interpreted the interpretations of the women I interviewed.

Limits to Understanding

I believe that it is only possible to understand an experience most completely if one has lived it. While I am approaching menopause, I have yet to experience it. While I have taken part in much ritual, I have not been Croned or participated in a Croning ritual. I needed to depend on the interpretations of the women who have gone through these lived experiences to help me deepen an understanding of transformation connected with their rituals of Croning. I did not, however, start from “square one” as I heard their stories.

Confronting Oppression

I am a grey haired woman. Looking into the mirror I am aware of two things: I am aging and the society in which I am aging has not been kind to older women (Nickerson,1991; Sheehy, 1993; Steinem, 1994). One of the main themes of my life so far has been addressing oppression in its many forms. I see them as variations on the same insidious theme of “power-over” others which can be undone by remembering and reclaiming one’s “power-from-within” and then engaging in “power-with” others (Starhawk,1990). Sexism, agism and, as has already been discussed, the suppression of the Crone archetype are particular oppressive currents which women address through Croning. Rationalism and positivism are particular oppressive currents that I bypass by researching ritual and transformation as my topic and doing so qualitatively. Ritual is one way to tap into “power-from-within” so that we can be in “power-with” others to reshape our world (Starhawk,1990; Fox, 1995).

Transforming Our Realities.

I believe that we create our realities and therefore can recreate and transform them

if we are so inspired. This is not to blithely ignore all of the factors which impinge heavily on the lives of individuals. It is, though, a recognition of the resiliency and creativity of the human spirit to find meaning and a way of being in even the most deplorable of conditions (Frankl,1984). We have the ability to transform our lives and our world. Perhaps this is what the human journey is all about. We can set our intention for transformation in motion through the words and actions of ritual.

Balancing the Profane and the Sacred

I celebrate the transformative power of ritual in a society which more often than not disregards or defames ritual (Fox, 1995; Grimes, 1995; Driver, 1998). This is sometimes unsettling. I move between the material plane in which I need to pay my mortgage (the profane) and the planes of higher energetic vibrational frequencies to which Newman (1986) refers in her theory of *Health as Expanding Consciousness* (the sacred). A growing spiritual awareness supports me and ritual helps me access those higher energies for personal and social transformation.

Moving Beyond War

I trace my interest in the work of transformation to my childhood during the 1950s and 1960s as a “baby boomer”. We lived for a few years in Colorado Springs which, as the headquarters for North American Air Defense (NORAD), was a primary target for nuclear weapons aimed at North America. Our neighbours had bomb shelters...and guns to keep us out. We wore dog-tags and were timed for how quickly we could find our siblings at school and get safely home during air-raid drills. I still plan escape routes. Later, I became a quietly determined social activist seeking personal and social

transformation through ritual, music, conflict resolution and shaping social policy. The ultimate escape route, you see, is to move myself and help move my society beyond war and annihilation through a process of transformation.

Cause and Effect: Casting My Intention

I believe in a relationship between cause and effect. If I do this/do not do this, then that *may/may not* happen. Please notice that I do not believe in *definite* outcomes for any action taken or not taken. In my mind the cause-effect relationship is not necessarily direct or linear in time or focus. There are variables beyond imagination at play--too many to conceive of a single cause leading to a single effect. When I am doing a ritual, I am communicating--or casting--my intention and connecting energetically with everything that is, was, and ever will be. Everything is energy (Capra, 1985; Capra & Steindl-Rast, 1992; Swimme, 1996). Everything is interconnected--to the “ends” of the universe. I have come to understand profoundly that how I live my life as an individual affects the state of the world and beyond.

Being Cocreators

What is “beyond”? I started this chapter with a quote about drawing forth perfection. I believe there *is* a perfect state which is the Source of all. Far from being static and ultimately attainable, it is energetic, omnipresent and ever changing. Every particle of our being is infused with this energy and our very being infuses and informs Source. We are cocreators in an ever changing universe (Fox, 1995). Nursing scholar, Martha Rogers (cited by Carboni, 1995) describes what I have been calling Source as a “unified field of oneness that is ultimately unknowable when restricted to the more

commonly accepted five-sense knowing yet can be understood through pandimensional awareness". Humans are "dynamic energy fields" that emerge from the unified field of oneness (p. 23). In ritual we consciously tap into Source energy--the unified field--to manifest our intentions and to "draw forth perfection" in our lives and our world. Ritual becomes a conduit for inspiration and energy.

Being Embodied

I am a woman and, even though lately my main place of existence is in my head, I enjoy being embodied. The sensual aspects of life like music, colour, food, and ritual are an essential part of the expression of my womanhood.

Spirituality as Relationship

My spirituality springs from a blend of many of the world's traditional teachings and newer thinking in areas such as quantum physics. Because I was raised in a society based on Christianity and in a protestant family, the tenets of this religion are strongly present in my life. While deeply influenced by Christianity, my spiritual understanding continues to unfold. I found that the following statement from the Maori "Just Therapy" group in New Zealand expresses much but not all of what I currently believe:

Instead of the traditional European dualistic world view that separates physical and spiritual values, we learned to respect the sacredness of all life. Spirituality for us is not centred on organized religion, but on the essential quality of relationship between people and their environment, people and other people, people and their heritage, and people and the numinous.

(Waldegrave, 1990, p.7)

Literature Review of Ritual and Transformation

Relating and Ritual

Imber-Black and Roberts (1998) list “relating” as one of the five purposes of ritual. Relating, they tell us, includes “shaping, expressing, and maintaining relationships”(p.28). As therapists, Imber-Black and Roberts are speaking about the relationships between people and other people but this does not negate the role that ritual has to play in all of the relationships named above. We employ ritual as a symbolic expression of an otherwise intangible relationship with Source.

Ritual in the Hands of the People

I have had a deep and long interest in ritual and transformation and have been informed about these topics through personal experience, works of fiction and nonfiction, the news media, books and film, and the academic and professional literature. Once the domain of anthropology and theology, ritual is being discovered by a wide variety of professions and reclaimed by ordinary folk. Increasingly, writers in the popular press have been encouraging people to engage in the creation and performance of new rituals (Fulgham, 1995; Starhawk, 1990; Hammerschlag & Silverman, 1997). Interestingly enough, Grimes (1995), respected and frequently cited for his work in ritual studies, asserted in the introduction to his book on ritual that there are no experts in this field. He bluntly states “At this juncture, there are only students of ritual (pp.xxvi). Turner (1982) reminds us that nonscholars and scholars alike may add to the understanding of ritual.

New Rituals

It is equally important to give serious study to new rituals like Croning and time

tested--some would say "time worn"--rituals like the sacraments of the Christian church. Walker (1990) points out that many of the new ritual forms have been created by women in response to the alienation they have experienced in patriarchal religious structures. Rather than directly challenging the patterns of oppression and sexism from within their churches, women have opted out in increasing numbers, finding more authentic spiritual expression for themselves in the women's spirituality movement.

There is an increased richness in our present day lives. With improved health and well-being we now experience menopause, changing jobs at age fifty and so on. We need new rituals to mark these life changes which few, even in relatively recent generations, lived to see.

Inclusion of Ritual in Our Work

While there may be no experts on the subject, much has been written about ritual. In the past, most of the writing was either from a liturgical standpoint by theologians or presented as ethnographic studies by anthropologists. At this time, however, people from fields as varied as Conflict Resolution and Occupational Therapy are exploring the subject of ritual and ways in which it can be incorporated into their work (Perreault & Scott, 1999; Peloquin, 1997). Much has been written about ritual by those in the women's spirituality movement, often with an ecofeminist or Wiccan world view (Starhawk, 1990; Stein, 1990; Walker, 1990; Budapest, 1989). While many groups, including nurses (Abrahamsen, 1997; Barry, 1994; Reeder, 1994; Wolf, 1988, Garrett, 1996) have written about ritual in the academic and professional literature it was difficult to find research studies done on the subject.

Ritual as an Innate Human Expression

While some scholars (Wolf, 1988; Kertzer, 1988 ;Somé, 1993) believe that ritual is innately human, others (Bell, 1997) question this, suggesting that we have used ritual to organize the world and as such it is simply a cultural and historical construction. Jungian analyst Bani Shorter (1987) would disagree. In her practice, she has observed that, when facing change or crisis, women--lacking societal preparation through ceremonies of initiation--naturally and intuitively create and enact rituals for themselves which help them across the transition. In so doing, they tap into and activate unexpected and powerful aspects of themselves as well as ancient collective memories of ritual. Women who have little or no previous conscious experience of ritual know what they need to do and how to do it. Whether innate or simply social construction, ritual serves a purpose for human beings.

Functions of Ritual

Imber- Black and Roberts (1998) list the purposes of ritual as “*relating, changing, healing, believing, and celebrating*” (p.56). Somé (1993) states that the people in his African community understand:

What goes wrong in the visible world is only the tip of the iceberg. So to correct a dysfunctional state of affairs effectively, one must first locate its hidden area, its symbolic dimension, work with it first [through ritual], and then assist in the restoration of the physical (visible) extension of it. Visible wrongs have their roots in the world of spirit. (p.43)

Driver (1998) names the “three great gifts that ritual makes to social life” as “order” “community” and “transformation” (p. 168). He goes on to say:

...it would be an open question whether rituals should be thought of first as instruments of order that happen to enhance communal bonds and to facilitate

various kinds of transformation; or primarily as community-making events that incidentally generate order and transform it; or first of all as techniques of transformation that help to order life and to deepen communal relationships. (p.168)

Because of his own ideology, Driver (1998) gives preference to the transformative nature of ritual, feeling it is only in creating social change that we see its true power. Driver makes a very interesting point that those most sceptical in Western society of the power of ritual to transform may have the most to lose should that power create major change.

Chapter Endnote

It was my intention, in this chapter, to most fully engage in “conversation” those who read this thesis. I hoped to build common ground for understanding and making meaning by offering information on ritual, transformation, Croning, and the beginning of my thesis process. Since this is a piece of interpretive inquiry--*Interpretive Interactionism*, and since the reader and I are engaged in kind of dialogue in which we negotiate meaning, I have shared some of my biography which helps shape my own meaning making.

In the next chapter, I have outlined my research process. This takes the reader through a brief description of selecting a research approach, then moves through the actual working parts of designing and carrying out the research itself.

CHAPTER 2

John said to John, "I think we take a left at the light. There should be a big crinkle-- assuming this map is right. John looked over and said, "Hey no, it's not. It's a crumpled up wrapper from the fast food that we got."

"They Got Lost" by They Might Be Giants

Research Paradigm

When going into unfamiliar territory, a map is always a good idea--but first it should be an appropriate map and then it needs to be interpreted in a way that will get you where you think you want to go. For this research project, after consideration of a great many possibilities, I chose to work with Denzin's *Interpretive Interactionism* (1989) because it seemed most closely to offer direction for a journey of exploring ritual and transformation.

Finding the Right Map

Qualitative Versus Quantitative

While it is possible to include quantitative research methods in research about ritual (Jacobs, 1989), because I wanted to know "How" ritual is transformative, not "How much" people were transformed by ritual, this dictated a qualitative approach to my research. I also wanted to deepen my understanding of ritual and transformation through the detailed stories of women who had experienced transformation connected with their Croning rituals. This, too, indicated the need for qualitative inquiry (Cresswell, 1998). Interpretive Interactionism employs a qualitative approach to research.

Epiphanies

My research topic was transformation and ritual. Since Denzin (1989) called for researchers to find and focus on the epiphanies or points of transformation in people's lives

this alerted me to the possibility that this might be a right “map” to follow.

Ritual as Interactive and Interpretive

I also recognized that ritual is deeply relational and interactive and that we create meaning, among countless other ways, through interpretation of ritual experiences. It was intriguing to me that not only was I going to discuss ritual which is interpretive and interactive but I could do so through an interpretive interactionist approach to research.

Bracketing

Croning rituals take place in sacred space--time out of time and place out of place--as discussed in Chapter 4. This seemed to me to be a natural form of bracketing described by Denzin (1989) as taking the phenomenon under investigation “out of the world where it occurs” (p.55). Within the natural bracketing of ritual, I recognized I would also bracket instances of transformation for deeper investigation.

Intuition

Being a student of research, I was not sure that Denzin’s (1989) work was the “best” map to follow. In the end, my decision was mainly based on intuition.

Interpretive Interactionism

Naturalistic Inquiry

Interpretive Interactionism is a qualitative research method which is naturalistic. Naturalism calls for inquiry to be located in everyday life--while some could argue that ritual is set apart from everyday life, I believe that enactment of ritual is very much a universal human experience.

The methods used for Naturalistic Inquiry need to be respectful of the people and

worlds involved (Denzin, 1989; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). While I did not gather my research information during ritual, I did the next best thing; I asked women to share in as much detail as they could their experience of ritual. Because I am deeply interested in ritual and frankly admire strong older women, I was most respectful of them. Two women shared pictures of their Croning rituals as they told their stories and two allowed me to work with the transcripts of their rituals. I was touched by the power of their rituals as the Croners shared their experiences with me.

Applicability of Interpretive Interactionism to This Thesis

In the first paragraph of his book on interpretive interactionism, Denzin (1989) states, that the “focus of interpretive research is on those life experiences that radically alter and shape the meanings persons given [sic] to themselves and their experiences” (p.10). In the book’s conclusion, Denzin speaks of the preoccupation social scientists have had with “how history, and human nature, is being made within their historical moment”. Following a rather bleak description of the postmodern times in which we live,

Denzin states that:

Interpretive interactionism in the postmodern period is committed to understanding how this historical moment universalizes itself in the lives of interacting individuals...Each person is touched by the mass media, by alienation, by the economy, by the new family and child-care systems, by the increasing technologizing of the social world, and by the threat of nuclear annihilation”. (p.139)

How people make meaning of these times and of their everyday lives is found in the stories we tell each other and of the dreams we dream. Ritual helps us create and express meaning.

The women who call themselves Croners, have experienced a ritual which has, in

some cases, radically altered the meanings they give themselves and their experiences. They have been transformed. Within an intersubjective space of meaning making, Cronos have responded uniquely to the complexity of these postmodern times. I wanted to hear and tell their stories in order to deepen my understanding of ritual and transformation. As I have previously stated, my ultimate goal is transformation for the well-being of individuals (including myself) and the well being of the earth.

The goal of interpretivism is “understanding the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it” (Schwandt, 1998,p.221). Reality is “the world of lived experience” (Denzin, 1989, p.143). Knowledge, Denzin tells us is “a belief, or set of beliefs, about a particular segment of reality” and is “socially and politically constructed. Knowledge is intimately related to power” (p.30).

Although Schwandt (1998) explains that interpretivist methods are “principally concerned with matters of knowing and being, not method per se” (p.222), Denzin (1989, p.27) has neatly summarized points to be considered when doing interpretation of everyday life. Loosely following his advice, I have chosen to interview four women, asking them to share their lived experience of Croning with me. I consider Croning to be both an expression and a source of epiphany and am interested in how participation in this ritual is connected to the women’s biographies as well as to “public issues” and institutions which have shaped their lives. From the outset of this work, I recognized that I needed to be alert to my own process and why I was making the research decisions I was. I needed to honestly question my intent and to examine whether my choices fit within the research method as well as my own values and ethics. I have clearly stated my position on my thesis

topic and have gone even further in offering points in my own biography which have shaped and informed that position. It is most important to me that the women who participated in this study should recognize the “language, feelings, emotions, and actions” presented in this paper as their own.

Five Steps to Interpretation

Denzin (1989) outlines the following “five steps of interpretation” as necessary to Interpretive Interactionism: “deconstruction, capture, bracketing, construction, and contextualization”. While these steps guided my research, I have not strictly adhered to them.

I believe I understand Denzin’s (1989) intent in presenting these “steps” as a way to clarify the research process but I do not regard ritual and transformation as something that can be examined in stepwise fashion. While I intended to address each of Denzin’s steps, I doubted I would be able to take as linear an approach as he suggests. Ritual and transformation are processes, things with “lives” of their own. I don’t truly see it as useful or wise to deaden ritual and transformation to make the topics less slippery. Less slippery doesn’t mean better understood.

With that said, I *have* selected and interviewed women who have had a life enhancing experience with their Croning ritual (capture). While working with the interview materials I *did* identify the overriding themes and attempted to examine them separately from the rest of the “data” (bracketing). I *did* also look at the themes as part of the whole (construction). This *was* all considered in the context of the women’s lived experience (contextualizing).

Aside from interviews with Cronos, it was my intention to deepen my understanding of ritual and transformation through differing points of view presented in the available literature. It was, however, beyond the scope of this study to do critical analysis of ritual and transformation so I *did not* engage in a formal process of deconstruction *per se*.

Relationship with Coparticipants

I differ in an important way from Denizen. While he speaks of research subjects, I considered my relationship to be that of a cocreator of reality within the intersubjective space of interview conversations.

Interactionism speaks of how human beings interact in ways which are taken for granted yet are laden with meaning. As humans interact, new meanings are constantly coming into being. This may result in individual and/or collective transformation. Relationships with self, others, the world, and Source may shift and change. Interview conversations are one interaction in which two participants share and create meaning.

The women who participated in this study have all engaged in action and interaction which had transformation as its intended outcome: ritual. While I had a task as researcher to make visible things not easily seen and to tell stories which haven't previously been heard, I have come to understand so much more because I have been transformed by my interaction with the participants.

Research Method

Data Gathering Process

Interview conversations were used to gather the information for this study. I had hoped to invite my coparticipants to take part in a small group discussion as well, however

all of us were too busy to allow this to happen. I also kept notes about my own process while writing this thesis.

Interviewing for Qualitative Research.

Kvale (1996) and van Manen (1997) have written extensively about interviewing for qualitative research. Kvale describes a qualitative research interview as “literally an *inter view*, an inter change of views between two persons conversing about a common theme”. He goes on to say, “In postmodern thought there is an emphasis on knowledge as interrelational and structural, interwoven in webs of networks. Knowledge is neither inside a person nor outside in the world, but exists in the relationship between person and world” (p.44). The interaction of the interview coparticipants, then, may result in a cocreation of knowledge.

van Manen (1997) states that “Human experience is only possible because we have language” (p.38). We can, however, only grasp and express the meaning of *past* lived experiences and they cannot be known in their wholeness. Turner (1982), advises that “an experience is never truly completed until it is expressed” (p.14).

Ethical Considerations

The confidentiality of the women who agreed to be interviewed for this study has been very carefully protected throughout the research process--this is expanded upon later in this section--and will continue to be closely guarded. I have an ever present awareness of the “burning times” which never seem far away and I have no wish to see any of these Wise Women exposed to oppression in any form because of their work with me.

The Crones who took part in this study are all women of power. They were fully in

control of their part in the research. Participants have access to the final results of the study.

I did not proceed with the research until after “Human Subjects Ethical Review” approval was received (Appendix A). Only then did I start to make arrangements for interviews.

Letters of Invitation.

The purpose of this research project was to learn about the transformative power of ritual from the perspective of women who have taken part in Croning Ceremonies and who described this ritual experience as positively life changing for them. I began with women who had been actively involved with the Amazing Greys gatherings to start to identify Croners who might want to take part in this study. Letters of invitation were only sent to women who were recommended to me for participation in the study by other Croners (Appendix B). A telephone call was also made to each possible participant. When women agreed to be part of the study, we set up a time and place for our first interview conversation.

Letter of Consent

All of the coparticipants signed a letter of informed consent (Appendix C) prior to being interviewed. They were each given an original copy.

Participation was at all times completely voluntary and there was no monetary compensation for taking part. At any time, participants were aware that they could choose not to answer particular questions and could withdraw from the study without consequence.

Interview Conversations

Interview conversations were held with four women individually. Each woman was interviewed twice. During the interview conversations, I followed an interview guide (Appendix D) to evoke information on the woman's biographical context and the world view on which she bases her interpretations of her life experiences. I also asked about the woman's past experiences of epiphany and transformation, experiences of ritual prior to the Croning Ceremony, her experience of the Croning Ceremony, and finally her experience of ritual and transformation.

The guide was considered a work in progress as I entered into the interview conversations. Adjustments were made as necessary. For example, I added a question which seemed to get to the heart of the issue quite well. It was, "What would it be like for you if you had not done your Croning?"

The interviews were taped and then transcribed by me. After the first interview, I listened several times to each interview and read the transcriptions over and over again, making notes for further discussion.

The second interviews were based on my notes and questions arising from the first interviews. I also spoke briefly with each of the women two or three times on the telephone mainly for the logistics of meeting times and places. This was also an important time for us to connect as people with a common interest and to share information.

Introduction to Narratives

A narrative was created based on the interviews of each woman. This narrative included possible points of transformation identified from the interviews. With a cover

letter (Appendix E), full transcripts of her two interviews and a copy of the narrative created from her interviews was sent to each woman. Each of the participants was invited to review and provide feedback on the narrative created from her interviews for how accurately her experience was described.

Process for identifying points of transformation.

It seems important to outline my process for identifying the possible points of transformation listed in the narratives. Each woman identified for me the major point(s) of transformation which she had experienced in connection with her Croning ritual. I was further alerted to signs of transformation by expressions of strong emotion, descriptions of changed behaviour and/or self identity, stated intentions for transformation-- including invocations, and shifts in energy perceived physically and/or intuitively.

Until I had confirmation from the participants that they agreed with the language, feelings, and ideas in the narratives, I did not go ahead with analysis or writing. The women all suggested small but important changes in their own narratives. I made all of the changes suggested and sent a revised copy to each woman of her own narrative.

Confidentiality

All interview conversations were held in private. Three women chose to be interviewed in their own homes and one came to my office after work hours.

The information gathered during the study remained confidential; interview materials were kept in a locked filing cupboard in my home. Names and other identifying information were not used on the tapes, transcriptions, or in any written documentation of the study results. The participants were invited to provide a pseudonym for this study. I

forgot to ask one woman for a pseudonym so gave her one for the purposes of transcription. I checked with her later to see if she wanted to chose another but she was comfortable with the one I had selected. At another time, I had the very odd experience of not being able to remember one participant's real name when I needed to call her, since I had so deeply identified with her pseudonym.

When the study was complete, the tapes and the transcriptions were destroyed. This is sadly, and no doubt wisely, dictated by the ethical review process. So much remains untouched from the interviews.

Introduction to Analysis of the Interview Conversations

The information gathered in the interviews was assessed time and time again for themes, commonalities and differences, particular language used, and for things unsaid. I looked for both surface and deeper meanings. I read and listened to the stories as a whole, then focussed on specific parts, then once again regarded the story as a whole and so on through many iterations. Throughout this time, I went back and forth between the interviews and the literature.

As outlined in the above criteria for consideration when doing interpretive research, I identified the epiphanies in the women's lives and connected them when possible to public issues. I was as faithful as possible to the language, emotions, symbols and images the participants have used in sharing their stories. The narrative helped affirm that I had done so.

I have looked at the way that older women are seen in our society in order to understand the context of the Croning Ceremonies and the forces which came together in

women's lives leading them to taking part in Croning. I also looked at how ritual is represented in my society and culture. I was alert to instances and facets of ritual and transformation found in the women's stories, then put them back together and relocated them in the lived experience.

As the interpreter of the women's interpretations of their lived experience, I have expanded on my previously stated values and understanding of ritual and transformation and outlined the pertinent areas of my own biography which shapes my interpretations.

The main criterion for evaluation of interpretive interactionism is that the person must understand their own story as it has been told. As the researcher, I have accessed and utilized many factors to increase understanding--some or all of which may not be known or available to the person sharing their experience. In the end, the person must still understand what is being said. One of the ways in which I ensured this was, as described above, to create a narrative of each of the interviews and request feedback from the women regarding their narrative.

I thought, as I got closer to finishing this paper, that it would have been wonderful to go back to the women at this stage and again ask for their input. Because this was not part of the plan, I simply needed to be mindful to represent the women in ways which did not usurp or misrepresent their stories. My respect for the women made this easy.

As stated above, I spent much time with the interview tapes and transcriptions and read for particular issues as well as the story as a whole. I also moved back and forth between the interview materials and the work of popular writers and academics who have explored the topics of women and aging, ritual, transformation, epiphanies, the Crone

archetype, and Croning Ceremonies. I also worked with the nursing theory, *Health as Expanding Consciousness* by Newman (1986). As stated earlier, my prime resource for methodology was Denzin's (1989) *Interpretive Interactionism*.

With difficulty, I decided on a path to take with analysis of the interview materials. I identified points of transformation in the narratives then expanded on them and linked them to the phases of *rites de passages* (rites of passage) as outlined by van Gennep (1960), the stages of transition proposed by Bridges (1980,1991) and information about archetypes.

Each day I thought of different information to present and different ways in which to do so. The women who honoured me by taking part in this research have offered a richness of wisdom and knowing which I have had to reluctantly leave untouched. There truly is no end to interpretation.

Chapter Endnote

In this chapter I have shared some of my research process, from selecting a "map" for the journey through to this point. Just as it is difficult to know where anything starts, this journey clearly has no end. I have gone in circles, stopped for some roadside attractions, and met some wonderful people and writers on the way. In the next chapter, I have partially described the women with whom I "travelled". Their narratives follow.

CHAPTER 3

To the extent that it is possible...you must live in the world today as you wish everyone to live in the world to come. That can be your contribution. Otherwise the world you want will never be formed. Why? Because you are waiting for others to do what you are not doing; and they are waiting for you, and so on. The planet goes from bad to worse.

Alice Walker, 1990, p.338

Description of the Co-Participants

The four women who participated in this study ranged in age from 50 to 56 when they took part in their Croning ceremonies. They had each been Croned either three or four years before being interviewed for this thesis. All of the women are Caucasian, educated, thoughtful, busy, creative people. Two grew up in Canada. One woman came to Canada from the United States with her ex-husband to avoid the military draft during the war in Vietnam. Another immigrated to Canada from Europe. For two of the women, English is a second language.

Two women were teachers, although one has now left teaching and gone into spiritual ministry. Two women have social work backgrounds. One is a counsellor at a post-secondary institution and the other works as a clairvoyant healer.

All of the women have been married, although only one is presently in a long term relationship. The participants have all experienced divorce. They are all mothers. Two are grandmothers.

One of the women was raised in the Catholic church but is now involved in a different faith community. Another of the women has a Jewish heritage but was not raised in a religious home. She is now exploring both her Jewish roots and another spiritual path. One of the women was raised in a family with some members who were gifted with

clairvoyance. She is now a practising Wiccan. One woman did not name her religious background, but did say that she had been deeply wounded by it and so, for most of her adult life, she avoided anything to do with religion. She now considers herself spiritual but not religious.

Two of the women learned about Croning through the Amazing Greys. Only one of these women had her Croning ceremony at one of the Amazing Greys gatherings. One of the women learned about Croning through her connection with Wicca. Another learned about Croning through discussions with feminist women friends. All of the women had experience to greater and lesser degrees with ritual and ritual creation prior to their Croning ceremonies. All felt the Croning ceremony was life enhancing.

When they told their stories of Croning, all of the women provided rich context to place the ceremony in their lives. All of the women showed me symbols from their ceremonies, which have continued to be very meaningful for them. Three shared some written parts of their ceremonies--two provided me with transcripts of their rituals. Two women "walked" me through their Croning Rituals by showing me photographs from the day.

Narratives

Miriam's Narrative--Creating a Positive Aging Experience

When she was in her 56th year, Miriam held her Croning ceremony. She had been considering doing this for three years, but as much as she wanted to do the ceremony, she hesitated to be at the centre of so much attention. There were two events which gave the impetus for Miriam to go ahead with her Croning. The first was the trauma of the break up

of Miriam's 26 year marriage. The second was meeting a Passover Seder guest--a friend of her daughter--who was preparing to do her own Croning. Three months later, Miriam was Croned.

For some time, Miriam had been thinking about how she could create a positive aging experience for herself. She was fascinated by the aging process and looked forward to it as another step in her life's journey. In contrast, her husband had great discomfort with even the topic of aging. This was one of the big issues in their relationship.

The ending of the marriage also reshaped her relationships with her grown children. Miriam's son was at university but had always considered the family home his home. That's where he got his mail. When his parents separated, he changed his address and established his own home. Miriam's daughter and her husband and child (Miriam's only grandchild) soon moved to another city for work. Somehow, Miriam feels the move was easier for her daughter because her parents were no longer together. Within three months, Miriam lost her husband, her family as she had known it, and her home. The Croning ceremony was held in the family home just before she left it.

For Miriam, holding her Croning ritual was an act of courage. It is a source of pride for Miriam that she broke through her resistance and gathered women together to create a more positive view of aging--not only for herself but for everyone there. "Since all of us are aging", she reasoned, "we may as well have some fun doing it"!

During her Croning, Miriam also wanted to acknowledge the friends--old and new--who had offered her support during the marriage break up. In the past, Miriam would not have reached out to others, but during this difficult time she did--and she received

tremendous support.

Miriam's daughter was a constant source of encouragement while they worked on the preparations for the Croning. They had enjoyed creating rituals together before, and Miriam was pleased that her daughter was as excited as she was herself about the discoveries made while researching the Crone and Croning.

Honouring rites of passage is important to Miriam. She believes they "help us to be conscious that change has happened, that we're in process, that we're moving". Rites of passage also help us "appreciate subtlety" since many of the changes in life otherwise go almost unnoticed. It's only later that we know a change has happened. When, we can't say.

Miriam feels some regret that she did not mark the adolescent rites of passage for her children, although her son had a rite of sorts on a long bicycle trip with friends and one of their fathers at the age of 14. Miriam's brother went through Bar Mitzvah, the Jewish coming of age celebration for boys. It was not until years later that people in some Jewish sects began to do the Bat Mitzvah for girls so Miriam did not have this experience. Miriam is delighted that one of her aunts went through Bat Mitzvah three years ago at the age of 83!

Miriam makes some parallels between Bat Mitzvah and her Croning ceremony. Years of preparation lead up to both ceremonies. The person being honoured researches a topic of interest and presents a talk on their discoveries. Miriam had a wonderful time with her research and during the time she was presenting information on the Crone and Croning to her gathered friends. She finished her talk by saying, "How each of us sees our own

aging process makes a difference for the world". It is Miriam's intention for herself and her wish for others to have a positive aging experience.

Miriam's Croning ritual was held on a sunny June afternoon on the deck of her home with a beautiful eastern view. It was wonderful to gather all the women together who were special to her--including one or two who only came because they cared about her and would rather have been doing anything else but performing a ritual and celebrating aging.

While much did not go as planned during the ritual, there were many special moments for Miriam. She loved the playfulness and colours of the altar symbols people created from play dough. Her crown of flowers made by a very busy friend touched her deeply--and was also appreciated by a visiting hummingbird. Miriam found the naming of her female lineage very powerful. It was a special day for Miriam that ended after most of the guests had gone home and a few of the planned ritual pieces such as a releasing were done late in the evening with the three or four women who slept over.

The emotional high point of the day was when Miriam's daughter spoke from the heart about how much she valued Miriam and their relationship. It was difficult for Miriam to hear words of praise from all the others. Her daughter's words would have been plenty. She did not want that much attention and she had other things she wanted the group to be able to do. They did not get to some of the things she had planned--including the time set aside for her friends to mark their own previously unmarked rites of passage. This was quite a disappointment for Miriam who had wanted to *share* the time when it ended up mainly just being *her* time.

Points of Transformation Connected with Miriam's Croning

As Miriam points out, rites of passage usually happen after a change has occurred since the change is only recognized in retrospect. In Miriam's case, many changes led up to her Croning. She had become a grandmother and had lost her own mother. Miriam was no longer a wife. Her role with her children had changed. It is impossible to tell when menopause began for Miriam but it was important for her to celebrate the transformation to help her be ever more conscious of the fact that her life is in process.

Interestingly enough, after many years of consideration Miriam decided to go ahead with her Croning in her 56th year. In her research, she discovered that in the Dianic Wiccan tradition "croning ritual occurs when a woman has reached the point in her life when Saturn has returned twice to her natal point, at age 56 ". Whenever she went into menopause, whatever her reason for doing the Croning, this was the right time for Miriam to move ahead.

While she has not thought much about her Croning in the three years since, Miriam knows that she is a Crone. She is increasing in wisdom and is following the path of Elders in many places who are deepening their spiritual lives. Which came first, the ritual or the Crone? It doesn't matter. There has been a transformation acknowledged and this has helped shape Miriam's life.

Within her Croning ceremony came another rite of passage when Miriam's daughter publicly acknowledged her for having been a mother and having "done it well". Perhaps it is important to acknowledge and be acknowledged about our previous roles before we can gracefully step into the next phase of our lives.

Much of the transformation connected with Miriam's Croning ritual came in the preparation for the ceremony, while Miriam was doing her research. Even though she had a background in Women's Studies, Miriam had not paid a lot of attention to women's spirituality. She had not known much about the three aspects of the Goddess embodied in women--the Maiden, Mother, and Crone. Miriam was surprised to learn about the history of the Crone and how women Elders had once been seen as very powerful. This was deeply affirming for Miriam whose intention it is to create her own positive experience of aging and inspire others to do the same.

Another transformation was needed for Miriam to break through her resistance to even do the ceremony. One day she wasn't ready, the next she had confronted her fears and just jumped into organizing her Croning! Once she committed to others, she went ahead. She knows herself as an introvert who doesn't "do parties" and certainly didn't want to be the centre of attention. The transformation didn't end there because all along the way and even to the end of her Croning day, Miriam was working with her issues of control which were being triggered from all directions. A friend was late. People talked too long. Parts of the ritual that she really had wanted didn't happen. However, her wish to publicly set the intention for her own positive aging and to invite others to do the same came along with a sense of responsibility which perhaps had an over-riding effect on her hesitations. This was important for her to do and for others to know about, so she did it.

We have no way of knowing the transformative effect on the women present. At the very least they were offered and heard another view of women's history and were invited to consider creating a positive aging experience for themselves. Emancipation can

begin in this way. Miriam understands that what we do as individuals “makes a difference” or transforms the world. In raising her own consciousness and sharing her new understanding with her circle of friends, she held an intention to “raise the cultural consciousness about the value, beauty, and power of older women”.

Following the Croning, there was some healing of the pain that Miriam was experiencing with the marriage break up. Miriam has embraced her aging process with no one to hinder her. She lives on her own for the first time in her life, has a beautiful waterfront apartment, and is looking forward to her retirement so that she can continue to grow in wisdom and spirit.

Spike’s Narrative--Crossing the Threshold into WOMANhood

On her 56th birthday, Spike celebrated her Croning. It was held at the culmination of a week long workshop on Sacred Doll Making, but the process, in fact, had been set in motion at least several years before. In a life full of rich experiences, the Croning ritual was an important turning point for Spike. From that day on, she has recognized that she is no longer the same person who had been “coming from a little girl place and asking a lot of permission” trying so hard to please others. Until the day of her Croning, Spike had mainly complied with the expectations held for her by family and society. During her Croning ceremony she literally stepped through the threshold into proudly owning her “Womaness” and now claims her power to speak and to do as *she* wants--providing her words and actions hurt no one.

Spike clearly identifies the prime moment of transformation that occurred in her Croning ceremony. As she stood meditatively at the threshold, Spike experienced a surge

and shift of energy in her body, letting her know she was ready to become a Crone. Spike knows that she was a different woman when she crossed the threshold at her Croning, and she hasn't looked back. Evidence of this can be seen in the life choices she has made since that time--among them the decision to enter the ministry at age 58!

Prior to her Croning, Spike had been on a long journey of personal and spiritual deepening. Part of the deepening came from a serious illness associated with two near death experiences. Spike relates that, as much as she would like to have stayed in the "spirit world", she was told she needed to return to her life because she was not yet finished with her work here. She reassessed her life and, among other things, left her life career as a teacher.

Spike continued her personal journey, which took an interesting turn one day in a bookstore where she met Betty Nickerson, the author of *Old and Smart*, who was organizing the first "Amazing Greys" gathering. It was an "engineered meeting by a force greater than the two of us", Spike recounts. She immediately joined Betty in this ground breaking work. It was during this time that Spike first learned about Croning. Although not ready to take part in the Croning rituals herself, Spike helped create the ceremonies for the first two Amazing Greys gatherings. This certainly planted the seed for her own experience of Croning later.

Up to that point in her life, Spike felt that she had very little knowledge of the history of women. Although she had been aware to some degree of the persecution of people--mainly women--named as witches during the Inquisition, it was at the Amazing Greys gathering that Spike learned of the devastation wreaked on women and the numbers

tortured and killed primarily by the Catholic church during the “Burning Times”. It shook her foundations as a woman who had been raised as a French Canadian Catholic.

However, it was not until after her own Croning ritual that Spike began to learn about the history and spirituality of women in a deeper way.

Spike names the Amazing Greys experiences and the Sacred Doll Making workshop held in the week leading up to her Croning as essential elements in creating the depth of change which she underwent during her ritual. Together, they prepared her.

Spike’s life continues to unfold in ways which she never would have foreseen. She finds herself living more and more authentically, sharing her wisdom as a woman of spirit and power and feeling comfortable to recognize and say when she is out of her depth. She “walks her talk” by being actively involved in peace work rather than merely supporting it as a good idea as she once might have done. Spike is also finding a new acceptance by her family of the choices she has made for her life.

When challenged that she would have come to this place in her life without Croning, she admits that it might have happened gradually over the years; but with the act of Croning there was a marking of the moment when things shifted and, for Spike, that day was her 56th birthday--“the starting line”. Spike describes Croning as “the best gift you can give yourself” because it is a time to bring home to yourself that “You are the Source and you are the expression”.

Points of Transformation Connected with Spike’s Croning.

Clearly, Spike had done much personal and spiritual work prior to her Croning ritual. She already had experienced much transformation. Spike had also done the personal

preparation that she needed prior to the Croning. Because she was in her heart *and* her head, absolutely present during the ritual, it impacted her deeply and permanently.

For Spike, simply being in the sacred space created for ritual is transformative. We step off the street and into ritual space, grounding and gathering our fractured selves together--maybe by taking three deep breaths--and we are transformed. The ritual space for her Croning ceremony was prepared with love and creativity by the women who gathered to share the event. Great care had been taken to bring together appropriate gifts and symbols to honour Spike, and a place for safety and authenticity of expression was created by all present. Spike believes everyone present was able to benefit from the transformative nature of being in ritual space.

On the day of her Croning, the Sacred Doll Making workshop had concluded with “Stepping Through the Threshold” as its theme. Prior to crossing the threshold, women were asked to “void whatever aspect” they wanted to release. Spike is absolutely clear that what she released, she has not reclaimed in the years since. She declares, “*It's gone!*”

The energy surge and shift which Spike experienced at the threshold has been described above. There was a knowingness and a body awareness that she was ready and that the time was right to go ahead into the Croning. She stepped across into a new life.

Everyone who attended had the opportunity to offer words of affirmation to Spike which she was able to receive and hear as “the truth” of herself. In turn, Spike shared her appreciation of them and something about her relationship with them. Spike points out that we rarely tell the people in our lives how much they mean to us. To hear about how we value each other and our connections can be transforming. It can build or sustain a sense of

community as well as enhance our vision of self and others.

The naming of her female lineage was also a powerful experience for Spike in which she claimed her place among the women of her family--including her daughter with whom she was estranged at the time. During Spike's Croning, the Sacred Doll Making workshop facilitator presented a puppet show of the Demeter and Persephone myth--a mother-daughter story of love and the grief of their separation. This was very moving to Spike who was touched by the depth of the mother's love for her daughter. It was a matter of great sadness for Spike that her daughter was not present at her Croning. Looking back, Spike realizes that it was the work she did at her Croning which later allowed her to reunite with her daughter. She feels that, if she had not undone her own pattern of approval seeking, her daughter might have remained caught in this damaging heritage. Spike and her daughter are once again a positive and meaningful part of each other's lives. There was, then, transformation for mother and daughter individually, and the healing of their relationship. This all sprang directly from Spike's Croning ceremony.

As mentioned earlier, since her Croning ritual, Spike has become more aware of women's issues and women's spirituality. This awareness has greatly enhanced her work as a guide and mentor. She also has become involved in the ministry and in peace work. Are these signs of Spike's transformation during her Croning ritual, or does the transformation continue, once set in motion and extend from the individual in ever widening circles?

Spike stands as an Elder in her power and wisdom speaking her truth and guiding others in their healing journeys. She is part of the Sisterhood of Croners.

Cynthia's Narrative--Process of Acknowledgment and Clearing
To Make Way for the New

When she was 53, Cynthia took part in a public Croning ritual. This was followed three years later by a private ritual which was not called a Croning but served to deepen Cynthia's identity as a Crone.

For Cynthia, everything is in process--layers and layers of process. One thing leads to another in unexpected ways. Nothing just begins or ends. It's all process, so it's hard to know where the Croning began--and it will never end.

Cynthia feels that the beginning of her personal and spiritual growth as an adult was in her forties when she took the "Context Training" series. As a teen, Cynthia had negative experiences with religion and rejected it. With the "Context Training" Cynthia reconnected with her spirituality, self-honesty and her intuition. She met another woman through their shared interest in the training series. A friendship grew and many years later this woman told Cynthia about the first "Amazing Greys" gathering. It was at the third "Amazing Greys" that Cynthia was Croned.

Cynthia approached her Croning with some apprehension. This was primarily due to a sense of the unknown, but there was also some awareness of the ritual being held around Halloween and being perhaps connected with witches. Cynthia had seen the National Film Board film, "The Burning Times" and knew a little about Wicca but she knew very little about what to expect from the Croning ritual.

As she prepared for her Croning, Cynthia was wavering about whether or not she should go ahead. One day, she was sitting quietly, making a coat for the ceremony and felt as if she was being "wrapped in angel's wings". At that moment, Cynthia knew that this

was the right thing for her to do.

During her Croning, Cynthia found herself doing a review of her accomplishments in each life stage. She was very proud of what she saw. The acknowledgment of herself was very important and touched Cynthia deeply. With this came both a sense of emptiness and of completeness and fulfilment. At this time, Cynthia also had a very strong awareness of being initiated into what felt like a “Mystic Society”.

Her Croning opened her ritual life. Cynthia had done ritual before but not like this. She now does ritual daily, loves ritual and looks forward to it. Cynthia is an artist and thinks in symbols and metaphors. She points out that art, symbols and metaphors go hand in hand with ritual.

For many years before her Croning, Cynthia related particularly to the butterfly as the metaphor for transformation. The butterfly was so delicate yet so resilient and strong as it went through its life stages. Now, she feels that a good, full bodied wine is the metaphor to which she best relates.

While Cynthia was now a Crone she did not really own the identity until some years later when she did another ritual--a ritual of “Sprouting Seed” to mark new beginnings and a time of letting go of the old and making room for the new. There were two things that inspired Cynthia to do this private ceremony. First, she attended the Croning of a friend and found that she renewed her sense of identity as a Crone. This identity, Cynthia says, “comes in waves”. Second, she was working with the Goddess Amulets and drew one which indicated she needed to say “goodbye” to her old self and move on, *and* she needed to celebrate this with friends. Since the message of this amulet “spoke” to her, Cynthia

followed through and had her private ritual.

Prior to the gathering, Cynthia took a long time to review her life and say “goodbye” to the parts of herself which she was letting go to make room for new experiences. She wrote a letter and burned it. For Cynthia, physical action, such as burning the words on a paper, shifts things at an energetic level. Cynthia feels this energetic shift is not merely symbolic but is, in fact, effective in creating actual change.

Her second ceremony was much more intense spiritually and emotionally than had been the Croning. In this ceremony there was an ownership of her identity as a Crone to a depth she had not yet experienced. In speaking of this, Cynthia indicates by gesture that this ownership was felt and resides in her heart.

As her friends spoke to her during this ceremony, they created and passed a ball of energy between them. Streamers of energy flowed as they spoke about what Cynthia was saying “goodbye” to and what parts of herself she was keeping. This experience contributed to an inward deepening and at the same time an outward spiritual expansion for Cynthia. There is still a sense of stepping into the unknown--but, she points out, we do this every day.

With her Croning, Cynthia has moved from wishing for a mentor for herself to being a mentor for others. She has acknowledged herself as a powerful woman and prefers to refer to the knowledge and experience which she shares as an Elder with others as “knowing” rather than “wisdom”. As a woman of power, Cynthia is also taking charge of her life and health. With Croning, she is becoming more assertive.

Ritual, Cynthia says, is about honouring herself and giving “credibility to my being”.

In ritual space, we nurture each other, are good to ourselves and express love for each other and the Earth. We don't need lots and lots of people in our lives, but instead we need healthy beings who are close and nurturing with each other. Cynthia uses gardening as a metaphor for ritual. With weeding to make room for healthy plants and a good dose of fertilizer (ritual) we have growth.

Cynthia says that ritual serves to increase our pleasure in the world, to have fun and play. The adornment of ourselves and the ritual space is a creative act of pleasure as well.

Ritual makes our lives meaningful then takes us across the transitions, easing us into the next stage of life. Transformation comes with subtle, infinitesimal changes. Ritual helps create and mark those changes.

Points of Transformation Connected with Cynthia's Croning.

Much transformation had taken place in Cynthia's life prior to her Croning. Because the Croning is part of a process which has no ending, it is impossible to name with any certainty or finality the transformation linked with this ritual.

There was transformation in Cynthia from being a woman who was wavering about taking part in the ritual to the woman who was assured that she needed to go ahead. Something shifted in her--whether from an outside spiritual source or an internal source.

In the Croning ritual, Cynthia experienced a deep personal acknowledgement of her accomplishments to that point in her life. With this acknowledgment came a new sense of appreciation of herself, completion and a clearing of "space" for new experiences.

There was a sense of having been initiated into a Mystic Society during her Croning. The Sisterhood of Crones is growing, and with this growth comes the support

and increasing knowledge shared by the community of Crones. Cynthia began to take on this new identity as a Crone and became a member of a community which is largely unknown to her but to whom she is energetically connected.

With the second ritual, Cynthia took much deeper ownership of her identity as a Crone. She acknowledged herself as a powerful woman and has become a mentor in her community. She is increasingly assertive for her own well-being.

Through Croning, Cynthia has been encouraged to develop a richly creative ritual life. Ritual is part of her daily routine. She now works energetically to shift reality. I believe Cynthia works at such a subtle and refined level of spiritual energy that it is difficult to capture points of transformation, yet this may be the most powerful work of all. Cynthia is an artist and perhaps her life, which she shapes and transforms energetically, is the most beautiful of her works of art.

HP's Narrative--From Mother to Crone: Embodying the Crone Energy

On her 50th birthday, HP held her Croning ritual. Because she saw this as a very important rite of passage, HP wanted to have a large celebration and invited "pretty well everybody" she knew in the community. Sixty people, men and women, from all ages and walks of life took part in the ritual. HP is Wiccan and usually has the honour of being the High Priestess during the rituals in which she is involved. When inviting people to her celebration, HP asked only that the people attending were "Pagan friendly". Because inclusivity is a high value for HP, care was taken to provide people with an order of ritual and explanations of what was going on during the Croning. Words to the Goddess songs used in the ceremony were also included .

For HP, marking rites of passage gives meaning to life events. If we don't celebrate them, they just go past and the importance of them is lost. While HP was aware that she was stepping into the Crone stage of her life, she was very clear that she was not going to be instantly wise. Instead, with her large community of friends as witnesses, HP honoured that she was moving beyond the Mother stage of her life and was now adding into her life the energies of a young Crone who would grow in wisdom. HP also saw this as an opportunity to normalize for others the transition into menopause--a subject no one used to talk about and which still makes many people in our society uncomfortable. Because she is healthy, vibrant, and fit, HP loves to upend the current societal image of menopausal women.

HP is sad to have missed marking the adolescent rites of passage in her own children's lives. Her own "first blood" was surrounded by messages of secrecy. When HP was growing up, menstruation was considered "dirty" and "nasty" and needed to be kept hidden. She sees this as foolishness when over half the world's population menstruates. HP will not miss her granddaughter's rites of passage.

HP spent a great deal of time and effort, within her busy life, preparing for her Croning. As she has done before, HP was leading the way for her friendship group. As a 50 year old she was a relatively young Crone and ahead of the other women in her circle in reaching this life stage. HP had only taken part in one other Croning ceremony prior to her own, and she was eager to learn about Croning from the books she read and from contacts she made with other Crones.

When HP prepares for a ritual, she researches it very thoroughly. In fact, she had

been gathering information about Croning for some time prior to her Croning. Because she is a thorough organizer and the person most experienced with ritual in her community, HP took great care to write out the ceremony for those who had agreed to enact ritual roles. Three women embodied the aspects of the triple Goddess--Maiden, Mother and Crone. Others helped with the purification, cast the sacred circle, led singing and chanting, spirit channelled, and toned with the Tibetan bowls. Everyone but the young woman representing the Maiden took creative license with HP's words, bringing into the ritual their own unique ways of being.

An unplanned event in HP's Croning ritual was one of the most powerful emotional points. On the morning of her Croning, HP decided to give her daughter the Mother Goddess pendant which she had always worn. During the ceremony, HP spent time at three thresholds which represented the three stages of her life--Maiden, Mother, and Crone. Before leaving the Mother threshold, HP took her Mother pendant off and gave it to her daughter, now a young mother. In her pocket, HP had a new pendant--the Crone Goddess of Willendorf who has large, "saggy" breasts.

When planning her Croning ritual, HP had not foreseen the outpouring of love and affirmation she received on that day from those who participated. This was shown in many ways. People spoke from their hearts during the ceremony telling HP how much she means to them and how they value the work she is doing. They also went all out in bringing food and wine for the gourmet vegetarian potluck that followed the ritual. Finally, there were some beautiful gifts given to HP, including a bouquet of fifty long stemmed red roses from her students-- some of whom had very little money at the time. HP was deeply touched by

all of this.

Over the past three years since her Croning, while HP continues to embody the energies of the Maiden and Mother, she recognizes that she is coming more and more into her wisdom as a Crone. She takes great pleasure in sharing with others the things she has learned which have made a positive difference in her own life.

Points of Transformation Connected with HP's Croning

HP believes that, because she is very experienced in ritual, she personally went through very little transformation during the actual Croning. She feels that, if there was a prime point of transformation, it came while she was doing research for the ceremony. What HP describes as a big "AH HA!" was in reading the stories of older women telling about what they, in retrospect, would have done differently in their lives. As a relatively young Crone, HP and her partner have taken these things to heart and do not plan to look back later on in their lives wishing they had travelled or done other things which were important to them.

To HP, transformation is something she is constantly going through. Simply put, it's change. HP measures the change that has come for her with Cronehood by "living the truths and the wisdom" which she has learned thus far.

It was HP's intent to mark the rite of passage into her Crone years very well. While she had already begun to take on the roles and energies of the Crone aspect of the Triple Goddess prior to her Croning ritual, going through the rite of passage was a way of celebrating with a community of witnesses the importance for her of this time. HP describes two points in the Croning which most clearly capture the change through which

she was moving. The first was described earlier, in which HP took off her Mother Goddess pendant and gave it to her daughter. The second was when she knelt to be crowned and named “young Crone”. The power of these moments is conveyed by the description of everyone present being moved to tears.

The witnesses for this ritual were also active participants in the smudging with sage to clear their auric fields, self-blessing with Holy water from the Glastenbury well, and later in raising the Cone of Power. Each of these activities was potentially transformative at an energetic level for all who attended.

HP asked the Goddess to bless and bestow the honour of Priestess on another woman so this woman could be High Priestess during HP’s Croning ritual. HP’s ceremonial sword and rope were leant to the woman. This apparently temporary transformation could be very important in the lives of HP and the women with whom she does ritual. HP has found it tiring to be the person expected to create and lead rituals, and she is pleased that others are beginning to share in this work.

A sacred circle was cast invoking the four directions. In this circle, between the worlds, is a place of “magick” where dualities do not exist. Being between the worlds is a transformation of consciousness, and reality can be created or changed in this place.

The Cone of Power raised by the group served to shift their vibrational energy and, when grounded, blessed the land on which the ritual was held. This was transformational for the participants and the land.

Prior to the ceremony, HP had written her wishes for her Cronehood. These were placed in the Tibetan bowl and while the bowl was being sounded, the energy of the bowl

vibrated through the wishes, sending them out along the vibrational frequency in the same way that a prayer cylinder or prayer bells work.

With her Croning ritual, HP challenged the invention of male dominant cultures of the “*ugly* and old woman/witch” which served to “dilute their power and wisdom as well as our own fear of death”. She replaced the negative stereotype with another vision: that of old women as “satin skinned, softly wrinkled, silver-haired, and awe inspiring in their truth and dignity”.

HP speaks of how repeated ritual builds in strength energetically. As more women hold Croning ceremonies, not only the power of the ritual itself is increased but also the positive image of aging women is created and strengthened. This is transformative.

Looking back on marking her third stage of life with a Croning, HP finds that she uses the title “Crone” a lot. She says, “Now that I’m a Crone....” and “Since my Croning....” and “With Cronehood comes....”. HP relates that she says this proudly and definitely says it more than she would say, “As a Clairvoyant Healer and Spiritual Counsellor....”.

Perhaps the most important transformation to come from HP’s Croning ritual is that she is being prepared to join many others in “a very special place” in the “earth changes”. By the year 2013, HP envisions that she and her sister Crones “will be able to guide Gaia and her human inhabitants into an amazing new era of global wholeness and personal health”.

Chapter Endnote

In this chapter I have introduced the women who helped inform my understanding

of ritual and transformation. I have told their story of Croning and have identified some of the possible points of transformation connected with their Croning rituals. Clearly, all of the women had undergone much transformation prior to engaging in the ritual process. Without transformation, they likely would not have been led to take part in their Croning rituals.

Collateral Transformation

Before I leave this chapter, I need to acknowledge the importance of what I have come to think of as ‘collateral transformation’. When I began this thesis project it was unexpected that I would find myself giving consideration not only to the transformation of the women being Croned but also the possible transformation of the other ritual participants and to that of the earth. In this, I took the lead from the Crones who expressed deep interest in the extended transformative influence of their ceremonies on others, the earth, and the future. I was reminded that everything is interconnected.

Although, within the context of this study, I have focussed on the experiences of the four women who shared their stories of Croning, the collateral transformation of the other participants and of the earth has been very much on my mind. “Collateral” may not be the correct word because I cannot regard any transformation achieved as secondary or of lesser importance than the ones sought. However, the word does imply having been in the range of the magic which was afoot. Hence, rather than “collateral damage” as in warfare, I have proposed the term “collateral transformation”. To expand on this for a moment; I silently renew my marriage vows--first taken 26 years ago--whenever I attend weddings. I take this time not only to offer support and blessings to the newly married

couple but also to reflect on and appreciate my own marriage relationship.

Having honoured the collateral transformation connected with these Croning rituals, I will move on. In the next chapter, I will look more deeply at the transformation experiences of the Croners themselves.

CHAPTER 4

Welcome to the sisterhood of Crones. Welcome to the honour only time bestows. Stand firmly on our good green Earth. Love her as Mother who nurtures all. Speak the wisdom of your years. Enhance the good as you know it. Offer guidance from experience. Live lightly on the Earth. Raise your spirits to the sky. Wear your crown of time with pride, with joy, with love. These years will manifest the best you have been and all you will become. Welcome. Take your place in the sisterhood of Crones. Blessed be.

Betty Nickerson, Certificate of Croning from the Amazing Greys
(used with permission)

Themes of Transformation

There are two overarching themes of transformation that spring for me from these interviews: The importance of Women's Rites of Passage, and Embodying the Crone. These are reflected in the titles I have given the narratives: "Creating a Positive Aging Experience", "Crossing the Threshold into WOMANhood", "Process of Acknowledgement and Clearing to Make Way for the New", and "From Mother to Crone, Embodying the Crone Energy".

Croning is a rite of passage *and* an opportunity for a woman to consciously and intentionally embody the Crone archetype. A rite of passage could certainly be held by any woman wanting to recognize that she has moved into the next stage of her life and, without doubt, a woman could chose to embody the Crone without a ritual celebration. However, there is a potency to the particular blend of purposes found in Croning. The women who took part in this study had the impetus and courage to step into this powerful and largely unknown territory.

I asked myself, "Why did these women chose to do Croning rituals?", given all the ways in which a woman could respond to aging in our society and at this time in history.

No one made them do it. It certainly wasn't expected of them. In fact a few of their family members openly expressed that they regarded Croning as "the devil's work". Some of the women also had to overcome their own resistance to doing the Croning rituals yet they were compelled to take part in them.

I would answer that these women were led and inspired to take part in rituals of Croning because of an intrinsic urge described by Shorter (1987) which leads women to enact rites of passage. I also cannot help but wonder about inspiration from the Crone archetype Herself. What experiences does a woman have to have, what conversations, what books need she come across, what dreams need she dream.... to lead her to Croning? What needs to be going on in the world and what critical mass of women--particularly older women--needs to be alive on the earth and aware of the Crone for Her to "return"?

I will explore some of these factors in the following discussion. Because I have found it challenging to separate consideration of the rites of passage through which the women were initiated as Crones and their embodiment of the Crone archetype, at times the two themes will intertwine. Before discussing the themes, I offer some background information on rites of passage, transitions, and archetypes. I also touch again on epiphanies as points of transformation.

Background Information

Rites of Passage

Every one of the participants spoke of the importance of rites of passage and the lack of them in our society apart from the standard ones of graduation, weddings, celebration of new babies/parenthood, retirement parties, and, finally, funerals. Two of the

women said that we have gone overboard on weddings and have failed to celebrate the other events in our lives. Furthermore, when we do rituals, so often we simply go through the motions of what's expected rather than what's important to us (Imber-Black & Evans, 1998). As one woman suggested, instead of having "corny" wedding showers, "Let's share stories. Let's share good wishes rather than playing stupid games and winning prizes. And watching her open her Tupperware and going 'Ooooh and Ahhh'."

Three women expressed sadness that they had not experienced coming of age celebrations and that they had missed doing this for their own children as well. There was expression of equal concern with the lack of rites of passage for both young women and young men, however, there was recognition that older men, not women, needed to initiate the young men. With great intensity, one woman stated that she would not miss the rites of passage for her grandchildren.

Purpose of Rites of Passage

The rites of passage referred to above by the participants, and the ones most often described in the literature, are those marking puberty, however these ceremonies and rituals encompass all life changes from birth to death. The term itself was coined by van Gennep (1960) in the early 1900s. He describes *rites de passage* as "...ceremonies whose essential purpose is to enable the individual to pass from one defined position to another which is equally well defined" (p.3). van Gennep states that the purpose behind these rituals is to decrease the level of disturbance to individuals and their society caused by significant life change.

van Gennepe's Subcategories of Rites of Passage

The essential qualities of all life transitions, van Gennepe (1960) said, are the same and, therefore, the detail and content of every *rite de passage* tends to be “at least analogous, if not identical” (p.3). van Gennepe proposed three subcategories of *rites de passages* : “rites of separation, transition rites, and rites of incorporation” (p.11). While every one of these aspects is probably present during the enactment of all rites of passage, their prominence in the ceremony will change according to the purpose of the ritual. For example, rites of separation are most prominent in funerals, rites of transition in initiations, and rites of incorporation in weddings.

Preliminal, Liminal, and Postliminal Rites

In a complete rite of passage, there will be “preliminal rites (rites of separation), liminal rites (rites of transition), and postliminal rites (rites of incorporation)” (p.11). Turner, (1969) explains that *limen* is Latin for threshold (p.94). In ritual, then, one steps across the threshold into ritual space where nothing is as it was, nothing is as it seems and all possibility is present. As Driver (1998) states, “ritual, religion, and liberative action...all construct alternative worlds...Different from ordinary life, they move in a kind of liminal space, at the edge of, or in the cracks between, the mapped regions of what we like to call ‘the real world’ (p.80).

Bridges' Stages of Life Transitions

In his work on the stages of life transitions Bridges (1980, 1991), speaks of “Endings”, the “Neutral Zone”, and “New Beginnings”. These correlate with the three stages of rites of passage: The preliminal experience or death (actual or symbolic), the

liminal or threshold experience, and a rebirth or postliminal experience.

Bridges states that all transitions begin with an ending, a type of death. He describes four aspects of the “natural ending experience: disengagement, disidentification, disenchantment, and disorientation” (1980, p.92). Disengagement is described by Bridges as the separation of a person “from the familiar place in the social order” (p.92). All the ordinary things of life are gone for the time being. Disidentification happens when people lose “ways of self-definition” (p.98). Disenchantment comes when we realize that the things we thought to be true no longer are. Disorientation is described by Bridges as a loss of a “sense of which way is up and which way is down; ...a sense of which way is forward and which way is backward” (p.102).

Ritual is intended to safely move a person through transition from Endings to New Beginnings as the person makes the adjustment to a new way of being in the world. Ritual also serves to delineate the full gamut of changed relationships which result from the transformation of a single person: Self with self, self with other, self with Source, self with the Earth....and all the relationship changes created by collateral transformation.

Changed Relationships with Self and Other

As Shorter (1987) states,

Perhaps all experience of ritual is initiatory to a greater or lesser degree but rites of initiation are remarkable for recognition and incorporation of a new relationship between spirit and body as well as society and person. Within their circumscribed space the initiand safely undergoes the often terrifying transformation from image to likeness...Ritual is the natural, necessary and transitional carrier of psychological process...It works therapeutically in the best sense since it relieves, releases, and carries psychic tension during the period of transformation when the image of the formed confronts that of the unformed and the individual is impelled to move toward the yet-to-be-formed...(p.43)

In this quote, Shorter (1987) speaks of image becoming likeness. “Likeness”, she says, “is consciousness of image and its embodiment. *Image* is archetypal and by way of its archetypal promptings excites and invites, in fact, insists upon a personal manifestation of itself.” (p.40). This would mean that the women who participated in this study responded to the inspiration of the Crone archetype and embodied that image as likeness. This is not merely a process of imitation. The level to which an image/archetype is embodied depends on how willing, perceptive and able a person is to take it on. The form in which a woman expresses the image/archetype of the Crone as likeness is uniquely hers.

Archetypes

In describing an efficacious rite of passage experienced by one of her patients, Shorter (1987) says, “though essential to the end, the rite did not achieve the effect (for there was a lasting and effective change in her person); rather, it appears that the image being archetypal, was itself capable of bringing about the effect that it pre-figured” (p.40). Shorter goes on to explain, “the image is a constellation of all meanings essential to the revelation of an archetypal pattern” (p.46). It is not the rite alone but the rite prompted or inspired by the image/archetype and the rite enacted which leads to transformation through the embodiment--the likeness--of the image/archetype.

What is an archetype? It seems important to know in case we should suddenly find our lives turned up-side-down by the siren call of an archetype. Woodman (1985) warns that “the world of the archetype is now an open market for the general populace without any ritual containment. If we are blindly living out an archetype, we are not containing our own life” (p.20).

Jung (1964) viewed archetypes as “archaic remnants” or “primordial images” found in the collective unconscious (p.57). These patterns, Jung says, “manifest themselves in fantasies and often only reveal themselves by symbolic images”. Furthermore, they “reproduce themselves in any time or in any part of the world” even without contact between peoples (p.58). Lopez, Pazer and Schwecke (1997) speak of archetypes as “energy patterns” and “universal themes we all play out” . They can be “viewed as past, present, or future alternative realities” (p.9-1). Bolen (1985) states that “Myths, and fairytales are expressions of archetypes, as are many images and themes in dreams.....As preexistent patterns, they influence how we behave and how we react to others” (p.15). Another writer has stated that “As an unmanifest abstraction, an archetype cannot be known concretely, but it can be apprehended intuitively” (Vaughan, 1995, p.210).

Bolen (1985) explains that we recognize the behaviours of the Gods and Goddesses because we hold their archetypal patterns in our collective unconscious. She suggests that, “All the goddesses are potential patterns in the psyches of all women, yet in each individual woman some of these patterns are activated (energized or developed) and others are not” (p.26). She goes on to explain that “archetypal patterns (which are universal)” become “activated archetypes (which are functioning in us)” depending on the “combined effect of a variety of interacting elements--the woman’s predisposition, family and culture, hormones, other people, unchosen circumstances, chosen activities, and stages of life” (p.26). Rather like a seed idea, an archetype may grow into expression in the right circumstances.

Epiphany/Transformation Experiences of Coparticipants

The right circumstances can be precipitated by an experience of epiphany. While Denzin (1989) whose four types of epiphanies are described earlier in this paper, seems to be referring mainly to negative epiphany experiences, I believe that the women who took part in this study have had both positive and negative experiences of epiphany and transformation which brought them to the point of Croning. Some of these experiences are rooted in the biographies of the women. Some are a response to historical social structures. I say this believing biography and historical social structures can't be separated.

Clearly, there is an individual process of epiphany and transformation which includes a unique blend of the woman's life experience and situation prior to the ritual, her preparation for the ritual, her experience of the ritual itself, and the way her life unfolds following the ritual. Each of the women experienced her ritual differently. Some were more immediately and profoundly affected than others. One woman experienced her Croning as *the* turning point into a whole new way of being in the world. She hasn't looked back. Others have experienced a slower deepening over time of their identity as Crones, Wise Old Women.

It was sometimes difficult for the women to find language to express their experience of ritual. For instance when one woman was asked how she knew she was ready to step forward and be Croned, she could only say "I just knew".

In fact, the decision to be Croned may not be so much choice as compulsion. As Shorter (1987) succinctly says, "In a sense, initiation offers very little choice; rather, it

announces itself when its time has arrived” (p.42). This is not in the realm of the logical and as such it is difficult to articulate. Without exception though, the women provided rich descriptive detail of their rituals, the context surrounding their Cronings and their experience of transformation as they understood it.

To the Threshold and Beyond

I will now take a look at the stages of the Rites of Passage experienced by the women who took part in this study. I will look at the preliminal, liminal and post-liminal phases of the Croning rituals of the participants remembering that everything is in process and it is a difficult if not impossible thing to say when a process begins or ends.

Preliminal Phase

This phase consists of everything that has gone before the actual step into the liminality of ritual space and time. It is impossible to say for any of the women where the whole thing started but everything in their lives moved them to this place of approaching Croning. Having recognized this, it is useful to look at the preliminal stage as a more defined space in time which marks the ending and separation from life as a woman has known it. There is a symbolic death which will be followed by a rebirth. However, it is not as linear as that. The preliminal, liminal, and postliminal seem to play within each stage, circling back and reappearing somewhere else - a small death here, a large rebirth there followed by new beginnings which contain birth and death...

Participant's Coming of Age Rites

Earlier, I related the sadness of the participants that they had not been honoured with many rites of passage. If anything the “puberty ritual” experienced by at least three of

the women consisted of having messages bestowed upon them of secrecy and distaste surrounding their menarche. One woman said when she started her “moon times” she was told, “Don’t tell Dad!” Another said her mother took her downstairs near the furnace and gave her some money saying cryptically, “In case you need it”. There were some tears shed when women told these stories. Sadly, they were not honoured as young women and did not have the power or knowledge to do so themselves. Decades later, coming into menopause, they had both the power and knowledge to mark their important rite of passage.

The Next Right Thing

For HP and Cynthia, Croning was clearly the next right step. HP was more sure of this than Cynthia. While they had been through much in life, the shift into menopause was the obvious ending which led to their Croning. The change in self-definition from being a fertile woman to a menopausal woman is met with disidentification no matter how accepting a woman is.

The participants in this study were raised in a time when menopause was an even more hidden topic than menstruation, and they have stood up in their Croning rituals and told the world that they not only used to menstruate but that they have now ceased menstruation. That this should be news in a world where over half the people are women is a matter of amusement to some Crones. As HP said, “Hey!...I’ve got another half of my life to go and it’s going to be menopause and post-menopause time. So you may as well get used to it.”

I had expected to hear more about menopause from the women, but there were

only brief references to it and then only mention of minor inconveniences like “hot flashes” and memory lapses. I found that the participants were focussed much more on the present and future than the past. If any of the women had a difficult time with menopause, she did not communicate it. My guess is that the positive way in which these women chose to view their aging made a great difference in the way they experienced menopause.

Knowing it *is* the next right thing.

Cynthia and Miriam spoke of points of change just before their Cronings. Cynthia was quietly sewing a coat to wear at her Croning and was “wavering” about whether she should go through with the ritual when she experienced a sense of being wrapped in “angel’s wings”. She wonders if it was her mother’s spirit which offered her such warm reassurance. After this, she says “I *knew* I was on the right track”. Miriam had held off for years doing a Croning ritual because she simply didn’t want that much attention to be focussed on herself. A turning point came, perhaps during a conversation with another woman who was to be Croned, and Miriam committed to doing it. In her regular fashion, once she had made up her mind, she just jumped into getting things organized.

Cast Out from the Ordinary.

As well as being in menopause, Spike and Miriam were, more literally, cast out of their everyday lives. Spike had survived two near death experiences which led her to reassess her whole life. Miriam’s husband of 26 years turned her world up-side-down by leaving her.

The Burning Times: A New World View

Aside from the obvious impetus for Croning, every one of the women, to greater or

lessor degrees, had been challenged to see their place in the world as women in new ways. At the Amazing Greys gatherings, Cynthia and Spike had learned of the "Burning Times" when an estimated 9 million women were tortured and killed as witches over a period of 300 years. Older women who were helpers and healers, or who were in any way outspoken or eccentric, were the first to be burnt at the stake (Bolen, 1991). It was shocking for Cynthia and Spike--as it is to any woman--to hear of this part of women's history which had been so suppressed. It was not until Miriam was doing the research for her Croning that she learned of the extent of the cruelties of these times. She too was shocked. HP had been exposed earlier to this information through Wiccan writers. It was, to coin a term from the 1960s, a consciousness raising experience to realize what had been done to women in the name of religion and how little women knew about it. We are never far from those times. This knowledge, for each of the women, was a point of transformation which, I believe, had direct connection with their enactment of the ritual of Croning.

Transformation Through Preparation for Ritual

The preparation in the preliminal phase was key for all of the women and especially for Miriam and HP. As Miriam was preparing the talk that she would present during her ceremony, she discovered much new information. While she is a feminist and well read on the women's issues, she had not before paid much attention to women's spirituality and she found herself particularly absorbed by the history of the Crone. Miriam identifies her time of learning in preparation for her Croning as an important point of transformation for herself.

HP also read extensively in her preparations for her Croning. Being a relatively

young Crone who, at age 50, is ahead of most of her age mates in reaching menopause, she wanted to learn more about women and aging. She found herself deeply touched by stories of women in their eighties telling what they would do differently if they had their life to do over. This is *the* point of transformation which HP identified as being connected with her Croning. She says, “I decided at that moment to live my life to the fullest in whatever way that meant...I’m not going to be 80 and wish I would have done something differently”.

HP and Miriam took a “hands on” approach to their Croning rituals. They researched and fully scripted their ceremonies. They put much thought into the way they wanted their rituals to go and what they wanted to say and do. Spike and Cynthia chose to leave the planning in the hands of other women. Cynthia was Croned at one of the Amazing Greys gatherings along with many other women. Even though she did not have a part in creating her Croning, it deeply satisfied her ritual sense. Spike trusted her friends to create a celebration for her which she knew would be done in a spirit of respect. Her only stipulations were that they couldn’t cover her in mud and she wouldn’t go naked. Spike’s friends rose to the occasion with great care, beauty and creativity--and no mud!

Gathering the symbols for ritual.

All of the rituals described to me were full to overflowing with colour and symbol. There was so much intentionality in everything that was included-- from the candles and music to the flowers and food. It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss all of the symbols. Because an essential part of Croning is the symbol of the crown I will discuss this aspect of the symbolism expressed, then will touch on such things as clothing for the ritual and the myriad other important details.

Crowns for Crones.

As Miriam scripted in her ceremony: “It was the custom, in ancient times, for the priestesses to wear headdresses, a garment of power that was later taken away from them and given to the priests....We reclaim the crown, symbol of power, and place it on Miriam’s head, remembering the relationship of power between the word Crown and the honourable title, Crone”.

Cynthia created her own crown, “a band with suns and stars and so on”. HP’s partner had a crown made for her of silver with a crescent moon on its back, horns pointing upward and flanked by purple semi-precious stones. Spike, who had left the celebration in her friends’ hands, was presented with three different crowns--one for each stage of her life. The first was made of papier maché and dried roses, the second of fresh flowers, “all delicate little baby roses”, and the third crown was not described. Miriam had asked a friend to make her crown. She says, “I do remember it being very moving that my friend, who is a very busy woman, had gotten it together...she came with this portable ice chest with this flower wreath in it. It was just very moving. I felt very blessed”. Later, while Miriam was wearing her crown, a hummingbird came to sip from the flowers.

Ceremonial clothing.

All of the women took care with the clothing they wore for their rituals. Cynthia sewed a coat “with stars and moons”, Spike borrowed a special jacket from a friend, Miriam found a brightly coloured muumuu, and HP found a dark blue dress on which she painted silver spirals. Miriam and HP both shopped at a thrift store. Without great expense they were able to adorn themselves for their Cronings. There is a sense of play and

impermanence when the women describe their ritual clothing. These clothes were not to be worn outside of ritual space.

Candles, colours...

Much thought was put into the setting for each of the rituals and the symbols to be used. Candles, streamers, flowers, and balloons in colours representing the Maiden, Mother, and Crone were used to create the intended atmosphere and to focus attention on the work at hand. Each of the Croning ceremonies was so different yet so rich in colour, texture, sight, and sound--not to mention food.

Cleansing and purification.

Cleansing and purification led up to the liminal stage in three of the Croning rituals. The participants were offered the opportunity to smudge with burning sage. As HP explains, "It's a way of clearing the energy of any debris that you may have in your Aura." The energy of the unified field discussed earlier, moves in and around us. The layers of energy closest to the body are known in some circles as the aura. Everything manifest comes into form from energy and returns back to energy. With intention, we manifest from Source everything to meet our needs on this life walk. Energy is meant to flow through us and around us in a continually flowing stream from Source and back again to Source. However, it can become blocked and stagnant and we may retain old energy patterns in our bodies and auric fields. This energetic debris can manifest as illness unless it is cleared away. Smudging also ensures that participants come into ritual space free of "whatever ordinary consciousness still clings to the person from the world outside the ceremony" (Hammerschlag & Silverman, 1997).

In another form of ritual cleansing, Spike thought about the things she wanted to release before her Croning, put it all down on paper and threw it in a “waste basket”. When asked if she had ever reclaimed what she had released, Spike exclaimed, “**NO!** *It’s gone!*” This, too, is transformation.

Smudging was followed by self-blessing at HP’s Croning as participants used Holy Water from the well at Glastenbury to anoint each of their chakras (major energy centres of the body). The water is thought to carry the energy of the holy place from whence it came. The energy of Glastenbury would shift the energy of the individual’s auric field as it touched into each of their chakras. The anointing of each chakra was done with an invocation of blessing. Words are a particular form of energy which carry power. They are not only self-efficacious in affirming a state of balance and well-being but also send our intention into the unified field which is the Source of all.

Liminal Phase

Then the threshold was approached. *Everything* had led to this. Even as the women entered the liminal phase, there were endings necessary to make way for the new.

Making Way for the New

HP spoke poignantly of leaving behind her identity as a mother and passing a symbol of motherhood, her pendant, to her daughter. With a slight teariness, Cynthia shared how important it was for her to have the time in her ritual to reflect back on her previous life stages. She says, “I *really* looked back on my life”. This was followed by a sigh. Then she went on to speak of the sense of pride she had in acknowledging her accomplishments as a young girl and a mother--especially that she had raised “two

wonderful, wonderful human beings” as a single parent. A high point for Miriam in her ritual was when her daughter, then a new mother, spoke of how good a mother Miriam had been.

This life stage review of the maiden and mother aspects of their lives was a part of every one of the Croning ceremonies. Rather than leaving behind those parts of themselves, the women seemed to be preparing to reincorporate them within their new identity of Crone. As HP scripted in her ceremony, “You are no longer a maiden, but always Maiden, filled with blissful, carefree, poetic energies. You are no longer a mother but ever Mother, abundant with creative, supportive, life-giving energies. You are now, and all the rest of your days will be Crone, woman of wholeness, woman of wisdom, she who knows death as well as life, impeccable action as well as spontaneous vitality”. The Crones kept the positive aspects of themselves as maiden and mother with their particular strengths and accomplishments and, at the same time, let go of other aspects which were holding them back, as one woman said, “from becoming fully actualized”. While I had thought that the major move for all of the women would be from mother to Crone, two of the four women felt they most needed to let go of the approval seeking little girl part of them before they could move on into Cronehood. I wonder how differently this would have gone if they had been honoured with rites of passage at other points in their lives.

Crossing the Threshold

Then came the moment when the women reached, then crossed the threshold to be Croned. Miriam recalls a moment of “being tempted to silliness” when she thought she could still call the whole thing off and just have a good party. What carried her through

was her seriously playful or playfully serious intention to set the tone for a positive aging experience for herself and to invite the women in her life to also chose this for themselves.

The novice and the young Crone.

Miriam recalls feeling “humbled” and “like a novice” as she was crowned and “welcomed into the circle” of Crones by another Crone. She felt “very open. Kind of exposed, vulnerable, but strong.” The Croning, she says, “meant that I was supposed to be becoming wise”.

On the day of HP’s Croning, she was calm, cool and collected--much as she had been at her wedding years earlier. When she knelt to be crowned and named “young Crone”, though, she and everybody else was “in tears”. The moment was “absolutely incredible” and was a “wonderful experience”! HP was very aware that “it’s not like I’m all of a sudden a wise old woman but I am taking that step. Her intention for her Croning was to mark “ the first step” in her “Croning training”.

Welcomed to a mystic society.

Cynthia works at an intuitive and energetic level. She did not have a specific intention for her Croning. She just knew it was what she needed to do. Cynthia describes entering the room where she was to be Croned. “It was semi-dark with candles and so on, and seeing the balloons and you were sort of stepping through each gateway of balloons as a maiden, as the woman, and then, when you got to the point where you were going to be Croned”. In hushed tones she expresses a sense of feeling “quite *proud*” and “almost like part of a *mystic society*”. With Croning came a recognition for Cynthia that she is powerful and “becoming more powerful as the years go by”. Cynthia prefers the word

“knowing” rather than “wisdom” to name her accumulated understanding and experience. While she once longed for a mentor, as a Crone, she has become a mentor.

Coming home, coming into my own.

For Spike, the process of crossing the threshold was “Just huge”. She says, “I am aware of some internal shifting and I’m not sure I can label it but I was a different woman when I walked through the threshold on the other side”. With a reverent sigh Spike recalls, “I don’t know the words to use even, it was a coming home, it was a coming into my own”. Later Spike added to this by saying, “Words don’t - it’s hard to put into words, because it’s a process of course, but, I think *meeting* myself would probably be as descriptive as anything. I know I was a different woman on the other side and just (pause) *honouring* myself”. When asked what it was about crossing the threshold that connected her in this way with herself, Spike answered, “It was the consciousness, the awareness that I was *definitely* moving from the old belief, that old box into a whole new view of life, possibilities and endeavours. (Pause) It was like, *anything* now is possible”.

Postliminal Phase

Into a New Life

Having entered the Sisterhood of Crones, each of the women experienced the postliminal period differently. Spike literally stepped into a new life when she crossed the threshold and hasn’t looked back. She went into the ministry in her late fifties, something she never imagined she would do.

Identifying as a Crone

HP finds that she refers to herself as a Crone more often than she does any of the

other identities she carries. She recognizes that she is in training for work that she and her “sister Crones” will be called on to do by the year 2013. HP and her partner are also enjoying life to the fullest so that they don’t carry any regrets in their later years.

Sharing One’s Knowing as Mentor

Cynthia, as noted above, is “becoming more powerful” and assertive with time. She says, “In retrospect, this was a beautiful experience for me, but it was ... step by step. It wasn’t like, ‘HEY (claps hands loudly) I’m a Crone!’ ... For me it was sort of a gradual thing”. Cynthia has experienced a deepening of her identity as a Crone as she has taken part in other rituals and, since her Croning, she includes ritual as a daily practice. Her mentorship role in which she shares her “knowing” with others is an important part of Cynthia’s identity as a Crone. When asked if she could imagine not having done Croning, Cynthia responded that she could imagine it but that there would be an emptiness. When asked what would be missing, she said “Fulfilment. Completeness. Fulfilment”. Ritual, she says, “brings a more full bodied life” and serves to clear the way for new possibility.

Growing in Wisdom and Spirit

Miriam is following a spiritual path which is deeply satisfying to her. She, too, has gradually absorbed the identity of being a Crone. Miriam hopes and believes that she is growing in wisdom. Having found the courage to be Croned, she is now moving toward celebration of her retirement.

For Miriam, the most important part of the ritual was the aspect of having a “public witnessing” of the transformation through which she had already gone so many times during the preparation for her Croning. She says, “It wasn’t quite how I envisioned it, but

it worked. I did it. (laughs) I'm a Crone - whatever that means. *I am a Crone*".

Changing the Rules

While there was not much talk of menopause, some of the women related a new sense of freedom to talk about body parts, body functions and women's sexuality. A story was related of a participant at an Amazing Greys gathering who had written and presented a poem called "Ode to the Clitoris". It became a hit as women took pleasure in breeching the taboos dictating proper subjects for "*nice ladies*" to discuss. While this may have happened in any gathering of older women, I have my doubts.

With age has come an increasing comfort to speak out. This probably would have come with or without the Croning but their identity with the Crone has certainly strengthened every one of the women to say what's on her mind. One of the women stated that, since her Croning, she has experienced a new sense of assertiveness in getting what she needs for her own well-being.

The Crone Archetype Embodied

Within a rite of passage, these women have each embodied the Crone archetype. Once activated within them, they have each expressed the archetype uniquely. In her ritual script, Miriam described the Crone as a "fully actualized authentic woman, as the fulfillment of female life experience and wisdom". Miriam also states that the "Crone state of mind keeps us in touch with our endings, our aloneness (all-one-ness), and the ability to know how and when to use our energy wisely". Miriam had a cake made for her ritual which said "Crones break all the rules". In becoming a Crone, she shed her involvement with earning worth through "doingness"--saving time and energy for the things and people

that matter to her.

In her ritual, HP writes in the voice of the Crone, “I am the wise woman with the life experience of all that has gone before. The autumn season where the riches of summer are gathered and stored for all to draw upon. This energy is compassion without the illusion or sentiment of youth. It’s the reclaiming of power and wholeness. It’s the stabilizing energy and love with calmness and understanding. The glow of sunset illuminating the darkening landscape. The crone is Wisdom, Teacher, Healer, the Elder”. HP also says the Crone is a “woman of wholeness, woman of wisdom, she who knows death as well as life, impeccable action as well as spontaneous vitality”. If nothing else, these are potent words of positive affirmation for women aging.

As these women approached and crossed the threshold to be welcomed into the sisterhood of Crones they honoured themselves and were honoured by others. As part of their rituals, the women needed to stand in their power and receive the words of praise from friends and family. This was surprisingly difficult and extremely moving for all of the women. Such honouring, Cynthia said, “gives credibility to my being”. This is not only important for a sense of completeness and fulfilment but also for physical, mental, emotional, spiritual and social well-being.

There is no doubt that each of these women, now Crones, have an awareness that they have been transformed and the transformation they experienced has led to their increased well-being. Their initiation into Cronehood has helped them let go of the past and embrace a present which serves them better. This present includes a positive and powerful view of themselves as Wise Old Women. They are also stepping into the future

and taking the rest of us with them.

Chapter Endnote

In this chapter, I took a deeper look at the two main themes of transformation which emerged from the interview conversations: Rites of Passage and Embodying the Crone Archetype. In the next chapter I have outlined my present understanding of ritual and transformation as it has been shaped by this study. I have also looked briefly at how this understanding may shape my nursing practice.

CHAPTER 5

What occurs when the transcendent interprets itself to the personal can be viewed either as a personal discovery of meaning, which is a psychological perspective, or meaning's discovery of person which is a theological one (Shorter, 1987, p.47).

My Present Understanding of Ritual and Transformation

Which came first, the ritual or the transformation? While the answer to this question varies, what I know more deeply now is that the two are inextricably linked.

Transformation as Process

When I began this thesis research, I had expected that the Big Moment of transformation in the ritual for every woman would be the actual point of crowning/Croning. In fact the Croning itself was a culmination of many processes which set in motion still more processes. While we may not always know when the transformation(s) came, ritual marks a place in time when it was recognized. As one woman related, she can look back on the day that her life completely changed, the day of her Croning.

Taking Time to Settle With the Crone Identity

During our interview conversations I was at first bothered that the women, with exception of the woman mentioned above, seemed to take a long time after the Croning to settle into this new identity. I thought at first that they were diminishing the experience or themselves. Now I recognize that this is the usual pattern following initiation.

Transformation may not be blindingly obvious. Like most major life experiences, it is only much later that we have any idea of the significance of the moment and of the degree of change arising from the moment.

Finding Meaning and Being Found by Meaning

As the quote at the beginning of this chapter suggests, there are two ways we can regard a transformation which has been experienced. We can see it as the result of a person finding new meaning in their situation, or as the result of an encounter with Source/Meaning. I believe both to be true at the same time.

As thinking women, the Crones who spoke with me certainly had discovered much meaning, and there is no doubt that Meaning also discovered them. They were very clear both about their own journeys of discovery and that energies--especially the Crone archetype--came to focus both before and during their rituals. Those energies continue to further unfold following their Cronings.

Crone Egregor

While the Crone may have discovered the women, they too discovered Her, first through books and conversations, then as an expression of themselves. Together, they build the growing energy of the Sisterhood of Crones and of the Crone archetype. HP explains that as more and more women celebrate Croning, they increase an energy field--or "egregor"--specific to Crones in the Earth's etheric body, a layer of the unified energy field surrounding the Earth. According to HP, every human endeavour has an egregor. She gives the common example of marriage as a huge egregor which contains all of the energy patterns connected with being married--from the wedding to the socks on the floor. When people who are living together happily say that they'd get married but they don't want to ruin a good thing, HP says that they are not wanting to tap into the negativity which has built up over the eons in the marriage egregor.

It seems much preferable to be attached to the Wise Old Woman/Crone egregor than the sweet-little-old-lady/elder-as-victim egregor facing many aging women in our society today. Perhaps the most apparent transformative result of their rituals was the change in identity to being a Crone. With the identity came the freedom and responsibility to increasingly claim and therefore speak and act from their accumulated wisdom or knowing. It is not just a matter though of identity but of also tapping into the Crone egregor/energy field as a growing source of women's power, strength and wisdom. There is a Sisterhood of Crones that meets and works in both the physical and energetic/spiritual realms for the healing of the Earth.

In a conversation with Wiccan writer, educator and Priestess, Jessica North-O'Connell (personal communication, April 8, 2000) it was suggested that The Crone is returning to the Earth at this time and She is coming back even stronger than before. The women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s most certainly has prepared the way for Her return. Furthermore, this time we are in an age of information and the message is unstoppable. Not all women will buy in, but all will benefit as the Crone's power grows. Imagine the potency of the merged intention of the 75 million women over age 50 in North America alone! Now add that to the intention of older women all over the world. The Crones intend transformation, and they intend to see the continuation of life on Earth. There is work to be done.

Embodiment in Women's Rituals

The very act of creating and performing ritual is part of the work. Once in the hands of "experts" it is now firmly back in the hands of the people and especially women. I had

not thought much before of the different approaches women and men have to ritual. As I discovered, men's rituals are concerned with the mental realm while women's rituals are about embodiment, a celebration of the senses (Shorter, 1987). How could it be otherwise when we are talking of such earthy things as menstruation, birthing, and retaining the "wise blood" during menopause? If we, as older women, are to see to the continuation of life on Earth, we need, through ritual, to celebrate our earthiness and to draw and ground the energies needed for inspiration and strength.

Ritual which helps women be embodied is essential in this time and place. We have been made ashamed of our bodies and, as one of the women interviewed said, we are cut off at the head. Spike recalls seeing a piece of art where the head and body of Medusa, the mythical snake haired woman, were "totally severed at the neck". This symbolizes for Spike that, "We have totally separated ourselves from our essence through...societal morés, family expectations, religion, patriarchal inquisitions. You can label it whatever you like but we've cut ourselves off literally".

It is well documented that the being of women has been consumed in our society by maleness. The work of reclaiming our wholeness includes the work not only of embodiment but also, as one of the women said, of re-membering a time before patriarchy. Perhaps Croning is an initiation into the "virginity" of post-menopause; a place of power kept for herself that no man, no one else can touch.

Spike stated that she was aware of transformation taking place for her at her moment of Croning because she was fully present in her head *and* her heart. She says because she was "in her Power" she sensed the moment of actual energy shift in her body.

That we are not aware, does not mean transformation has not taken place. That we *can* be aware is to be celebrated.

I wondered what an aging rite of passage for men would look like in comparison to these. As stated above, male models of examining ritual process focus on cognitive processes while, for women, ritual is about embodiment. Add this to the work of Aptheker (1989) who, in writing of the meaning of women's daily experience speaks of how embodied women are. She suggests that, rather than being restricted to resisting *against* things with which they don't agree--resistance from a place of "No"--women also plant flowers, sing songs, burn candles, have babies, celebrate the senses and the sensuous and in these ways resist from a place of "Yes" to life and its beauty. The beauty and sensuousness of these Croning rituals seems to be a declaration of "Yes" to life, to Womaness, and this part of their journey. These Crones are helping create the kind of world in which they want everyone to live. This is also the work of transformation.

Collateral Transformation

The Crones who took part in this study were not only interested in their own transformation but that of others and the Earth. In following their lead I recognized the importance of what I called "collateral transformation". Given that everything is interconnected, when one person reaches a point of transformation it touches everyone and everything else--known and unknown. Through ritual, all possibility, including transformation, is set in motion.

Meaning for Nursing

The purpose for doing this thesis was to deepen an understanding of how ritual is

transformative in order to work with ritual as a healing modality in my nursing practice. My understanding will, no doubt, continue to unfold. At this time there are five significant findings with which I will work.

Rites of Passage and Nursing

Our society is aging. We can see that some women are moving with grace and wisdom into and through the third stage of their lives. (I hesitate to call this the last third of their lives since, as one of the Cronos pointed out, this may represent the last half of her life - from age 50 to 100 plus.) Some of these women have taken part in Croning as a way of marking and making a positive transformation into their wise years. While rituals of Croning are not for everyone, creating and celebrating rites of passage for all life events and at all the life stages for both sexes is a powerful honouring and healing way which needs to be reclaimed. Since nurses are healers, we have a place in this work.

While rites of passage are important for everyone, I have been thinking about older men. While I was at the beach, I had a conversation with a retired man in my community who was quite interested in my thesis. He said that he feels women get more powerful as the years go by and that men, once retired, become weaker. My heart went out to him and I wondered how *his* wisdom and experience could be honoured in our society and how he could honour himself as did the Cronos. At the same time, the faces of young people flash before me saying they need the same thing.

One of the few research studies I was able to locate about ritual discussed Anorexia Nervosa as a self-created rite of passage young women undertake to achieve transformation on a journey from suffering to recovery (Garrett, 1996). There is purpose

to the pattern which has implications for many other journeys of suffering as well.

Working at the Energetic/Spiritual *and* Mental/Psychological Levels

In the first chapter of this paper, I quoted Somé (1993) who spoke eloquently of correcting visible wrongs by working with ritual at the energetic/spiritual realm where the problems have their roots. This makes intuitive sense to me. It also connects with my experience of working with Reiki, Attunement and Therapeutic Touch--all forms of energy work which are based on the understanding that physical symptoms are manifestations of disturbances or blockages at the energetic levels of the body. Working at the energetic/spiritual level should be enough, but in, my experience, people feel better for a while and then go back into the pattern with which they started.

What this means to me is that people want the “quick fix” of energy healing without doing the work of understanding and changing the circumstances around the disturbance or imbalance in their field. Work at the energetic/spiritual level *and* the mental/psychological level are needed to result in lasting physical well-being. This energetic/spiritual work can be energy healing and/or the creation and enactment of ritual. Wright, Watson, and Bell (1996) are working at the mental/psychological level to change people’s understanding of their illness. It would be very potent to combine ritual and the work of Wright Watson, and Bell. This is where I started but I return with a deeper understanding of how essential it is for a person to discover meaning *and* for Meaning to discover the person. Ritual has a role in both.

The Long and Winding Preliminal Road

I have also learned that you can not just pull ritual out of a hat and expect it to

work its magic. Much transformation had taken place for the women prior to their rituals and much followed. To be effective, a ritual has to be the next right thing for the person to do. They need to go through all the preparation necessary before the ritual can have its fullest effect. Part of this is certainly the discovery of meaning and my guess is that when a person embarks on a journey of discovery it sets them on the path of Meaning so they, in turn, can be discovered in the act of discovering.

If I am to work with people using ritual for healing, I will need to celebrate with the person the preliminal phase...as long as it takes. Everything in its right time. We will also need to be open to inspiration from Source. Everything in its right way. This is not the interesting quick fix I that had once imagined offering. While ritual can create a dramatic and immediate shift, there is always much preparation required prior to ritual and much deep work to follow.

Archetypes and Illness/Healing

While doing this thesis I have been very absorbed by the idea of archetypes. Bolen (1985) touched briefly on the need for women to resist if they are called to “do the bidding” of some of the Goddess archetypes since they “do not look out for the best interests of mortal women, or for their relationship with others. Archetypes exist outside of time, unconcerned with the realities of a woman’s life or her needs” (p.22). As cited earlier, the “immature shadow magician” is running amok in our world because we have not used our “magician potentials in the service of healing and community” (Moore, in Somé, 1993, p.9).

We can both resist those archetypes which may not represent our best interests and

use archetypal energy in mature ways if we know how. If we do not, we may get jumped from behind by shadow energy. This leads to disharmony and imbalance manifesting as physical and emotional illness and damage to the Earth.

As nurses we may be encountering archetypal energy in the people with whom we work. This has never before been as clear to me. If I recognize what patterns with which I am working, I can perhaps be more effective. With ritual I can help people invoke the archetypal energies which will strengthen them on their journeys. This is not only applicable to those we call "Patients" but also those of us called "Healers".

Clearly, invoking the archetype of the Crone has been a life enhancing experience for the women who spoke with me. This energy not only benefits them with a glorious vision for the last stage of their lives but also calls on and strengthens Crones to work for the well-being of others and the Earth. What a pleasure it would be to work as a nurse both to help others discover/be discovered by the Crone archetype and then to roll up your sleeves and share in their active vision of transformation!

Health As Expanding Consciousness

In her nursing theory, Newman (1986) proposes that "health is expansion of consciousness". As we grow and learn, as we clear those patterns in us that are blocked, as we connect with those things of which we were previously unaware, and finally "knowing as we are known" our consciousness is expanding. Newman goes on to say, "The expansion of consciousness never ends. In this way aging has lost its power. Death has lost its power. There is peace and meaning in suffering. We are free from all the things we have feared - loss, death, dependency. We can let go of fear" (p.3).

Newman (1986) speaks of the interaction pattern that occurs between two people. The more clear we are in knowing ourselves, the more effective our interactions will be with others. Newman proposes a nursing model of non-intervention in which, rather than setting out to achieve a specific nursing goal, the “professional enters into a partnership with the client with the mutual goal of participating in an authentic relationship, trusting that in the process of its evolving, both will grow and become healthier in the sense of higher levels of consciousness” (p.68). We don’t know what needs to happen. We just need to be in authentic relationship.

Being in authentic relationship, we create/discover knowledge and meaning. Now infuse this with ritual in which we may discover meaning and meaning may discover us. Ritual could be seen as a specific intervention and, done in one way, it might be. Done in another, where it is the obvious next right thing in the journey of transformation as it was for the Crones, nurses need to be prepared to go along for the ride--and perhaps be transformed themselves.

Conclusion

This study was worth doing if only to give serious and respectful consideration to both Crones and ritual. All of the women who honoured me by sharing their stories thanked me for presenting a chance for them to revisit their Croning rituals. I believe this was a very positive experience for all of us. I cannot help but wonder how much energy we put into the Crone energy field together as we did this work.

I have been transformed simply by the experience of interacting with the participants and I have learned something of the process of transformation and the

transformative power of ritual from the stories of four women. It was a small, select group that was involved in the study, and it is not likely that the results can be generalizable; but I have come away changed and with a few more pieces of the puzzle for the important work of personal and social transformation and to shape and inform my nursing practice. I have a growing and deepening awareness of ritual, transformation, and the Crone archetype.

This work is not finished.

What I Learned as a Researcher

I want to mention just a few of the things I have learned about myself, research, and myself as a researcher. While I am writing this, I am very aware that the learning will continue.

The act of creating a thesis is deeply intentional, and I offered into the work as much authenticity of presence and clarity as possible. In turn, I became connected in a deeper way with expected and unexpected aspects of myself, my world, and Source. This was consciousness expanding.

Throughout the thesis process I invited and relied on inspiration from Source. When mindful and present, I asked the question, “What needs to be brought through (from Source)?” and I “listened”. When not as mindful or present I became de-energized and blocked and needed to work with ritual to move myself back into creativity past the fearful monster of Great Resistance. This greatly increased my appreciation of the transformative power of ritual and Source.

The Art of Interviewing

I also gained a deeper appreciation of the art of interviewing. I thought I knew that

the way a question is posed makes a huge difference in the answer. Now I know this to a greater degree. When I thought I understood what someone was saying, I failed to go deeper. Only in listening to the first interviews did I realize that I needed to know what the person was saying, not what I thought they were saying. I also see the degree of importance in doing pilot studies to test questions before embarking on a big project. Oh, the things I would do differently and the questions I would ask instead!

Although there is a great difference between interviewing for research and counselling, after listening to myself for hours on tape I have become a better counsellor. I realized I have had some rules about not sharing too much in counselling sessions as well as during these interviews. The most interesting, energized parts of our conversations happened when we both got so engaged that I forgot the “rules” and we were interacting very naturally.

After months of working with the transcripts and tapes, I realize that I feel a deep sadness at seeing them destroyed. I am going to create a ritual and let them go back energetically into the unified field.

There *is* No End to Interpretation.

I discovered that there really *is* no end to interpretation. Having come to this point, I have deep sadness that I may have missed something *really* important. Another person could have taken exactly the same interview materials and found other things of importance. At another time I might find other things as well. This is, however, the path I took and this is where we finish our conversation for now.

Final Thoughts

My life has been enriched by spending time with these Crones. They are bright spirits who give me such hope for my own aging. As I finished writing, women were gathering for Crones Counsel VIII, I am a year closer to menopause and have become a grandmother...the Crone is whispering in my ear.

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Appendix A

Ethical Approval



University of Victoria

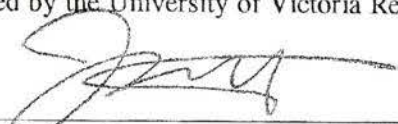
Human Research Ethics Committee

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

<u>Principal Investigator</u> Gail Fern Peekeekoot Graduate Student	<u>Department/School</u> NURS	<u>Supervisor</u> Dr. G. Hartrick	
<u>Co-investigator(s):</u> N/A			
Title: Ritual and Transformation: A Look at Croning Ceremonies			
<u>Project No.</u> 048-00	<u>Start Date</u> 14 Feb 00	<u>End Date</u> 13 Feb 01	<u>Approval Date</u> 14 Feb 00

Certification

This is to certify that the University of Victoria Ethics Review Committee on Research and Other Activities Involving Human Subjects has examined the research proposal and concludes that, in all respects, the proposed research meets appropriate standards of ethics as outlined by the University of Victoria Research Regulations Involving Human Subjects.



J. Howard Brunt,
Associate Vice-President, Research

This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the procedures. Extensions/minor amendments may be granted upon receipt of "Request for Continuing Review or Amendment of an Approved Project" form.

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Appendix B

Letter of Invitation

Date _____

Dear _____

I am writing to invite you to be a study participant in the thesis research I am doing for a Masters of Nursing at the University of Victoria. The purpose of this research project is to learn about the transformative power of ritual from the perspective of women who have taken part in Croning Ceremonies and who would describe this ritual experience as positively life changing for them.

This is a small study and I am only contacting women who have been recommended to me by other Crones. I recognize and honour that Crones are vital and busy people who choose wisely how they wish to spend their time. In order to help you make your decision about whether or not to accept the invitation to participate in this study, allow me to provide a little more information.

Participation is at all times completely voluntary and there is no monetary compensation for taking part. At any time, participants may choose not to answer particular questions and may withdraw from the study without consequence. If you chose to withdraw, you will have the power to decide what happens to the information which you have shared to that point.

There will be a minimum of two private and confidential interviews with me. I expect each interview to take from one to two hours. Together we will decide when and where we should meet to allow us to feel comfortable and be undisturbed. Each participant will also be invited to take part in a small group discussion with up to three others. This, too, is completely optional and will take from one to two hours. I will be present at the small group discussion. We will try to keep travel time and costs for the participants to a minimum. Participants will also be invited to review and provide feedback on the preliminary reports of the information they personally have shared for how accurately it describes their experience. Finally, I may need to be in touch by telephone or email with participants to clarify information they have shared. Altogether, I will be asking participants for between 4 and 8 hours of their time over a three month period.

The only costs and inconvenience to you which I anticipate at this time are: 1) Sharing from 4 to 8 hours of your time without monetary compensation; and 2) Minimal travel costs. The benefits to be derived are: 1) Having your experience of Croning heard by someone who is deeply interested; 2) If you take part in the small group discussion, you may meet new kindred spirits and strengthen your relationships with other Crones; 3) The

finished thesis may help raise awareness of Croning, the wisdom and strength of older women, and the importance of ritual in marking life transitions; 4) This thesis may add to an increased understanding of how ritual is transformative; 5) There will be consideration in the academy - in particular the school of Nursing and the faculty of Human and Social Development - of ritual, transformation, Croning and Croning.

Information gathered will remain confidential. Because of the nature of small group discussions, your anonymity cannot be guaranteed if you decide to take part. Interviews and the small group discussion will be audio-taped and then transcribed. The tapes, transcriptions, and your signed consent to take part in the study will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in my home office. Only my thesis supervisor, Dr. Gwen Hartrick, and I will have access to the tapes, interviews, and signed consents. The tapes will be erased and the transcriptions shredded when the study is complete. Names and identifying information will not be used in preparation of the thesis report. Participants will have access to final results of the study.

Information shared by participants will become part of my Masters Degree thesis at the University of Victoria, School of Nursing. Dr. Gwen Hartrick is the thesis supervisor of this project and can be contacted at (250) 721-6191 or by email at ghartric@uvic.ca. Dr. Howard Brunt, Associate Vice President of Research at the University of Victoria may also be contacted for comments or complaints at (250) 472-4362. I can be contacted in Crofton at (250)246-9923 or by email at gfpseekee@uvic.ca.

You may be interested in knowing a little about me as the researcher. I am a 48 year old woman who has been nursing for 27 years. Many of those years have been in First Nations community health. I work full-time (Monday to Friday during the day) and have done my graduate studies part-time over the last four years. My interest in Croning is, in part, due to the fact that menopause and the last third of my own life are fast approaching. Also, ritual has been a life-long passion and I hope to create a nursing practice in which ritual plays a key role. My time on earth is focussed on personal and social transformation.

I welcome your calls - please feel free to call me collect in the evening or on weekends. I hope you will consider taking part in this study.

Respectfully,

Gail Peekeekoot

Appendix C

Informed Consent for

“Ritual and Transformation: A Look at Croning Ceremonies”

I understand the purpose of this research project is to learn about the transformative power of ritual from the perspective of women who have taken part in Croning Ceremonies and who would describe this ritual experience as positively life changing for them. I understand that I will be asked about my experience of the Croning Ceremony. I understand that I will also be asked to describe my key life experiences prior to taking part in the Croning Ceremony and to describe the effect the Croning Ceremony has had on my life since taking part in it.

I realize that there will be two main interview conversations which will be from one to two hours in length each. I understand that I will also be invited to join with up to three other study participants in a small group discussion. I know my participation in the small group is completely optional. I understand the small group discussion will be from one to two hours in length. I realize there could be one other interview or communication by telephone or email to clarify information. All interview conversations and communications will be held in private. The small group discussion will also be held in private and participants will be asked not to share outside the group what has been said in the group or to identify in any way those who have taken part in the discussion. All interview conversations will be with Gail Peekeekoot. Gail Peekeekoot will also be present at the small group discussion.

I understand that all interview conversations and the small group discussion will be audio-taped then transcribed. The tapes will be erased and the transcriptions shredded after the study is complete. I understand that I will be invited to review and provide feedback on the preliminary reports of the information I have shared for how accurately it describes my experience. I also understand that I will have access to final results of the study.

I understand that my participation is completely voluntary and that there is no monetary compensation for my participation. I understand that I can choose to stop participating at any time with no consequence to myself. If I choose to withdraw, I have the power to decide what happens to the information I have shared up to that point.

I understand the benefits to be derived for participating in this study are: 1) I will share my experience of Croning with another who is deeply interested in hearing my story; 2) If I chose to take part in the small group discussion, I may meet new kindred spirits and strengthen my relationships with other Croners; 3) The finished thesis may help raise awareness of Croning, the wisdom and strength of older women, and the importance of ritual in marking life transitions; 4) This thesis may add to an increased understanding of how ritual is transformative; 5) There will be consideration in the academy - in particular

the school of Nursing and the faculty of Human and Social Development - of ritual, transformation, Crones and Croning. The potential costs and inconveniences for participating in this study are: 1) I will be giving between 4 and 8 hours of my time for interviews, the small group discussion, and travel if necessary; 2) I will not be reimbursed for travel costs - although understand that travel will be kept to a minimum; 3) In choosing to take part in the small group discussion, my anonymity cannot be guaranteed.

I understand that the information gathered during the study will remain confidential; interview materials will be kept in a locked filing cupboard in Gail Peekeekoot's home office. Only the researcher, Gail Peekeekoot, and her thesis supervisor, Dr. Gwen Hartrick, will have access to the information I have shared - including this consent form. I also understand that my name and other identifying information will not be used on the tapes, transcriptions, or in any written documentation of the study results. I will be invited to provide a pseudonym for this study. I recognize, because of the nature of small group discussions, that my anonymity cannot be guaranteed if I chose to take part in the small group discussion.

Gail has explained that she is a graduate student in nursing at the University of Victoria and is working on her Masters Degree thesis. Information shared will become part of this thesis. I understand that the persons responsible for this study are Dr. Gwen Hartrick (thesis supervisor) and Gail Peekeekoot, University of Victoria, Graduate Studies, Faculty of Human and Social Development. Dr. Hartrick may be contacted in the School of Nursing at (250) 721-6191 or by email at ghartric@uvic.ca. Gail Peekeekoot may be contacted at (250) 246-9923 or by email at gfppeekee@uvic.ca. I may also contact Dr. Howard Brunt, Associate Vice President of Research at the University of Victoria, for comments and complaints at (250) 472-4362.

One copy of this consent will stay with the participant and another will be in a locked filing cabinet at the home of the researcher.

Participant's

Signature _____ Date _____

Researcher's

Signature _____ Date _____

Appendix D

Interview Guide

The purpose of this research project is to learn about the transformative power of ritual from the perspective of women who have taken part in Croning Ceremonies and who would describe this ritual experience as positively life changing for them.

Ritual & Transformation

You described your experience of Croning as _____. Can you tell me more about that?

Experience of Croning Ceremony

How did you hear about Croning?

How would you describe your experience of Croning?

Please tell me in as much detail as possible your experience of your Croning Ceremony.

What have you told other women about Croning?

Experiences of Ritual Prior to Croning Ceremony

How much experience of ritual have you had in your life?

What kinds of ritual have you taken part in?

- Transition
- Healing
- Transformation

Past Experiences of Epiphany/Transformation.

Please tell me about the significant moments in your life.

- Life changing events
- Turning points

World view

What gives your life meaning?

How has the meaning changed over your lifetime?

What has been significant in changing that meaning?

Appendix E

Letter Requesting Feedback on Narrative

Dear

Here are copies of your two interviews. They are strictly for your own interest. However, if you notice a place where I have misheard what you have said, please let me know. As many times as I have read these and listened to the tapes, I keep making changes. They are still a work in progress. (Only read the interviews if you wish to.)

I am also sending a brief narrative of your interviews in which I have set the context for your Croning and identified some of the points of transformation connected to your Croning. Could you please read it and let me know if you agree or disagree with what I have said in the narrative? If you disagree could you please elaborate? I would also like you to change any words or phrases which don't fit for you. It is very important for me to know that I have captured *your* meaning and not put words in your mouth. If you have any thoughts which you would like to add, it would be wonderful.

Could you please write your comments, changes, additions etc. on your copy of the narrative and put it in the mail to me by June 5th? (I'm enclosing a self-addressed stamped envelope for this.) If you'd rather talk about this, just indicate a good time for me to call you. I am going to be away from May 31st to June 4th. I will send you a final copy of the narrative after I have made any changes you have suggested.

In the body of my thesis, I expect to expand much more on the ideas you have raised but hope, for the narrative, I have selected the main themes from your interviews and have identified the main points of transformation connected with your Croning.

When I first contacted you I had been hoping to have a group conversation with all the participants. When I realized how busy everyone is, I let go of that idea.

The journey continues. Thanks for your part in all of this. My heart is *full!*

With thanks and respect,

Gail

Vita

Surname: Peekeekoot

Given Names: Gail Fern

Place of Birth: Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

Educational Institutions Attended:

University of Victoria	1989-1991
	1995-2000
Justice Institute of British Columbia	1994-1997
University of Alberta	1975-1976
Vancouver General Hospital School of Nursing	1970-1973

Degrees Awarded:

Certificate in Conflict Resolution	1997
BSN (with distinction)	1991
Certificate in Advanced Practical Obstetrics (APO)	1976
RN	1973

Publications:

MacDonald, M., Peekeekoot, G., & Najak, M. (1991). A Delphi Survey of Native Health Priorities. Report presented to W.J. Shannon, Director, Health Education, Communications and Education Branch, British Columbia Ministry of Health.

MacDonald, M. & Peekeekoot, G. (1992). A Review of Psychiatric Admissions to Royal Jubilee Hospital Emergency Room. Report presented to J. Greschner, Director, Salaried and Sessional Branch, Medical Services Plan, British Columbia Ministry of Health.

MacDonald, M., VanBibber, M., Najak, M. & Peekeekoot, G. (1991). The Prevention of Fetal Syndromes in British Columbia. Report presented to W.J. Shannon, Director, Health Education, Communications and Education Branch, British Columbia Ministry of Health.

Modeste, D. (et al) (1995). The Spirit of Cowichan: A Journey Through the Tsewultun Health Centre. In P. Stephenson, S. Elliott, L. Foster, & J. Harris (Eds.), A Persistent Spirit: Towards Understanding Aboriginal Health in British Columbia (pp.331-356). Victoria, B.C.: University of Victoria, Western Geographical Press.


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Title of Thesis:

Embodying the Crone: Transformation and a Woman's Rite of Passage

Auth


Gail Fern Peekeekoot
November 20, 2000