The Importance of Story

by Janet Morrissey

There is an increased interest in our ancestral backgrounds. We want to know where we come from and how our families got to America. Ancestry dot com is continually advertising to encourage you to discover your ancestral story. PBS television has a program called, “Finding Your Roots” with Henry Louis Gates, Jr., helping famous participants discover and share their ancestral histories. Just as Gates uses DNA samples to investigate their background, we also can do this by requesting a kit to collect our DNA sample. I have done it with surprising results.

My mother’s background is totally Slovenian. Rose Sleyko McCarthy was born in the United States but was raised mainly in an orphanage from the age of three, due to her mother’s early death. Unfortunately, she knew little of either of her parent’s background or the stories they had to tell. I grew up having very little knowledge of Slovenia. In 1979 I received a letter from my mother’s sister who shared an old Slovenian map with an X to mark the spot where the family was from. In 2005 my husband and I took a tour of Slovenia and Croatia and found the small village of Osek. The only information I had was the map and the last name of my grandmother, gotten through my aunt’s obituary. We were able to speak to the parish priest, who only spoke Slovene and through a parishioner who spoke English, the Church records were retrieved and the family history found: number of brothers and sisters, sacraments she received and where she was raised. The priest said he would show us the empty house. I was thrilled.

We have returned four times and each time we meet distant relatives. My wish was to take my adult family to see the house and meet some of the friends and neighbors. In May we were able to make that trip. More of the story continued with finding my grandfather’s place of origin, a few miles from my grandmother’s.

Thomas Berry, a Catholic priest, cultural historian, and ecotheologian, talks about restorying in the newsletter from Rolling Ridge Study Retreat.

Our task is to discover and inhabit other stories that may seem altogether new to us. This is the way of restorying. In restorying, we hope to hear and inhabit other stories: those told by our human ancestors and those found in the original impulses of religion and faith. We may even listen to the wild ones of the Earth or rediscover some forgotten corner in our hearts. New and ancient stories are found in all of these beings and places. The path of restorying is both deeply personal and profoundly universal. And it is eternally hopeful.

At Crones Counsel gatherings, we hear stories that often touch our hearts and help us to find our own stories. Kianna Bader has found her Irish ancestral story and through researching her roots has put it into her book, Setting Donegal on Fire. We heard stories of hope. We listened and heard about our dear Enid and her faithful Crone friends, who saved her to find happiness and joy. We heard about difficulties and sufferings that make us stronger and often grateful. We learn lessons. Enid gave us the advice to ask for help when we need it. Through these stories, we grow, reflect, and heal.

Our Crone foremothers knew that storytelling had the ability to teach us in an infinite number of ways and that it must be an integral part of our Gatherings. They understood that Wise Women have wisdom to share, and we all have lessons to learn.

Clarissa Pinkola Estes says, “The telling of story is an essential spiritual practice. Most are not simple entertainment.”
A Pilgrimage Home

By Diane (Kianna) Bader

Although this was my fourth trip to Ireland, it would prove to be the trip of a lifetime. After sixteen years of research on my Irish ancestors, I finally wrote and published the biography of my great grandfather, Daniel McSweeney. On August 11, 2016, I would have a book launch in Falcarragh, County Donegal, Northwest Ireland. It was the same town where my great grandfather lived and where much of his story, Setting Donegal on Fire, took place.

Barbara, a college friend, traveled with me. We met at our hotel in Dublin on August 6 and I phoned my cousins, Tom and Barbara Sweeney, that evening. Their son, Eamon, invited us to their home for dinner the following day. I had last seen Tom six years before when he drove me to Donegal and we visited our ancestral lands. After a lovely dinner, my cousin Eamon offered to play his Baroque guitar at my book launch later in the week. I was delighted.

Ireland had been celebrating the 100th anniversary of the 1916 Easter Rising, which ultimately gained independence for Ireland. We first visited the Post Office on O’Connell Street in Dublin where Padraig Pearse had read the proclamation of independence, and we saw more Dublin sights when we returned after my book launch in Northwest Ireland.

On the eighth, we took a bus to Letterkenny, the largest city in County Donegal. Our bus driver was delightful. We enjoyed talking with him and hearing many stories. The next morning we walked up the narrow street to the Donegal County Museum at the top of the hill. It used to be a workhouse and there was much history within its walls. We visited the massive St. Eunan’s Cathedral and had tea in one of the little shops which lined the road. A lovely day exploring.

The following day we took the Highlander Tour to Slieve League Cliffs, which are three times as high as the Cliffs of Dover. However it was a rainy, windy day so we didn’t stay long on top. Paul Sweeney was a wonderful friendly bus driver who navigated the narrow rural roads with skill and even backed down mountain roads when necessary. He was a school teacher of the Irish language who drove the tour bus in the summer. We also visited the tiny folk village of Glen Columcille and the well-known village of Ardara, famous for its textiles.

Then we took the service bus to Gortahork where we stayed for the next two days. Our young driver, Paul, drove us there too — for free since we’d spent the day with him! We stayed at the Osten Loch

St. Eunan’s Church

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Altan Hotel, which turned out to be across the street from the cemetery where my great-great-grandfather, Edward Sweeney, was buried. I had been there in 2003 when I brought some sand from San Francisco to sprinkle on his grave in remembrance of my great-grandfather, Daniel, who emigrated to San Francisco and then returned to Ireland. That evening, I phoned Joe Kelly (Seosamh O Ceallagh), the young man who had been urging me to write my book for the past six years. A teacher of Irish history, he is now the local historian for Northwest Donegal. He came to the hotel and we talked about what the next day would involve. He had advertised my book launch in the newspapers, on the radio, and put up posters. Everyone who came would be well prepared.

The next morning, Joe came to our hotel with his little boy, also named Seosamh. We drove to the Barracks in Falcarragh, the next tiny town, where my book launch would take place that evening. The old Barracks was set up beautifully with a small café in front and meeting rooms in the back. Our room for the evening was filled with rows of chairs. My books were displayed nicely in front. They were flanked by an American flag and an Irish flag. We talked about the program for the evening. Joe had even asked the Minister for the Diaspora, Joe McHugh, to attend and do the official launch. What an honor!

After our meeting, Joe took us to his mother’s mansion nearby for tea. I soon realized her house was directly across the road from Carrowcannon House, the estate that my great-grandfather, Daniel McSweeney, had purchased when he returned to Donegal with his family. The action in my book had taken place right there!

That evening, the room filled quickly. Every seat was taken, perhaps 50 or 60. Tom and Eamon were there. The program went smoothly, some in English and some in Irish. Joe Kelly showed slides and explained the background of my story. Then I showed slides and spoke about my relationship to Daniel. I read from his speech to the 12,000, the speech that set Donegal on Fire. I never understood the words used to launch my book because Joe McHugh did it in Irish!

The audience was very interested and responsive. At the book signing afterward, one young woman came up and said, “I was so glad to see a picture of my grandmother, Kitty McGeady, in there!” Another said, “Jimmy was my great-grandfather.” It was so exciting. Later we would visit the
A PILGRIMAGE HOME, con’t. from Page 2

McGeady family. I signed at least 40 books that night. The next day we took a taxi to Dunlewy where we stayed three days in the beautiful new Errigal Youth Hostel up on a hill overlooking the Poisoned Glen and Dunlewey Lake. I had dreamed of spending a few days there, under the shadow of Mt. Errigal, where my ancestors had lived. It was rainy and foggy at first. The fog was clear down to the foot of 2000 foot Mt. Errigal and the rain made the peat bogs below too muddy to walk up close or try for a short climb. Nevertheless, we enjoyed walking around the lake below, taking a boat ride on Dunlewey Lough, visiting the gift shop and stopping in McGeady’s Pub. Dunlewey is so remote there are no ATMs, and cell-phone service barely works from time to time but we did fine without them.

Soon we saw two women walking up the road, Kathleen and her daughter. They had just been to Falcarragh to buy my book and wanted me to autograph it. Before we parted, Kathleen offered to drive us later to An Cuirt Hotel in Gweedore for dinner. That proved to be an interesting dinner, as we sat in the bar and watched our first hurling match on TV. It was a lively spot as people cheered on their team. A huge wedding party was celebrating there too. Their 1:00 p.m. wedding would continue the celebration till 1:00 a.m., bringing in several bands with different types of music.

On Sunday we went to Mass spoken all in Irish. We met Paidraig and Nuala there. They had been at the book launch and they offered to drive us around and show us the local sights, each of which came with many stories attached. We saw Sweeney Bridge, and a burial site for sixth-century monks who had lived in beehive cells. We walked around Padraig’s abandoned childhood home all made of stone, perhaps where Daniel had been born too. We traversed the Guinness estate, met Padraig’s cousin, Patrick, who is the gatekeeper of the Guinness estate and we were treated to more stories.

Our last day there, Nuala drove us to Gortahork where we caught the McGinley bus to Dublin. No fog on Mt. Errigal as we waved goodbye but it was amazing: I felt like I really belonged there.

Back in Dublin, we visited the National Museum to see the bogmen. We joined a student-led tour at Trinity College and spent time at the fabulous Book of Kells exhibit. As we were sitting on the bus to the airport leaving Dublin and crossing the Liffey River, a beautiful song was playing, just for me I think. It was John Denver’s A Starry, Starry Night.

Articles for CroneTimes

Have you ever thought about writing an article for CroneTimes? Have you wondered why we haven’t addressed certain topics? If so, we’d love to hear from you. We have tremendous diversity within our group, and we’d like to highlight more of this.

In order to be considered for publication, all text submissions must be in Word format and all photos must be in jpg. Thank you!

Please send your ideas and/or articles to Kianna: Kianna4064@gmail.com or to Julie: ejsanfrancisco@hotmail.com
Reflections from a Former Mother Board Member

by Carol Friedrich

My term as a Crones Counsel Mother Board member concluded with Crones Counsel 24 in Denver. As a rule, I prefer to contribute to an organization more behind the scenes; however, with what was an ancillary task for CC 18 as Facility Liaison, I became more aware that being a member of the Mother Board had its advantages for communication and decision making. Being the “facility liaison” has been a task of mine several times.

For several years, more or less behind the scenes, I had worked with annie lehto, who, as Crones Counsel president, influenced my decision to become a visible part of the CC leadership. So, together with the other Board members, I took on the legal and ethical responsibility to act on behalf of our programs, services, and finances for all participant crones, focusing on the overall affairs of the organization. Having had experience in administration, this was a good fit for me.

I have attended every Crones Counsel since CC 3 Scottsdale, which was my first gathering. I learned of CC through my sister, Jan Soyster, who found information about that gathering from a posting in an Oregon alternative bookstore. Attending each gathering has been a highlight of my year. I have helped plan three CC’s in Colorado, and more when, as a Board member, we found ourselves having to do the planning. These have been valuable experiences.

Being on the Mother Board allowed me to see the work of CC from within, and to contribute directly to program planning and implementation. It also gave me the opportunity to get to know the other Mother Board members better through the months and years we have met together. Adding Skype to our board meeting schedule was also a plus.

What has been my contribution? Having been part of twenty-one Crones Counsels has given me a perspective, both in terms of our past history and of our mission and purpose forward. These experiences have allowed me to contribute to the management of Crones Counsel in the present.

Which brings me to “How will I spend my time since I’m now off the Board?” In the metro Denver area where I live, we have a wonderful, thriving local crones group. I will continue to be active with our group and to contribute to maintaining its supportive, welcoming environment. I am also committed to encouraging other local groups to form, other women to plan gatherings, and friends to embrace their aging gracefully.

I am also committed to encouraging other women to plan gatherings and friends to embrace their aging gracefully.

There will also be some “behind the scenes” contributions to Crones Counsel. And, lastly, I have many house projects that need to rise on my priority list. Now, they will get their time.

Namasté

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**When the Grandmothers speak, the world will be healed.**

— LAKOTA SAYING

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My mother’s lifestyle did not offer me role models when I was growing up. Mom’s focus was supporting her two kids on an RN’s salary, and she had no time for a social life. So as a mother myself, I wanted my daughter exposed to strong, independent women that could be role models for her. It became a much more doable goal after I attended my first Crones Counsel in 1999, CCVII, Estes Park, Colorado. Here was a group of highly spirited women who embrace aging and its gained wisdom. I also met a few mother-daughter pairs, inspiring me to share the Crone experience with my daughter. It took a few years of talking about it before Andrea and I attended our first Crones Counsel together in Albuquerque, New Mexico, CCXVIII, 2010.

Andrea blended in with the Crones as easily as I knew she would. She eagerly participated in workshops, and not always the same ones I went to. She also enjoyed her Wisdom Circle, remarking that it was a great opportunity to meet and share with Crones on a more personal level. Her 43rd birthday was on that Saturday and during Storytelling, I invited the Crones to give her a standing ovation and sing Happy Birthday. Wow! She later told me that she had never felt such an energy coming from complete strangers, and it was directed at her!

Storytelling that year brought forth many tears with stories of loss and grief. To my surprise, Andrea took the stage! I think it took me four or five Counsels before I was “brave” enough to participate in Storytelling. But there she stood away from the podium and with microphone in hand and shared a story she had learned as a Social Worker. She later told me, “I was so touched by the women’s stories of loss I felt compelled to speak and to encourage them by telling them a story of hope.” This was a moment of deep pride for me!

Driving home, we set up the micro-mini cassette recorder and began to recap the gathering, sharing our reactions. I started, “Andrea, what is the most outstanding feature or element for you as you experienced your first Crones Counsel?” Her answer was immediate: “The authenticity of the women.” She continued, expressing her admiration for specific women she had met at Crones Counsel. “These are accomplished women,” she said, “but you don’t hear about that. You just know who they are today. They are living their passion — living from the inside out.”

We have now been to three Counsels together, most recently Crones Counsel XXIV 2016 in Denver, Colorado. At this Counsel, we both participated in the Opening and Closing Ceremonies. What an honor and joy for each of us. Oh, yes, it was her 49th birthday that Saturday, and yes, she got a standing ovation along with a rousing rendering of Happy Birthday!
CRONES COUNSEL XXV
25th Anniversary Jubilee

Weaving the Silver Threads of Past, Present, and Future

Wednesday-Sunday, October 4-8, 2017
University Guest House & Conference Center
Salt Lake City, Utah

Early Bird Discount until February 28, 2017

We look forward to our next gathering at the University Guest House and Conference Center for Crones Counsel XXV, where we will share in Storytelling, Workshops, Ceremonies, Honoring the Decades, Follies, and the Crone Artisans’ Bazaar. Salt Lake City, Utah, is an ideal location for fall weather. Come, renew old friendships and make new ones.

Gathering details are on the Crones Counsel website: www.cronescounsel.org.

Call or email annie Lehto, Registrar, 303-697-6016 or email her at cronenancy@q.com

See you there.

University Guest House and Conference Center
110 South Fort Douglas Blvd., Salt Lake City, UT 84113-5036
888-416-4075

TO OFFER A WORKSHOP, RESERVE A SPACE IN THE CRONE MARKETPLACE, OR BE A CIRCLE LEADER, CONTACT:

HOLD A WORKSHOP? Contact JoAnne Casey, jfincasey@gmail.com

LEAD A CRONES CIRCLE? Contact Meg Randle, meg.randle@imail.com

RESERVE ARTISANS’ BAZAAR SPACE? Contact mARTa Quest, 2020 Hwy 99 N, #5, Ashland, OR 97520, 541-234-4383 RRandArt12@gmail.com

We need Crone Sisters to volunteer as workshop facilitators, program and ceremony planners, crone circle leaders, etc., by sharing your wisdom and creativity.

ALL WORKSHOPS, PROGRAMS, CEREMONIES, AND CRONE CIRCLE LEADERSHIP ARE DONATED TO THE GATHERING BY WOMEN WILLING TO SHARE THEIR WISDOM AND CREATIVITY. OUR GATHERING RELIES ON YOU WONDERFUL WOMEN.

Please NOTE: All contributors must be registered for the gathering. Artisan’s products offered for sale must be Crone creations.
THE NIGHT BEFORE I FIRST VISITED TAQUILE ISLAND, I HAD A DREAM THAT I WAS GOING TO DIE SOON, AND WOULD DIE WITHOUT MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN THE WORLD. I AWOKE WEEEPING. ON THE BOAT TO THE ISLAND, MY HUSBAND SAM AND I GOOD-NATUREDLY GAVE AWAY COCA LEAVES WITHOUT KNOWING ANY DETAILS ABOUT THE CUSTOM.

Even so, I think the boatmen gave s a good recommendation and we were assigned for our homestay with Felipe and Celbia. As we followed Celbia through the arch at the top of the steps, I saw Taquile Island for the first time. The view took my breath away: green terraced fields, thatch roofs, vast blue lake with snow-capped mountains far in the distance, and I said, “If I were designing paradise, I’d start with Taquile.”

When we arrived at their home, Felipe laid out his weavings and told us he was looking for an agent to sell these textiles, and then wanted to come to the United States in two years and teach a textile class at the University. At first we doubted that it would be possible, but we awoke in the middle of the night and imagined that we could make such a visit happen if we sold their work at the same art fairs where we sell our pottery.

That’s how it started. Felipe and Celbia lived with us for seven weeks in our little mobile home near Aspen, Colorado, in the summer of 1988. We sold their work at three art fairs and did several community presentations. They taught two workshops and we sent them home with the first 40-watt solar photovoltaic (PV) panel on Taquile.

When we returned to Colorado, we wept in gratitude every time I turned on my faucet.
One particular solar trade was with an 85-year-old grandmother, Mercedes. The system was very small, consisting of 3 LED lights, 10w panel and sealed battery. White LED’s were new on the market at that time and we marveled that this indigenous woman had the most modern lighting in the world. She had saved a beautiful hand-woven manta, a large traditional shawl, in anticipation of this trade. She had used kerosene or candles for lighting throughout her long life. A week later, she clapped her hands in front of her breast and exclaimed, “I feel so young, now that I have lights!”

In our early visits, we noticed the problem of smoky kitchens. Most cooking was done with twigs or dung on an adobe and ceramic stove with the smoke escaping through a small hole under the eaves. We would sit in the kitchen on low stools, hunched under the layer of smoke that filled the air about four feet from the floor. Back in Colorado, Sam and I had begun using solar cookers, a simple thermal technology that concentrates sunlight into an insulated box behind glass. Out of locally sourced materials we were able to build cookers which reach temperatures of 325ºF. or more. In workshops we charged two knitted hats to pay for the materials and we have built 40 cookers on Taquile. Success is mixed. Our cookers are too small for the large soup that is basic fare, but using them to preheat water, or roast vegetables does serve a need. Also, the woman has her efficient place next to her fire stove with all her tools and ingredients, and cooking outdoors in the sun is contrary to her custom.

In the last few visits we are supporting the construction of clean burning bio-fuel stoves, by adding primary air intake under the fire and a chimney to remove the smoke. They are a welcome improvement within embedded cooking traditions. Taquileñas also use propane when they can afford it; especially useful for quicker meals. Last year, two young girls were living with their grandmother for the school year while their parents were living in Puno building a boat. To facilitate their getting to school on time, we gave them a two-burner propane stove to fix breakfast.

**Sacred Coca Leaves Cultural Customs**

Since that first boat ride, we have learned the cultural customs for the sacred coca leaves. The shape of these leaves is like a bay leaf with variations. Coca is an ancient and sacred plant medicine, particularly useful for high altitudes. Tourists are frequently given coca leaf tea, even at the airport. On Taquile, we use the leaves mixed with a little alkaline ash from burned quinoa stems. This activates medicinal qualities, including enhanced energy, but also aids digestion and helps temper the glycemic effects of a diet high in potatoes. The leaves are traded, studied as a divination tool, imbued with intentions and prayers as sacred offerings. The annual ritual on Easter Sunday is to “pay the Mother Earth.” In this community ceremony of gratitude taking place at the highest point on the Island, abundant coca leaves are empowered with prayer and then burned that night in a private ceremony by the shamans.

In the year 2000, we were invited to be the padrinos, or godparents, for the wedding of Silvano and Ruperta. Weddings on Taquile last for four or five days, the bride and groom ritually transforming from childhood into full adulthood. After the wedding, the bride and groom began to call us “Mama” and “Papa.” I had not expected this degree of relationship; now they have two sons, our grandsons! I couldn’t ask for a better son and daughter. For example, when Silvano was on town council, deciding whether the new water-pumping project should be solar or diesel he led the faction arguing for solar, which won. I am proud of him for his sober leadership.

Carnival is the festival around Mardi Gras, a week of processions from house to house, dancing to flutes and drums to bring good fortune to the crops, twirling skirts and both men and women wearing bright red mantas, and wide red cummerbunds. The men also wear red bandoliers across their chests. Seven groups follow a leader to party at various houses. Upon arrival at the courtyard, which is usually bedecked in balloons and colorful ribbons, the hostess presents steamed potatoes and more finger food is laid out on clean cloths on the ground. The bowl containing salsa always disappears quickly. Then beer and soda and sometimes a homemade fermented grain drink
called chicha is served all around, coca leaves offered, then the flutes and drums start up again and we dance in the courtyard before parading to the next house. Sam enjoys playing with the children. Soup is served at the final house of the evening and rooms are prepared for a group sleep-over, although—with the coca leaves for energy—the noise can go on all night. We always walk home to sleep.

Ash Wednesday, a sober day in most of the rest of the Christian world, is actually the biggest party day of all on Taquile, with competition dancing among the several dance groups. In addition to all the red mantas and belts and bandoliers, we are adorned in colored paper streamers, confetti in our hair and everywhere, and the women wear extra layers of colorful skirts. Cacophony reigns as we gather in the town’s central plaza, all of the seven bands might be playing at once, each for their own group of dancers. Then one at a time each group dances in front of the reviewing stands, trying to stand out from the other group with more confetti, or flower petals that they toss over the judges. I never could figure out why any group won over another, but it definitely was a competition.

The finale on Sunday night is also a special party in the central plaza. We shed a few layers of clothing; the young men take off the red bandoliers to reveal their white shirts. The young women put the most day-glo colors of skirts on top and roll up their extra skirts and put them into their red mantas, so it appears that they have huge flowers on their backs. The music changes and these young dancers, with all the energy of youth, brighten the night, under fireworks, in their light-colored clothing. Finally we dance to the house of our group leader for soup and the final party, often pulling out the recorded reggeton or rock and roll by the end of the night. Our leader sheds his leadership role and either joins the party or goes to bed early!

In the past, we always traded strictly for everything big that we gave. Our last trip in 2016 we saw needs in families who really didn’t have items to trade and we fulfilled them as best we could, recognizing that we could make a big difference with very little of our own money. We have never been a legal non-profit organization. It’s just Sam and me acting out of love and relationship seeing a need and filling it. We help in the fields and the kitchen, play with children, dance and play music and participate in festivals. We helped build a dock and a rock-paved trail, and dug a trench. One old man said that we are true Taquileños, because we have changed the rocks of the place. I transformed my dream into action, and have made a difference.

An Impossible Dream
by Alice Yee 2016
Our Eldest Honored Elder

From a world of turmoil
I wish I could fly
Like a beautiful bird
soaring high in the sky.
I’d fly forever with my wings
spread wide
To a world free of conflict
with nothing to hide.

We’d all get along; there would be few rules,
Our leaders would never act like fools.
My flight would wind through air that is pure
No chemicals floating, no need for a cure.

Somewhere in flight I’d imagine the sounds
Of a world that today is out of bounds.
People are civil and talk to each other,
Reflecting the lessons learned from their Mother.

Their neighbors are friends, whoever they are,
Regardless of race if they come from afar;
Money is important but not a cure all;
No foolish talk about building a wall!

TV is pleasant, not screechy and shrill,
Guns are for hunting, not people to kill.
Women’s equality settled at last,
By laws that reverse a regrettable past.

The world of my dreams is so far away
It will never happen during MY day.
So I’ll fold my wings and drift back to earth
’Twas a lovely dream for what it’s worth.
Honoring Is a Sacred Circle
by Iris K. Barratt © 1997 AnonymousExpressions.com

Honoring is where silence joins what is true
Honoring is a divine reflection of me and of you
Honoring is holding a sincere respect
As a natural goodness that you reflect
Honoring is my greatest joy day after day
Honoring in secret builds nobility
Positive anonymous surprises foster one’s humility
Honoring is my essential reality
Honoring brings me essential clarity
Honoring is a sacred circle of discovering
That together we are harmonizing
It reflects the capability of our divinity
Joined with our responsibility,
To create melody and mastery,
a new tranquility of generosity.
Just remember that if your honoring of others
and of your life
Is really clear and sincere
That the goodness of others and life will surely
Reflect and honor you too my dear!

Loss of Our Children
TO MY LOVES
By Mnimaka, Women of Spirit, 1995

No one expects to outlive their child. Nothing prepares us for such a loss. Even the most
cynical of persons does not entertain the loss of a child as a possibility. I suspect even the brutal or abusive parent never
considers the loss of the child as a consequence. And although death is the most undeniable loss, there are many,
many others, and any of these losses are too much to bear.

“No one expects” is the key to the attendant pain, for whatever the loss, we must first mourn the loss of our expectations. Even before they are born we worry about whether our child will have all their fingers and toes.

So a stillbirth is the immediate, final death of all that expectation, an undeniable tragedy, immediately mourned. A crib death is no less painful for having overcome the first hurdle: the miracle of a new life, seemingly full of all the possibilities of our expectations. A child born impaired or limited in some way evokes in us such a storm of emotion that it is also too much to be borne. A child who falls ill and fails to recover, is injured or missing is always cause for the same storm of emotions of outrage, of guilt and shame, of blaming, and self-pity, and unremitting pain until the loss is felt, mourned, and released, usually over and over, and the blessings and the peace of the release are accepted.

We may not even be able to comfort one another, families may fall apart, each person in his own pain unable to comfort the other. We must answer the question: My child is lost and gone forever. Why me?

There are many stories of such losses: some unique, small and very privately unbearable, some universal and unbearable for us all.

The Winter Queen
by Virginia L. Small © 2016

I leave no footprints as I make
My way ‘cross tundra cold.
No one can follow in my wake
As winter nights unfold.

A white crow wings its way ahead
To herald my return.
Two silver wolves are at my feet
To forecast winter’s burn.

The sleeping trees, so stark and bare
I shroud in liquid glass.
I sprinkle jewels everywhere
I have for eons past.

As I approach, the woodland folk
Look for a place to sleep.
They’ll grow a triple winter coat,
And gorge on food they eat.

POETS CORNER, continued on Page 12
POETS’ CORNER, continued from Page 11

I take no pity on the sick,  
The weak, the dull, the slow.  
It’s now that death will reach its peak  
No mercy will I show.

I leave that as my sister’s task  
For spring will bring new life.  
I’m charged with wearing winter’s mask  
A necessary strife.

Not all will sleep as I pass by.  
I will not go unseen.  
The pine, the spruce, the edelweiss  
Will see the Winter Queen.

Some people curse my time on Earth  
They’d rather I not be.  
They only know my crueler side  
My beauty they don’t see.

They fail to know my crystal sky  
My diamond-covered sea.  
The shrouded silence of my Earth  
The magic that is me.

_We Are Crones_  
by Laura Osburn

_CAW CAW CAW_

The call of the crow beckons the crones.  
We are those women of wisdom and years  
who heed the call to share the stories of our lives  
from deepest despair to joys unimagined.

Our hair can be white, gray, silver, red, blue or green;  
maybe to the shoulders or more. How about a buzz?  
Now that’s stylin’!

We are tough old ladies (maybe ninjas) so don’t let our hair,  
tattoos, tie-dyeing, hats, scarves, shawls or walkers fool you.  
We sing, dance, drum, hum and dream of golden days to come.

We speak our truth with voices loud and clear.  
For our exuberance we are unapologetic.  
Our laughter, so loud and frequent, as to wake sleeping angels.  
We speak of healing and honor the Four Directions.  
We fully embrace the stages of our lives,  
and celebrate with our stories their true meaning.

You see, when crones gather, there is safety.  
Only here are we free to share our heartfelt stories of  
estrangement, struggle, loss, pain, sorrow and redemption  
that we, perhaps, never dare elsewhere to mention.  
In perfect balance, we celebrate with standing ovations our  
triumphs, accomplishments and successes with  
plucky jubilation.

We pass the tissue to dry the tears, give hugs all around  
then someone tells a joke and we laugh all over again.  
We are poets, authors, artisans, musicians, teachers, and  
philosophers (the list is long) who have something to say.  
And do.

We share our gifts freely and honor those no longer with us.  
Shoulder to shoulder we walk in gratitude with our sisters,  
Mother Earth, and Her four seasons. Ho.

To promote and protect our fundamental values, we all must stay engaged – this week, this month, this year, and beyond.  
— THE SHIFT NETWORK