First Timer Surprises or Maybe, Reflections

By Mary Jensen

What a surprise: For reasons I still can't explain, my name tag being the correct color matters to me. “My decade” has become an important framework for my story.

At first glance it appears everyone is dressed in flowing colorful skirts, tops, dresses, or shawls. Except me. I've come from the airport, and look as if I'm on my way to a hike. Sad old memories flood my mind. I begin to wonder if I belong here.

Clearly folks are connecting with friends, and so just glance at me. I recognize no one, and I live here. I'm a stranger wearing hiking clothes. Does she belong here? I wonder, too.

And so begins my first Crones Counsel gathering. I was croned by my mother five years ago. I wear my crone charm, cherish crone feelings, and hold my crone wisdom ground. Differently than the competent independent feminist I was born. Somehow, differently.

After the official opening — intellectual, competent, well-known women of history — I begin to feel as if I might belong here after all. Even so, when we adjourn, I'm grateful to go home to my own bed, my own peace and quiet.

The next morning I'm again surprised, as I enthusiastically return to the crones, now not all strangers. During the day I must leave twice due to my crone work, but return each time to attend yet another interesting session, talk with our artisans, and chat with women in the halls who now look familiar.

That day extends many hours. I miss the dancing. But I'm peaceful and content knowing I've connected and played and thought with other crones today, and I've done my crone work, as well. And there's still another day and a half to go! How glorious, how luxurious.

Yet another surprise awaits. When the registration opens for Tucson, I sign up! In spite of the very real fact that I'm heat intolerant and have specific dietary needs, I am going to Tucson.

And somehow, I know it will be so wonderful I invite my best friend of 50 years, who's now living on the opposite coast, to join me. Surprise and delight, she too is coming! In Tucson we will do our crone work of connecting, playing, and thinking, and we'll join the dancing and the drumming, too! Oh yes, Tucson, September 2019.
Growing Up

by Maggie Fenton

I'm sitting in a beach chair watching the grandsons learn to surf.

It's Thanksgiving week and instead of staying in Ohio, we've traveled south and hearing the weather conditions back home, it was a brilliant decision! Lucky me. Near me, a young brother and sister, our neighbors for the week, are playing in the surf and the older brother ... around seven, I'm guessing ... is busy building a complicated sand structure. At one point, I hear him, with a very officious voice, say to his little sister, "Grow up!" It's funny, coming from a young boy, and said with such authority that I'm sure he has heard it before. He hears me laugh and gives me a confused look. After all, why wouldn't everyone want to "Grow up!"

Why indeed? But what does it mean? As I thought about it, I'm still not sure.

When I was seven, growing up meant that I should learn to be like my big sister, Patty. Ten years older, in my eyes she was the perfect grown-up. She and her friends were seniors in high school; their lives seemed so glamorous: school, proms, boyfriends, parties, concerts, college visits. She was the Miss Mercer County Fair queen. A queen! Surely, that was grown up! I even had an elementary school teacher who frequently admonished me to be more like my big sister Patty. Later, I discovered that, for this particular teacher, this meant to be compliant and sweet and never, ever to question authority. I feared I would never "grow up."

Patty remained my grown-up role model for many years. When I was a teenager and she was near college graduation and marriage, we sat in the front yard of our farm house on a quilt under a tree sewing tiny beads on her wedding dress. She talked about her upcoming wedding and her plans to teach for a while until she had children because that is what her husband-to-be wanted. This, I thought, must be what "growing up" meant and the thought made me slightly nauseous, especially the part where I had to give up my own dreams to follow my partner's dreams.

I blundered along, a rebellious child of the sixties, meeting new role models — both men and women — who encouraged me at every stumbled step. An early marriage, two children followed in quick succession, but a divorce found me living in student housing, raising my two children on rubber child-support checks, and finding income where I could get it (playing guitar and singing in a bar, cooking unlicensed meals for hungry students, working in the campus data center, freelance programming for grad students, even posing semi-naked for an art class — what was I thinking?! At that point, "growing up" meant that I needed to be responsible. This meant supporting my two young children and finding a way to make a life for them and me. It also meant speaking out against what I considered an unjust war, marching in protest marches (sometimes with my two young children along), writing congressmen, and finding my voice.

During this time, there were incidents of incredible kindness from perfect strangers that I still remember. They taught me that Being Kind was essential to growing up.

Life moved on; I moved on; I met Rich and we married. He was a wonderful human being, a wonderful husband, and a wonderful father to my children — the one they (still) call Dad. I had a career with all its ups and downs, worked in corporate America and then started my own business, each step another opportunity to grow up. My children's teenage years were a special opportunity to grow up, as they learned to spread their wings and I learned to let them experience their own successes and failure while (mostly) withholding judgment.

All too soon, I lost Rich to cancer. It was the most painful "growing up" I ever had to do. I learned that Growing Up means learning to let go, even of the most important and dear things. Growing up meant celebrating the birth of grandsons during the middle of deep grief. Growing up meant picking myself up, surviving and moving on.

Growing up meant opening to new relationships. My partner, Mike, and I met and bonded, probably because we each had lost the loves of our lives to illness. We've grown into the wisdom that you can have more than one love in your life.

I hope I'm still growing up. Now, it is about keeping the lessons that have been hard-learned over the years but also learning from the child who is still a part of me. She is the one who approaches every day with a sense of discovery and adventure, who speaks her mind with deliberation and kindness, who loves often and well, especially at herself, who tries new things without fearing failure, who cries freely when tears are needed, who loves without condition, who can be amazed by nature and music and beauty and who doesn't spend much time thinking about "growing up!"
This short story of Growth and Change is part of a much longer story, and it is only one example of many regarding a current epidemic, which is on the rise in the United States today.

As Wise Crones, we know that growth and change can occur at any age. Sometimes it is forced on us, as in the death of a loved one, and when we are wise, we choose to continue growth, but often it chooses us. In this case, it chose me and it felt as if I were caught up in the middle of a nasty tornado purposely whirled up by Pachamama (aka Mother Gaia, the Goddess, etc.).

Many times we lose all control in a disaster and then we find ourselves dropped into a completely strange and foreign landscape, where we no longer recognize the skills or survival mechanisms required of us.

In August of 2018, I traveled to Idaho from Washington, to visit two girls I used to babysit. My daughters and I had recently reconnected with them. When we got together in 2017, I discovered they had children of their own, and they gave me the honor of still calling me "Mama Jana." In return, I claimed their children as my own "grandchildren." A year later, I discovered how much of an impact I had made in their lives when they were young.

One of the girls I used to babysit, (now in her 30s) who I will call "S," had unfortunately been involved with meth, other drugs, and alcohol since the age of 15. She had abandoned all three of her daughters to their own fate. The middle one, Harmony, had been left at the age of three months in the care of her father. For unknown reasons, she had been in foster care for a year at age three, and then lived in extreme poverty and sometimes homelessness with her father. (I did not know this until much later.) I had gone over to buy her school supplies, not fully aware of how dire things were. She began begging to come and live with me during our short visit there. After all the things she told me, which no ten-year-old should even have knowledge of, I was on the phone, crying hysterically to my eldest daughter. I explained that "I could not come home without her, nor could I turn my back." This child had experienced ten years of a completely shattered life.

My next step was to tell Harmony that I could not make any promises, but I would see what I could do. Seemingly in the blink of an eye, one week later, my loving, supportive husband and I found ourselves driving back to Idaho to sign Legal Guardianship papers for the care of Harmony.

I am 63 years old, my husband is 66, and we had planned on going to Arizona for the winter, as I have multiple health issues.

In addition, my husband was retired and suddenly we found ourselves with a ten-year-old child to care for. I could not wrap my mind around it for a full two months, yet somehow I strongly felt like it was destined, something I was not only supposed to do, but was chosen for. Even though it felt like an honor in some ways, I was in tears every day, not only for her, but at my admitted resentment and fear at the change in our lives. My own daughters are in their late 30s and doing quite well. I suppose I was in shock for a while and I went to talk to my Mentor (a teacher of mine who gave me my Reiki Master qualification, and taught me Energy and Chakra healing), about the situation. She helped me come back down to earth and gain more insight.

I also took Harmony to see a wonderful local Shaman woman who sent me a great note. I would love to quote it here:

"Thank you for sharing. It is so very difficult to see the greater vision within the chaos of our life. I hear your heart and your wisdom to know there is purpose. You will find your way. You cannot miss. Sometimes before we evolve to our next place, we get stretched farther than we feel we can handle, yet we need to accept that sometimes change is forced upon us. The Lord can be quite harsh at times, and when we are wise, we choose to continue growth, but often it chooses us. It’s like a catapult and once we are shot out, we no longer recognize what was once familiar, including ourselves.

Many blessings, ‘A’"

This was such a perfect response, because it did indeed feel exactly like a catapult. I also spent the first two months on the phone constantly, making appointments, checking out resources and talking to her to a psychiatrist because I knew she had many mental-health issues. Her other relatives refused to care for or help her. She was diagnosed with severe ADHD and ODD. Since my own daughters were pretty normal kids, I had no idea what I was stepping into. It has been quite a ride in the four short months we’ve had her. There have been extreme temper tantrums like I’ve never experienced. They often send me over the top and leave me in tears for 24 hours. There has been love, grief, learning and growth.

Then one day, I finally realized it was a two-way street. She had brought me out of my descending apathy. She gave me purpose, goals, hope. She gave me the promise and ideal of being able to change just one little life, which can be a very
Recently I saw a quote that went something like this:

“When we feel like we are buried in darkness, what if we’ve been planted instead?”

I am buried in my own form of darkness right now and those words touched a frozen spot in me. They have been on my mind ever since, and I found myself slowly shifting my outlook and trying to understand how we manage to live through difficult times without giving up. I always look to nature for guidance so this analogy was something I wanted to explore.

What happens when a bulb is planted in the fall or the crocus lies dormant beneath the frozen ground? It's protected, warm, nourished by the rich moist earth. As the seed rests in quiet darkness it fills with beautiful possibility, gathering all the strength necessary to break through the hard crust with that one hopeful little sprout.

The dark days of life can feel like being buried underneath the weight of one’s past, leading up to a confused or hurtful present and into the fear of an unfathomable future. If we can see this as a dormant time, especially as we go into Winter, which encourages us to seek warmth and rest, we can use it to feed us, body and soul, so that we can bloom.

Take pleasure from small things; a warm bed, brisk air on your walk, hands wrapped around a hot drink, music, books, friends.

Give thanks for big things; shelter, enough food, whatever good health you have, the caring people around you. Give yourself time to be still. Meditate. Practice letting go of heavy thoughts and circumstances. Breathe deeply and often. Work at it, but not too hard. Add a little enjoyment in and allow others to help you. See yourself as that bulb, growing full of everything you need, preparing for the moment you break through the darkness and feel the sunshine once more.

Take heart. Remember, even if the first new green shoot comes up too soon and is struck down by an icy blast, many more are growing within your heart and you will be reborn with strength and grace and beauty into a new season in the cycle of your life.

JUST WHEN I THOUGHT I WAS DONE!, continued from Page 3

big thing and rebound throughout the world. We have both grown in this short four months, but we still have a long way to go. I am still learning.

Today the counselor at her school was able to give me resources and information. Because this type of situation is such a common occurrence now, many states have what is called Kinship Care (find information here: https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/outofhome/kinship/about/) and here are some statistics about foster care children from the 2017 issue of In Loving Arms: State of Grandfamilies available from https://www.gu.org/app/uploads/2018/05/Grandfamilies-Report-SOGF-2017.pdf

Benefits vary from state to state, and some states may refer to the federal level. But the woman who is personally working with me has been a lifesaver and very helpful. Almost everyone I’ve talked to either knows someone in this situation, or has been there themselves, including the counselor and other staff members at Harmony’s elementary school. It is one thing to have a culture of extended family, but quite another to be facing this growing epidemic. Thankfully, Kinship Care is a non-profit, non-government organization. If you know someone who needs it, have them check it out.

In the meantime, Harmony and I continue to grow together. Last night I was able to truly put myself in her shoes and imagine what it would like to be her. She is opening my heart again. And while this can be a painful process, it is something we all need to work on all the time.

I would like to end with the first paragraph of my "Daily OM" (https://www.dailyom.com/) meditation that I just received as I was working on this article. It says it all:

We are multidimensional beings and our earthly aspects are a very small part of who we are. Many of us are familiar with the experience of waking up to the fact that our lives are no longer working the way we have set them up. Sometimes this is due to a shift occurring inside ourselves over time, and sometimes it is part of the larger shift that is currently affecting all humanity.

Change is happening at such an increased rate that it is difficult to predict what the future holds. As a result, many of the old ways of planning out a life are no longer applicable, and if we cling to them we feel strangely out of tune with reality. If we are in tune with the energies around us, we will begin to question ideas that just a few years ago seemed sensible.

I am buried in my own form of darkness right now and those words touched a frozen spot in me. They have been on my mind ever since, and I found myself slowly shifting my outlook and trying to understand how we manage to live through difficult times without giving up. I always look to nature for guidance so this analogy was something I wanted to explore.

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WISE-ING UP:

Approaching Cronehood

by Susan Ann Stauffer

I remember my twenties. I was rather stupid. I recall the decade of my thirties. I thought I had the cat by the tail, only to be slapped in the face by the self-same stupidity of my twenties. By forty, I began to understand the imperative to get my act together. To wise up. If not, I would be left standing in my own shit.

During the span of my fifties, confusion reigned, and disenchantment frequently became an uninvited companion. I seemed to recognize that dark wood Algieri Dante had so aptly described. The dreams and imagined schemes I’d conjured in my forties seemed to vaporize without any hope of realization. Consequently, I found myself resigned to surrender to the reality of what was. I began to walk forward into life without my well-laid plans.

In my late fifties, I realized the wood was not so dark after all. It was a summer wood. And sprouts of greening were reaching through the swells of my gloomy morosity.

Throughout the decade of my sixties, after crossing oceans of place and time and raw experience, I found myself happily re-enchanted and re-committed to life. Oddly, those summoned desires of heart and mind I’d yearned for wove together seamlessly and effortlessly. Aha! There was a ripening, a harvest.

Now, just shy of seventy, I gratefully realize I arrived at certain of those lofty pinnacles I had determined to scale. Spiritus rector had done its finishing work. I see it now, the guiding spirit of my life’s own telos.

Thus, I suspect, I am indeed wise-ing up. I’m not so sure such happy circumstances could have arisen had I not had a North Star, had I not understood the arc of the Crone, had I not looked toward Old Nut Face for guidance in coming to terms with the distillate of my life. She has been alongside me since that first Crones Counsel in 1993, tiptoeing in my dreams and visions, lurking behind the mirrors. Under her gaze, I gleaned the bigger picture, I began to see with an aerial view, which is the gift She Who Sees Far bestows upon all of us who dare to look her in the face.

How do I know growth is happening? How do I know I’m wise-ing up? It is in small moments. Brief interludes of conscious clarity when something surprises, becomes sensible, is felt as different, new, changed. When a conversation elicits a whiff of eternity. A previously incomprehensible book becomes alive with clarity. When patience catches me by the throat and the words my anger would utter do not leave my mouth. When I have the forbearance to take a slight without offense. When the hurried driver next to me displays his middle finger and I send blessings his way.

When I look hard and tenderly at my gnarled and twisted fingers. When I give a task the time it rightfully takes. When I sit in circles with women. When I catch a moment of utter sacredness and taste it. When I affirm I am already somebody and I am enough. When I cease to lie to myself. When I own my stuff.

Now, seventy has found me planted with my roots deep down. There is frost on top of my head. From stupidity, to arrogance, to dreaming, to surrender, to autumn, to the time of veritas, I have found I am still growing, still learning, with the courage to live into my final destiny.

And the Crone? She still frightens and fascinates, but I know She is not going to leave me alone. Nor I Her. And so may it be for you.
The View
by Andrea Hartwig

As I searched the topic of growth, I came across various interpretations. Basically, growth is defined as “the process of increasing physical size.” Other words defining growth were widening, thickening, swelling, and ballooning. Hmmm, not what I had in mind; although, I do seem to be experiencing an increase in physical size in a few areas as I age. Continuing my search, I perused my new AARP weekly newsletter and learned about skin issues including growths that come with aging. Still, NOT it. I noted that growth is also often defined in terms of increasing wealth, growing business, or other career-related successes. This resonated with me, as this was my main focus from the time I was old enough to work, up until about three years ago.

I think something happens to us as we age. There is a change in perspective: a re-ordering of priorities in life. This perspective change happened for me just before I turned 50. I began daydreaming a lot about inner growth and development. I felt compelled to learn about myself, to simplify my life, and to be free of the 60-hour work weeks of a corporate healthcare executive. I planted many thought-seeds at this time!

Apparently, I watered them well with intention and desire because in April 2017, the Universe plucked me from my top-floor office with the gorgeous view of the mountains and the Rillito River and transplanted me into my very own “garden.” This garden was vast, with a lot of room, and although it seemed I was pushed way down into the dirt, I was just where I needed to be in order to truly grow from the inside out.

Today, I have sprouted and grown into a seedling. I have had many wonderful experiences to aid me in my growth, and although I know I have a lot of growing left to do, I am eager. When I think about it, my view is different now but I would have to say, the view is much better here.

Here’s to the wild, the weird, and the wonderful. To the tribe of troublemakers that think so far outside the box, they dream on the edges of the infinite.

Here’s to the brightly colored, divine visionaries that won’t stand down, play small, or sit out.

Here’s to the awakened ones whose purpose is to feed their soul and not starve it.

Here’s to the wild ones. Here’s to you.”

— ARA

CRONES COUNSEL BOARD CONTACTS

PRESIDENT
Janet Morrissey
928 S Bay Hill Road,
Banning, CA 92220
JM928@dc.rr.com
951-845-6740

VICE-PRESIDENT & REGISTRAR
Maggie Fenton
6424 Township Road 199
Centerburg, OH 43011
cronemaggie48@gmail.com
740-625-7278

TREASURER
Kay Bouma
5452 E. Hillery,
Scottsdale AZ 85254
kaybouma@cox.net
602-377-5632

SECRETARY
Win Fiandaca
P.O. Box 17843,
Munds Park, AZ 85017
winfiandaca@gmail.com
480-225-7020

MEMBER AT LARGE
Carol Friedrich
20880 E 52nd Avenue
Denver, CO 80249
cronecarol@earthlink.net
H 303-373-5135
C 303-594-0923

WEB MOTHER
Suzanne Gruba
232 West 4th Avenue
Denver, CO 80223
suzgruba@gmail.com
303-946-8996

Administrative
mARTa Quest
2020 Highway 99 N, #4
Ashland, OR 97520
RRandArt12@gmail.com
541-234-4383

CRONETIMES
Kianna Bader
9425 Montevideo Dr.
Wilton, CA 95693
Kianna4064@gmail.com
916-525-7285

Crones Counsel, Inc., is dedicated to claiming the archetype of Crone through the creation of gatherings that honor and advance the aging woman’s value.
Welcome to the Southwest!
Our theme originates with a powerful deity of the Navajo and Apache peoples. She embodies the spiral of life/death/life. She constantly changes but never grows old, for as she completes the cycle of the Medicine Wheel and returns to the east in the spring, her youth is restored.

We will be gathering at the Marriott Tucson University Park Hotel in the heart of Tucson, adjacent to the beautiful University of Arizona campus.

You may enjoy 33 restaurants and a variety of shops within a two-minute walk; however, there are dining choices in the hotel! In addition, you will become acquainted with the cultural heritage of the Great Southwest!

Join in the ...
- Workshops
- Drumming
- Storytelling
- Wisdom Circles
- Honoring the Elders
- Honoring the Decades
- Poetry Reading
- An evening of Singing and Dancing
- The Follies – bring an instrument or your voice
- Optional Sightseeing.
- Reserve your Crones Artisans’ Bazaar space through the CC website

NOTE: All contributors must be registered for the Gathering.
Artisans’ products offered for sale must be Crone creations.

Gathering details and Registration are on the Crones Counsel website: www.cronescounsel.org
Call Maggie Fenton, Registrar, 740-625-7278 or email her at cronemaggie48@gmail.com
Moving Along into 2019
by Janet Morrissey

REGIONAL MEETING!
I spent the week after Christmas in the San Diego area, meeting with some of the San Diego Crones for lunch: Marian Karpisek, Alice Yee, and Michele Serra. I have met with these women since I’ve gotten on the Board, including at times, Mahtowin and Mnimaka. I have called them my core group because their knowledge and friendship have been of great value to me.

I was most excited to share with them because the Mother Board is going to experiment with a new idea, and San Diego was going to be our launching pad. They agreed to be part of this new adventure.

The Board has discussed expansion with the idea of reaching more women who might be interested in what we do. As society ages and women’s numbers grow in the 60, 70, 80 age groups and beyond, we felt we needed to tap into these circles. I see organizations who don’t add younger members to their rolls and slowly they begin to fade and die, not that Crones Counsel is fading, but it doesn’t hurt to introduce more women to the concept of Crone.

With that in mind, we began to explore the idea of having a Regional Meeting, separate from the Gathering. A plan was designed and the Board asked Anne Richardson to coordinate this first Regional Meeting. San Diego Crones were asked if they would be interested in hosting this endeavor. They were excited and felt it was a good opportunity for their local circle to increase, and also, to contribute to the success of Crones Counsel.

The first Regional Meeting will be held on Saturday, March 9, at the UU Church in San Diego with the theme “Better Balance.” It will be held from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., using the format of our yearly Gathering: storytelling, wisdom circle, workshop, drumming, and singing. There will be a registration fee of $50, which will include lunch. We invite any of you who are in the area and would like to attend to please visit our website (cronescounsel.org) to view the details and register.

I want to thank Anne Richardson and the San Diego Crones for all their work in putting this together. I ask all of you reading this to put your positive energy forward making this a colossal success.

If you have any questions, email Anne (silicroneally@gmail.com) or Janet (jm928@dc.rr.com).
Honoring Laurie Dameron

Laurie won the 2017-2018 BPW (Business Professional Women) Boulder Trailblazer Woman of the Year Award for Music and Environmental Work.

Laurie goes to Egypt!

The Cairo conference was our 29th BPW-International Congress with 680 women from 33 countries. The National Federation of Business and Professional Women has been around since 1919. We were one of the first organizations to support the ERA (Equal Rights Amendment) written in 1923, which has still not been ratified for the USA! But we only need one more state!

You can help! There are BPW (Business and Professional Women) chapters in several states. Please consider joining one: https://www.nfbpwc.org/

Our Boulder BPW president, Sharon, and I were both told we were getting Member of the Year awards in Cairo. We were so excited to travel there, but, it turned out, we didn’t get our awards. Something about some paperwork we were supposed to fill out that neither of us knew about. However, we flew to Cairo and attended the fantastic conference. I was a voting delegate and I learned so much! The trip itself was like a dream. We also got to travel around that amazing country.

My grandfather, Lester Jones, on my mom’s side, was in the Navy and was on the “Great White Fleet” that President Theodore Roosevelt sent around the world between 1906-1909. I tried to recreate his photo when I was in Egypt. We are both second from the left.
2020 HIGHWAY 99 N.
UNIT 4
ASHLAND, OR 97520