The Strength of Story
by Janet Morrissey

“I believe in the power of stories to change hearts and minds. I also believe that these stories bring us together, for we have more in common than not.” — ELENA HUNG

Listening to the wise women tell their stories at the Gathering confirms my belief in the strength of each of us through our stories. Women tell their stories whether they tell them to a group or to a listening friend. It’s in our nature and in our DNA. Perhaps, that is what makes us strong: sharing, asking for advice and returning the service by listening.

Years ago, I shared a story at the 2003 Gathering at Asilomar of how I became involved with three other women to open a spirituality center. It happened rather magically as I was looking for something to do when I retired. I was drawn to sharing with women spiritually, as I had been working on a master’s degree in feminist spirituality at Immaculate Heart College Center in Los Angeles.

In the fall of 1999, I attended a retreat in Missouri led by Barbara Fland who shared a story about Joan Marie Sasse, a woman I had met once who ran a retreat center in Grand Terrace, California, about 30 miles from my home. I knew of her retreat center and had attended one of her retreats.

Upon my return, I called her and we set up a meeting with another shared friend who did touch healing and essential oils. We talked briefly about the idea of opening a spirituality/healing center in the Beaumont/Banning area where I had seen a house for rent. We agreed to drive to see it. The business next door was a friend of Joan’s and we stopped to say hello.

As she heard our story, she said, “I have a house that is empty. Would you be interested in seeing it?” Of course. A few hours later, I had the keys to this rent-free house, and we became serious about opening the Holistic Renewal Center. This happened in one day. Other people came forward to offer money, advice and assistance. It was magical but needed our strength in believing that we could open a business, develop a plan, and work as a team. There was no financial outlay from either of us.

We all have a story to tell about gaining strength from sharing a dream or a story. Last year at the Bellingham Gathering I received the special shawl that is passed from one crone to another. I was overwhelmed and could hardly believe Marilyn Thompson called my name. All year it has been on the back of my chair, giving me support and courage. I would recall the stories of the women who cherished this precious garment and who had instilled their dreams, strength, and love into it.

Our Crones Counsel foremothers believed strongly in storytelling and in creating a space for women’s voices. Jean Shinoda Bolen tells us that,

“If stories come to you, care for them. And learn to give them away where they are needed.”

Come to the Tucson Gathering and tell us your story. We all have a story.
Building Strength

by Anita Hedlund

If we want to make our bodies strong, especially our muscles, we have to use them and make them work. For something to be strong, it has to be well made. Our bodies are miraculous on many levels. Strength of spirit or life-energy is made by what we are given as attributes, what our families teach us, what we observe in the world, and how we choose to interact with people and our environment.

Think of people you look at and say, “that person is so strong!” We are most often referring to a life experience that the person has made it through: labor and birth, breakdown of relationships, death of a loved one. To develop strength as in resilience, we have to work through adversity. Our strength is forged by the fire of our passions and the water of our emotions, reshaping and adding layers to reinforce the core.

To make something new, as in a garden or a building, there first has to be a preparing of the ground that looks rough: a plowing up, a mixing in, a tearing down — perhaps adding things to enhance the site or the soil. Strength does not come easily — it requires surviving through fear, anxiety, pain, unknown outcomes . . . but at the same time there is opportunity to learn about who we are, as well as the true character of others are that come alongside us, carry us through, or run away. A major element of strength is love. Love of another, or a self-love, that leads us to choose certain actions or paths in our lives, or simply to keep going. The chance to see another sunrise, a beautiful locale, or a dear one’s face . . .

I experienced a time of “tearing down” in my first marriage. My ex was emotionally abusive, dysfunctional, and eventually was unfaithful. The evidence of his infidelity was left where I would easily discover it. I felt so small, so broken, so unworthy,

“A Woman of Spirit, She Showed Courage, Wisdom, and Delight in All”

BUILDING STRENGTH, continued on Page 3

PARADOX

by Mnimaka

It is in birthing that pain becomes unavoidable
Holding back birth to avoid pain results in corruption and death
Crisis becomes the crucible of insight and understanding
It is in dying that we complete our living
— MNIMAKA 1999

In my mid-fifties when relieved of the responsibilities of children and career, I began to define myself differently, to go inward and seek the wisdom of my own understanding. I now see the inner life force as a river into which some will risk dipping a toe but into which, whether naively or courageously, I have jumped feet first. I am immersed in the current and revel pouring its waters over me — cleansing, nourishing, baptizing, and sanctifying me. Leading with my heart first, my soul second, and my head third, my body remained somewhat disconnected from the process, sensually receptive, but less inclined to jump off into space than the rest of me.

I have come to terms with fear, which I now know must be faced, and walked through for an understanding and thereby have the truth revealed. I have also come to terms with death and have found that I have an insatiable thirst and passion for life which I intend never to release while I have breath; I will imagine it, experience it, see it, hear it, taste it, smell it, feel it, and touch it. I also see it, experience it, hear it, feel it, and touch it through the art of others. For others are able to touch me through their art alone, without they themselves having to be present. Available to me are the visions of Michelangelo, DaVinci, Raphael, Vivaldi, and all of the anonymous storytellers, singers of songs, architects of cathedrals, cities and cultures — Artists who may no longer be alive, but who live because I am alive and I can experience their vision.

An epitaph I would choose is . . .

“A Woman of Spirit, She Showed Courage, Wisdom, and Delight in All”

— CELTIC CHRISTIAN TRADITION
so angry. I wept and I raged. The action that was clear to others as the right way to proceed took me some time to get to. I had made a commitment in faith. I moved out, I came back. I pleaded and I shouted. Finally, I came to a place where I knew the way to love myself was to leave. To walk out the door of the home and the relationship, and never look back. Although that period of my life was painful and difficult, I would not change it or have it taken away, as it brought me to where I am now. I gained strength and developed resolve to not be treated poorly and disrespected. I have learned what love looks like and feels like, and what it does not. After being plowed up and living through a cleansing storm, I met a new love who gave me hope ... and my longed for children. I can see certain strengths developing in my daughters. The best strength I can instill in them is my deep, abiding mother love.

hitting balls and a star was born. She won the first tournament she entered and claimed the prize — her very own tennis racquet. From that point on, there was no stopping her as she became the number one seed in high school and reigned as the "Inland Empire's Tennis Queen." Education was Alice's passion and becoming a teacher was her goal. Despite being high school valedictorian, there was no scholarship for her; only men got college scholarships. However, lack of funds didn't stop Alice from enrolling in Eastern Washington University in 1936. A summer job in a window-blind factory netted her $100 and, with this in her pocket, she hitch-hiked her way to Cheney to begin classes.

Upon arrival, Alice immediately went to the Dean of Women's office to find a much-needed job. Informed that nothing was available, she told the Dean in no uncertain terms that she had $100 and intended to go to college. She returned each day until the Dean finally gave in and admitted there was one job, but it was never given to women. Alice leapt at the opportunity and for the rest of the school year rose at 5:00 a.m. to clean restrooms in the Administration Building. In her junior year, funding from the National Recovery Act of 1933 paid for her to be a student assistant in the P.E. department — a job she loved.

Tennis continued to be an important part of Alice's life, but university women's teams didn't exist so she practiced with the men's team and ranked number 2. No matter how good she was though, competing in tournaments wasn't allowed lest she beat a man and cause him great embarrassment!

Marrying her high-school sweetheart, George Low, in 1942, Alice gave up teaching and became a full-time homemaker. When the couple's three children, Dave, Becky, and Duncan, were born, she thought she had attained the "happily-ever-after" life she had been conditioned to expect. If things had gone according to plan, this might have been her future.

However, life has a way of upsetting our plans and Alice's turned upside down when she learned her husband had Hodgkin's disease and might have only a year to live. Together, Alice and George decided she needed to return to teaching and get a Master's Degree.

Teaching during the school year at Wenatchee Valley College, Alice embarked on an ambitious plan to get her Master's...
with two summers on campus at Central Washington University. This meant getting up early every Monday and driving to Ellensburg, attending classes and studying all week, returning Friday afternoon to catch up with her husband and children, cook, clean, and do laundry before starting all over again.

Living in a dorm worked except for one rule: women were required to be in by 10:15 each night. Alice, 35 and a mother of three, was not about to obey such a rule. She knew she didn’t have time to fight the rules so, after careful consideration, she talked to the House Mother and worked out a plan that was acceptable to both of them.

George miraculously lived seven years longer and knew his family would thrive with Alice at the helm. In 1957, Alice became Dean of Students/Faculty at Wenatchee, launching her career in college/university administration.

Serving on a Wenatchee selection committee to choose a new Political Science professor, Alice met Robert Yee who impressed her with his analytical mind and astute intellect. They had a strong attraction, but Alice refused to remarry until her children were out of school. She could not handle the disruption of adding a new man to the family.

Alice was hired as Dean of Women at CWU in 1960 and the family had to move to Ellensburg. This created a problem as Dave was entering his senior year in high school. Although there was much discussion about whether he would stay in Wenatchee to graduate or move with the family, in the end, he went with them.

The Sixties ushered in seething unrest at campuses across the country as students rebelled against the status quo. Alice was in the forefront of changing the mindset that women needed to be governed by hours, dress codes, and moral standards in order to keep men in line. One of her first accomplishments was abolishing the hours restriction for women.

Working within an established, traditional, and primarily male, environment meant she had to figure out where the power lay, learn how to be political and work with groups and individuals while using patience in making changes. She challenged existing mores while not creating conflict — a delicate line she successfully walked. Each step forward gave women more autonomy and control over their lives and futures.

In 1966, Alice was invited to become Dean of Women at Grinnell College. Her initial response: “NO!” She enjoyed her work at CWU and had no intention of moving from Washington. However, the President of Grinnell was persuasive and finally convinced her to move to Iowa. This time it was her younger son who was entering his senior year of high school. Despite concerns, the move was successful and Alice and her children agree that it was the best thing they could have done.

Although Alice still cared very much for Bob, he lived in Washington, she in Iowa. Not wanting to keep him on hold, she repeatedly told him to “go find another woman.” Instead, he arranged his life to permit trips to Iowa as often as possible. At last, in 1970, when Duncan graduated from college, Alice told Bob if he still wanted to marry her, she was ready.

Marrying Bob and returning to Ellensburg meant Alice was out of a job. That quickly changed when CWU recruited her to create a Women’s Center. Given the title of Director, an office, and a budget of $500, she wrote grants, lobbied the legislature and worked with community programs to develop a thriving center that helped improve the lives of women and girls statewide as well as at the university.

A highlight of Alice’s life was the 1977 International Women’s Year. As chair of local arrangements for the Washington State Conference, she spent many hours planning and executing the logistics. All was in readiness for the expected 2,500 representatives when, just hours before the opening session, 2,000 conservative anti-ERA women (and men) arrived unannounced, intending to sabotage the outcome of the conference.

Problem-solver Alice and her team worked feverishly all night getting additional programs and forms printed and figuring out how to handle the influx. In the morning, registration lines were long, but everyone was eventually processed and no one could claim they were denied access or were treated unfairly.

The conference involved long and heated discussions, especially about the ERA, and there were concerns the conservative delegation would overwhelm the balance. But when the 24 delegates were announced, 23 were pro-ERA; only one was a conservative. Alice went to Houston as an alternate
delegate and listening to speakers Rosalynn Carter, Betty Ford, Coretta Scott King, Bella Abzug, Betty Friedan, Barbara Jordan and Maya Angelou was an unforgettable experience.

Retirement in 1983 gave Alice and Bob more time to do the things they loved. Leisurely days spent fly fishing and telling stories around a campfire with family and friends in Idaho and Montana made summers an idyllic time. But there were a few heart-stopping, adrenalin filled, moments like when Alice came face to face with an angry moose on Rock Creek. In typical Alice fashion, she won the staring contest and the moose finally turned tail and ceded the victory to her.

To escape the cold winters of Ellensburg, the Yees became San Diego snowbirds for 30 years. Alice, not surprisingly, wasn’t the typical snowbird. She quickly became involved in ushering for San Diego theaters and the San Diego Symphony, participating in political activities ("Brides for Bush" and the 2016 Women’s March stand out), playing with local tennis groups and joining Women of Ancient Wisdom, San Diego’s crone circle. In 2008, Alice attended her first Crones Counsel in Seattle and discovered a tribe of like-minded women.

Alice and Bob sold their Washington home in 2014, moving to a retirement community in La Jolla. Bob passed away in 2017, but although Alice still misses him greatly, she continues her active, involved life. As she says, "Aging is inevitable, but growing old is a choice. If you’re going to live a long time, enjoy it and live every day. Attitude is key to getting through problems."

We honor this strong woman and esteemed elder, Alice Yee, on her 100th birthday.

NOTE: After her huge birthday celebration with 150 of her family and friends and one day before her celebration with the San Diego Crone Circle, Alice suffered a serious fall. Although she suffered a cracked pelvis and shattered wrist, she is recuperating and has a great attitude. She is determined to get through this, return to her active life, and be in attendance at Crones Counsel in September.
Please join us in Tucson, Arizona for our 27th annual gathering of Crones Counsel where you will join your Crone Sisters in celebration of the cycle of life’s joys. "Changing Woman" is our theme. She is a powerful deity among the Navajo and Apache and is honored in ceremonies for childbirth, coming of age, weddings, and new-home blessings. From the viewpoint of the Crone, coming of age means more than a girl becoming a woman; it represents becoming Crone. Changing Woman represents the power of life, fertility, and changing seasons. Her essence is one with the cycle of life/death/life: She constantly changes but never dies and becomes young again each spring as she returns to the East in the Medicine Wheel. Her story suits our group perfectly as we are all in different stages of becoming.

First Timers are welcomed and will receive orientation to help them gain the most out of their experience.

Our annual gathering will be at the University Marriott Park Hotel adjacent to the University of Arizona Campus.

880 E 2nd St, Tucson, AZ 85719

The hotel has a 24-hour fitness center and features complimentary wireless Internet, a business center, dry cleaning, laundry and, for $20/day extra per room full concierge services including hot breakfast. On-site dining options include the Saguaro Grill Restaurant and room service (during limited hours). There is also a bar/lounge.

Note: Three meals are also included in our conference registration.

Rooms are $119, double queens, plus taxes and fees. Conference rates are good for three days before and 3 days after. Refrigerators are available on request and microwaves are available in the business center. Parking is $10.00 per day and free on Saturday and Sunday.

Register for Crones Counsel XXVII Now. Make Hotel Reservations Now.

To register for Crones Counsel go to www.cronescounsel.org and select 2019 Registration.

Note: the cost currently is $225 (elders 80+ $210) until 8/1/19; after that, rates go up.

For Hotel Reservations call 520-792-4100 or online: TucsonUniversityPark.guestreservations.com
DIRECTIONS: The hotel is 12 minutes from the Tucson International Airport and 6 minutes from the Amtrak and Bus Station. The hotel does not have airport transportation. Estimated Uber fare from the airport is $13-$17 and $7-$8 from the train and bus station.

DIRECTIONS BY CAR: Coming from the North or South on I-10, exit on Speedway (257), turn East to North Euclid Avenue. Go two blocks to Second Street and turn East. You have arrived.

TO REGISTER FOR THE GATHERING IN TUCSON, GO TO WWW.CRONESCOUNSEL.ORG AND SELECT “2019 REGISTRATION.” REGISTRATION THROUGH 7/31/2019 IS $225. (ELDERS, $210.) REGISTRATION GOES UP AUGUST 1.

CRONES COUNSEL XXVII INCLUDES:

- **Opening and Closing Ceremonies** — Our opening ceremony sets the tone and then provides closure for the gathering.
- **Story Telling** — Offering women a chance to tell their stories in a sacred, safe place.
- **Wisdom Circles** — Small, intimate groups where we share our stories and meet other crones.
- **Honoring the Elders** — We offer a ceremony honoring those 80 and above.
- **Poetry Evening** — Sharing our poems and other writings.
- **Drumming** — Sing, dance and drum!
- **Follies** — Our awesome talent show open to all who wish to perform.
- **Workshops** — Peer led on topics such as aging, health, spirituality, writing, crafts and more.
- **Outreach** — We collect money for a local women’s organization and invite them to speak to us about their work.
- **Excursion** — Optional sightseeing trips on your own.

View of the Main Gate Plaza at the University of Arizona.

Enjoy 33 restaurants and a variety of shops all within a two-minute walk, as well as Arizona’s History and State Museums.

(Our hotel is in the upper right-hand corner of the photo at left.)

Catalina Mountains overlooking Greater Tucson

https://vimeo.com/248026619 1.5 hr drive from hotel
ALICE YEE, continued from Page 5

ALICE WITH LYNN ERIKSSON, photographer extraordinaire!
2019 REGIONAL CRONES COUNSEL GATHERING — SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA

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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 to society.
Calling up My Strength

by Patricia Subatch Alton, May 5, 2019

It took all of my strength to leave her — on that dreary 2007 January morning in Martin Memorial Hospital, Stuart, Florida. I could not bear to witness her take her last breath. The woman who gave me my first breath, Alma Louise Harrison Subatch was indeed dying.

Was it cowardly to leave my daughter Jessica and brother Richard to be her death doula or was the excuse, “I need to go to work,” enough to justify that I just couldn’t handle losing her? I drove blindly up to the island to be near the ocean my mother so dearly loved. The sun was just rising up over the horizon promising another picture postcard winter’s day in sunny South Florida. How could this be happening? I know we are meant to have our parents transition before us, but does it have to break your heart wide open? I walked alone along the pristine barrier reef and picked up a stick to mark out a heart in the sand with “Mom” inside it. Maybe this would keep her close? The tide soon washed the heart away — along with it a thousand memories of joy, laughter, sorrow, and pain, as it slipped into the surf. The sun shone brightly as I was suddenly startled by one long column of light from the dark edge of the horizon. It beamed straight up to the heavens and I knew right then my mother had passed.

It was difficult to concentrate on my tasks at work, waiting for the “call” and it came around 10 a.m. from my brave daughter — “Nana’s gone — a while ago — around sunrise. Sorry, Mom, I didn’t call sooner, Rich and I needed time alone with her.” So there it was, the dreaded call that we all for the most part must face, and what next? It took all of my strength even after twelve years to not pick up the phone and call her for comfort, wisdom, and unconditional love.

Three months to the day of my mother’s passing, I was in the same hospital, same floor having had a heart attack. Loss can break your heart wide open and time and memories can heal it. But what is Death? New life without a cumbersome body. She sends me rainbows and most recently on March 11, 2019, a card: on the front, “With God All Things are Possible”

An Impossible Dream

by Alice Yee 2016

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.
“Whether we like it or not, most of us have had our strength constantly challenged over the years. I, like many seventy-six-year olds, have faced good and bad times that have called on various strengths, which I never thought were in me.”

I have been challenged to get through breast cancer, divorce after a long marriage, and the deaths of parents and aunts and uncles and nieces and friends. On a more positive side, unanticipated strength was necessary for a year’s travel around the world when I had to “work it out” through creatively developing new solutions to the various hurdles of extensive solo travel. I have needed strength for the birthing and raising of children, job and geographic changes, and many others. However, I have never spoken the story of a more recent trying experience requiring major strength to accept and “work it out.”

A few years ago in the spring, I traveled west from Atlanta to interview many of our elders and others over eighty for a book I wanted to write on aging. I had only been home a few weeks after this three-month sojourn when I had a monthly dinner with five close friends. During our traditional “check-in,” one very close friend said she had been to a doctor and would be getting results the following week. Several of us offered to go to the appointment with her, which she declined. A few days later I repeatedly tried to make contact by phone, text, and e-mail. At first I thought she must be a little depressed and was choosing to cut herself off from friends for a while as she sometimes did.

Finally, being the only person with a key to her house, I decided to seek her out. After knocking several times and yelling that I was coming inside, I entered and walked the rooms of the first floor arriving at the garage. I knew if her car was there that something was terribly amiss as she did not enjoy walking outside. Finding an intact car, I fought the mounting uneasiness to go to the second floor.

It was unusual to find an unmade bed but neither it nor the floor contained my friend. As I turned to view the large adjoining bathroom, there she was. She was fully dressed lying dead in a red, quilt-lined bathtub with candles along the rim and a gun by her side. A suicide note was taped to the side of the tub.

My first reaction was pure anger. I began cussing her for what she had done. I finally got some control and called 911 and two of her other close friends. The shock was overwhelming and the strength it took over the following year has probably been my most challenging life event. Not only was I co-facilitator for her funeral service a month later but a major part of carrying out her well-documented wishes. One of the hardest dictates was specific instructions not to tell anyone, including mostly estranged siblings, that she had committed suicide.

I and four close friends painfully protected her privacy for a month until an attorney said the siblings must know in order to give final approval for one of us to be the outside estate executor. As if our strengths hadn’t been tested enough, the executor and I had to spend almost a year going through her household goods and dealing with a complicated distribution and disposal.

Projects or plans for my own life were non-existent, as I worked to accept the shock of her discovery, the long-time grieving of her death, and the need to focus on the work left to be done. I found it necessary to seek professional counseling for the first three months. Additionally, having the support of the other four friends was paramount to holding my strength. The old saying of “what doesn’t kill us makes us stronger” and this Crone has been tested and “hung out to dry.”

All that remains is a plea to not be called on for further strength-building in this lifetime and the hope that my friend has found peace.
2019 REGIONAL CRONES COUNSEL GATHERING – SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA