



Focus

From the Editor

From Crisis to Chrysalis

In 1985, I came to the tiny hamlet of Point Arena, California as a part-time student pastor. I was so stunned by the jaw-dropping beauty that I prayed for a way to live there the rest of my life. Shortly thereafter I met my husband (a local), changed my career, and started a family. The small-town coziness, perfect weather, and security of friends and family buoyed me for awhile, but eventually my underlying emotional fragility began to show. Within a decade-and-a-half I was approaching full-blown agoraphobia.

Blaming Point Arena for my deteriorating mental state was hardly fair, but living on the coast was also no longer working economically for our family and there were no job prospects for our rapidly-maturing children. So, the year our eldest son Arthur left home for college in Oregon, we moved as well.

The result has been very much a mixed bag. The Great Recession flattened our finances just when we were most vulnerable. In addition, I didn't count on the effort it would take to engage with a new community, and even today I find support largely with the same friends I made back when my children were little.

What the move to Oregon did do, emphatically, was land a great big brick smack onto my cobbled-together control mechanisms. The twenty-plus-year power structures upon which Alan and I previously built our marriage are largely in ruins; shattered by our efforts (sometimes tender, sometimes not) to establish territories in our new environs. (I'm not proud to report that my frantic efforts to be "top dog" have often been pretty bitchy.)

One such battle royal threatened to erupt one afternoon two springs ago when Alan went out with our friend and next-door-neighbor Andy and came back astride a Honda 400 motorcycle. We'd never had a motorcycle in the family before — although I knew that Alan had ridden during his "wild-and-crazy" adolescence — and I was absolutely livid. Still smarting from the wounds of a poorly-resolved conflict over family sailing (he loved it, I panicked) I simply couldn't believe that my dear husband had introduced another uncontrollable element into our lives. My first ride on the back of his new "baby" — on a seat designed for no one larger than a skinny twelve-year-old — helped the situation not at all.

But this time, instead of fighting Alan's "teenage" hobby, I did something quite different: I sought out and discovered a long-buried, inner wild woman of my



own. Instead of staying home while he rode off into the distance (gnawing on my fingernails in anxiety) I engaged with riding on my own terms. Starting with a 50 cc scooter, I eventually moved up to a freeway-capable bike and within the year received my very own motorcycle license. Happily, traveling on the open road (on separate bikes or together) is now one of our favorite summer pastimes.

For me, part of becoming crone has been an ongoing process of shattering tightly-held illusions, not the least of which was the fantasy of my own immortality. The same spring that the Honda unexpectedly arrived, so did Type II diabetes.

For several months my diagnosis felt like an imminent death sentence, and during that time I thought long and hard about how my family would — *will*, eventually — get along without me. That self-reflection resulted in a surprising sense of both humility and freedom. Today — twenty pounds lighter and with a daily aerobic exercise practice as my ally — I look towards the future with a sense of adventure.

Changes like the ones I have described aren't merely the result of good fortune. Nor do I believe that it was the move to Oregon that "did it."

Instead, I believe it was a conscious

and loving decision that our family made — to strive and grow, in spite of the risk, instead of staying frozen in the familiar and the safe — that ultimately made my remission from mental illness and my increased physical health possible.

Merriam-Webster defines a metamorphosis as "a striking developmental change especially occurring subsequent to birth or hatching." That describes the process I've been going through, especially the part about hatching, as I still feel very much like a baby chick of a crone.

Whether facing chronic illness, a catastrophic fire, or the loss of a beloved spouse, the courageous women featured in this issue have used the heat of chaotic forces to fire their hearts and souls to even greater beauty. I found their examples both inspiring and heartening as I move forward, and I hope you will feel the same.

Truly these women, as all of you, embody the Crone in their wisdom and their courage.

Gaia bless you and yours,

Anne Newkirk Niven



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