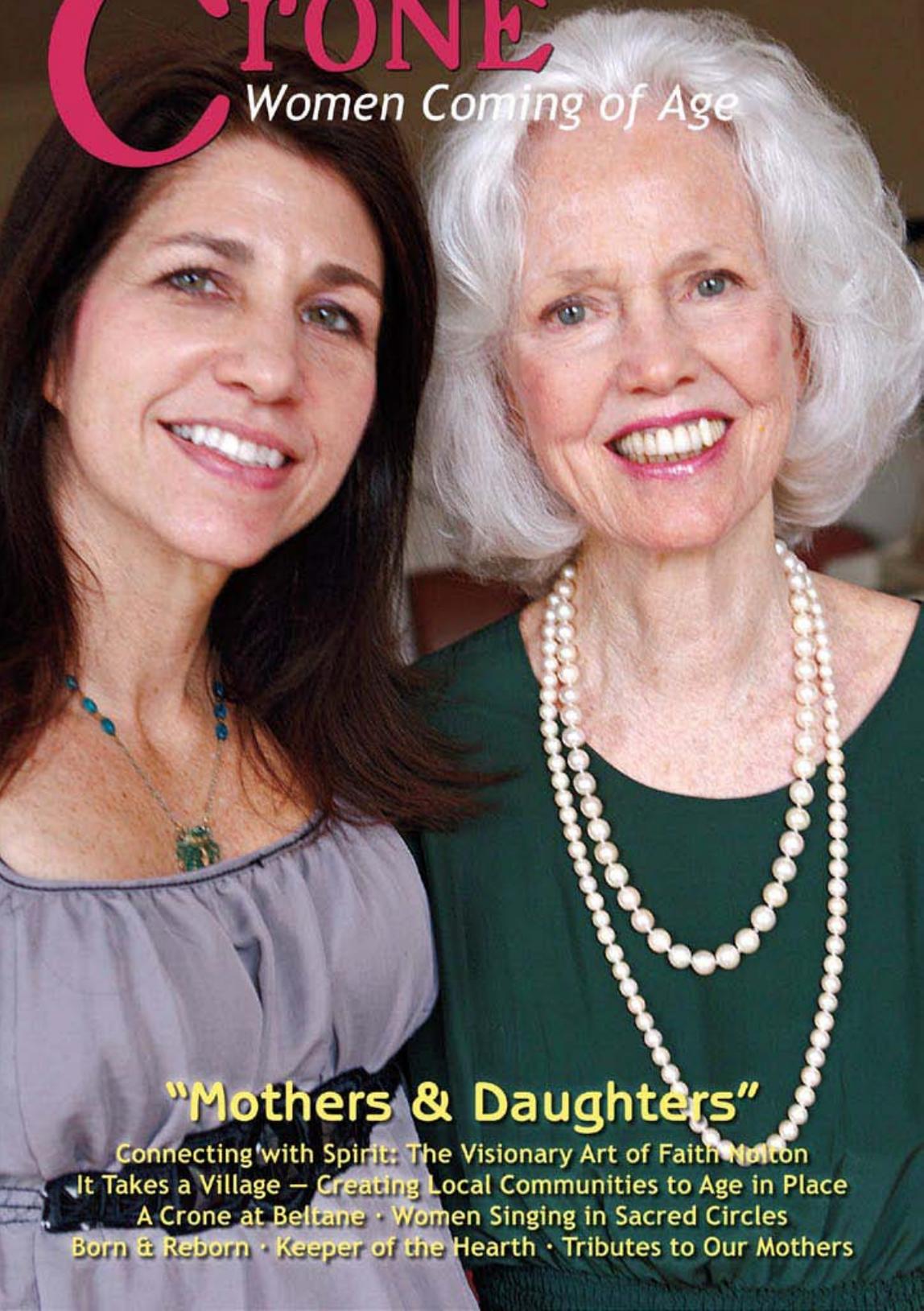


CRONE

Issue No. 7

Women Coming of Age



"Mothers & Daughters"

Connecting with Spirit: The Visionary Art of Faith Walton
It Takes a Village – Creating Local Communities to Age in Place
A Crone at Beltane • Women Singing in Sacred Circles
Born & Reborn • Keeper of the Hearth • Tributes to Our Mothers

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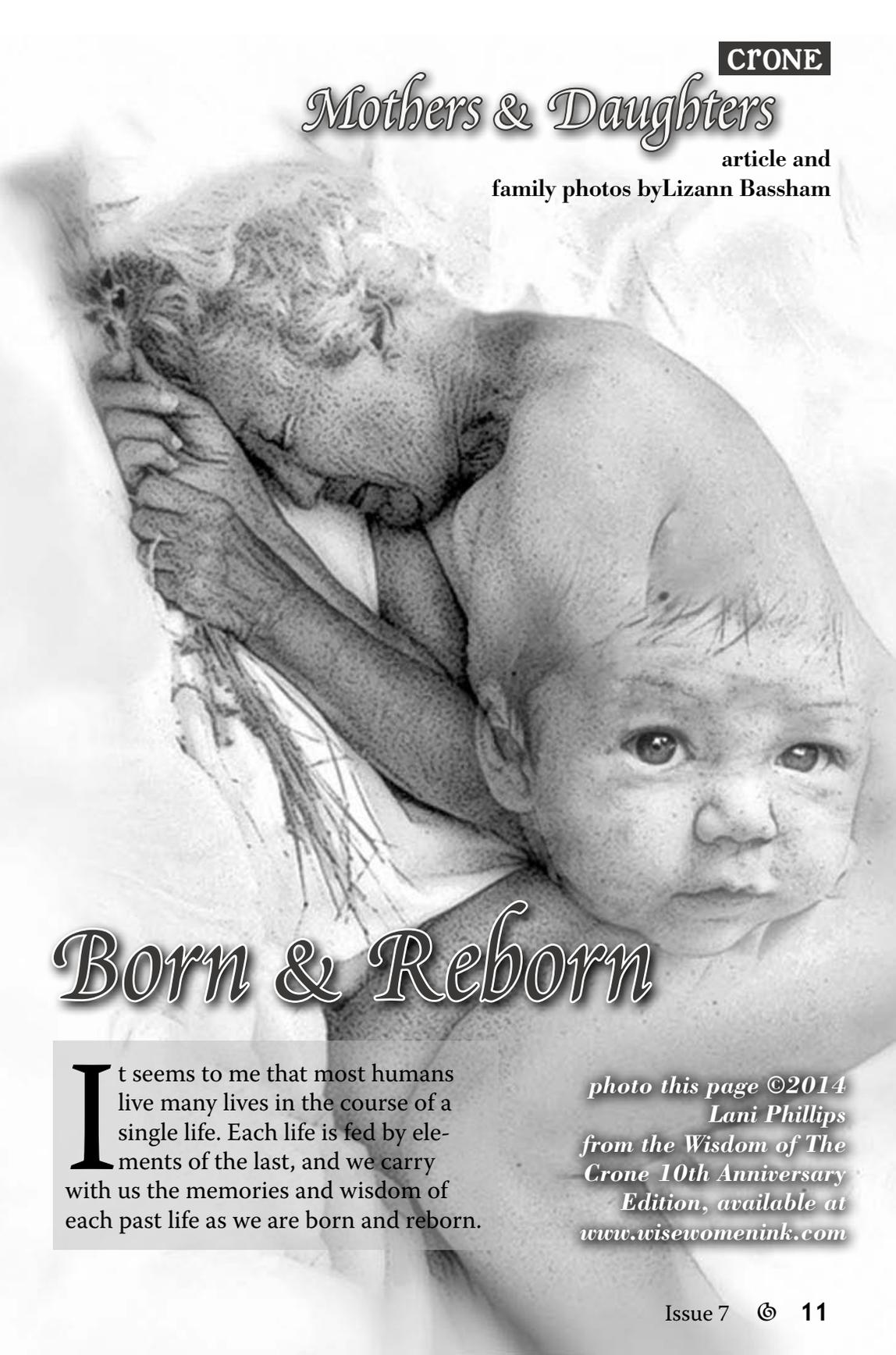
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Mothers & Daughters

article and
family photos by Lizann Bassham



Born & Reborn

It seems to me that most humans live many lives in the course of a single life. Each life is fed by elements of the last, and we carry with us the memories and wisdom of each past life as we are born and reborn.

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Lani Phillips
from the Wisdom of The
Crone 10th Anniversary
Edition, available at
www.wisewomenink.com*

*From left:
Casey and
Peggy Clark
in 1937;
author Lizann
Bassham and
her mother
Sandy Sparks
in 1991.*



For instance, **my Grandma Peggy** was born and reborn seven or eight times. In her first life she was born in 1908 in Wyoming to an unmarried fourteen-year-old mother who had been seduced and left by an older man. Her own grandmother, so the family story goes, sold her to a Native American woman and her white husband. For the first six years of her life she was Daisy: a wild and free running child who loved going to pow-wows with her mother. She loved the sound of the drums, the way the beat vibrated through her and moved her muscles to their rhythm. That life died when, without explanation, she was taken and put in a six month limbo while a legal battle raged at the courthouse over her custody.

Eventually, her biological mother won custody, and Daisy was reborn as Margaret Puett. Her second life was not a happy one: Margaret loved her new little brothers, but those sweet connections did not mitigate the unwanted attention she received from her stepfather when she hit puberty. So she ran off, and Margaret Puett was reborn as Peggy Clark, when she married into a rambunctious Irish Catholic family doing subsistence ranching in Montana. That life was full of delight, music and dancing, hard work, and laughter.



When the Great Depression hit, Peggy and her husband Casey left the ranch. With his gift for gab and her head for business, they did as well as anyone, and eventually ended up in California where he worked on the WPA Shasta Dam Project, and after a decade of trying, Peggy got pregnant. But after

twenty-four hours of hard labor, the doctor in charge did an emergency C-section, and her daughter Sandy was born. Peggy almost lost her life that day, and the trauma contributed to the death of her marriage. Peggy Clark's life transformed again and she became a single mom, working as a waitress.

From left and clockwise: Sandy Bassham, her husband Donny, and their daughter Lizann Bassham in 1960; Sandy Clark growing up in French Gulch in the mid-1940's; the author, Lizann Bassham 1961; Peggy Clark and her daughter Sandy (mid-1940's); Peggy Smith in the 1960's.



She was reborn as Peggy Smith, married to Ed Smith, the owner of the French Gulch Hotel Bar and Restaurant. She became his partner in business and in life. Somewhere in the early part of Peggy Smith, she actually *did* die. There was a surgery (the details of which are a little fuzzy,) but the fact that she died, and what it was like, stayed clear for the rest of her days. She flatlined, and found herself floating above her body, drawn into a long dark tunnel. At the other end was a garden, lush and beautiful. She felt loved, peaceful, blissful. Then there was a voice, sweet but firm, that told her it wasn't time yet, and that she needed to go back to take care of her daughter (and my mother) Sandy.

Just a few months short of her one hundredth birthday, my mother and I sat vigil with Peggy for three days while her energy filled the room and her body slowly shut down. As the last bit of air left her lungs, her energy flew from the room without a backward glance. She knew where she was going.

Her daughter, **my mother Sandy Clark**, has also had many lives. First she was Sandy Clark, a little girl growing up in The French Gulch Hotel Bar and Restaurant. From the cook Loy Quan, she learned to use chop sticks and began a fascination with China. From the other cook, Raymond Costello, she learned gratitude. "Don't thank me," he would say, "thank the Lord."



Sandy Clark went to a two-room schoolhouse until the eighth grade, then took a long bus ride into Redding to high school. She thought she wasn't a good student because, back then, no one understood dyslexia.

Sandy Clark left that life and was reborn as Sandy Bassham, a high school dropout, wife at sixteen, and mother at seventeen in 1959. She and my dad Donny moved to San Francisco where her beatnik neighbor Stella introduced her to the San Francisco Public Library, as well as all manner of radical ideas. She and my father soon divorced and, after settling me in to live with my Grandma and Grandpa, Sandy began to do the growing up she hadn't done in her teens.



Sandy went back to school, finished her associate's degree, and we two moved so she could start her bachelor's degree.

At that point, Sandy Bassham dropped out of college and was reborn as Sandy Read. That life started off a bit shaky, with her new husband going off to fight in Vietnam while she gave birth to her second child, my brother Andy. When her husband returned from war, they tried to make it work, but eventually Sandy Read became a single mom, went back to college, finished her bachelor's, and went on to earn a master's.

Like her mother, Sandy Read had a brush with physical death. It was 1979, near the end of her undergraduate work. She and I both took incompletes in our college classes that Thanksgiving as she went in for cancer surgery.

Sandy Read eventually was reborn as Sandy Sparks, who became the first female pastor at a



This page: The Rev. Sandy Sparks 1989/ Opposite page, from left: Peggy Smith and her granddaughter Lizann Bassham; Sandy Rosen dancing with her new husband Aaron Rosen in 2010.

small church in a rural farming community in Eastern Washington. With her intellect, understanding of small town dynamics, and wisdom braided together,

she had a challenging but fulfilling career in ministry.

That life ended when Sandy Sparks retired and moved back to California to be closer to my brother and I. Using the skills she had acquired pastoring, she took care of my grandma in her last life, jumped into volunteer leadership at her new church, and became the facilitator of a lively current events group at the local senior center. But Sandy Sparks unexpectedly transformed again: She became Sandy Rosen when she married Aaron Rosen and was swept into yet another life with his family, as well as a new relationship with her own.



And then there's me. Now in my fifties, I, too, am on my fourth life. In my first life, I was a quiet and reflective child, but that changed in my second life as a professional clergywoman during my twenties and thirties. I pushed myself to the edge: full of drive and vigor, fulfilling work, and passionate loves, I ran so much energy I simply wore out that life. My cognitive functioning and endocrine system shorted out like the wiring in an old house.

My third life during my forties was a long slow, and painful dance with the depression I'd managed to previously skirt. But, as with all lives, that one too came to an end, and I was reborn.

Now, I am living a new and wonderful crone's life. As I waltz with the Waning Moon of this life and reflect on these many lives, I am grateful for the collective memories and wisdom fed by elements of each as we are born and reborn. And you? Which life are you on?



Blessings on all your lives
as you are born and reborn
and reborn... ©



LIZANN
BASSHAM,
54, is enjoying
her transfor-
mation into
Cronehood.
She writes
about in Sage-

Woman as well as in her poetry series and journal *In Praise of Aging*. She is the founder/director of *Front Porch Spirit*, a collective of writers, artists, musicians, and retreat/workshop facilitators in Sonoma County, CA. www.frontporchspirit.com.



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