

A CIRCLE OF WOMEN

*"How do I tell you what it's like to be a woman
When so much of me resides
in the space between words
If only you could see the world through my eyes
And experience what I am experiencing
right along with me
Perhaps you can, in A Circle of Women"*



A Circle of Women celebrates the inner and outer lives of women today.

It is an intimate story of a group of women in California, our growth and transformation.



It is a universal story of women coming together as women have done with women, and men have done with men through the ages, of community and the value to be found when we share in a place of trust.

It is a new paradigm for a new time whereby the feminine principle is reaffirmed and brought into balance with its masculine counterpart and the family of the earth unites as one.



And it is a model of what is possible for people throughout the world, challenged by the complexities of the day to feel connected, acknowledged and appreciated for who we really are.

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COMING INTO OUR OWN IN THE COMPANY OF WOMEN

by Frankie Lee Slater for The Whole Life Times, Los Angeles

Over the course of my life, in addition to many intimate friendships with women, I have been blessed with a great wealth of experience in community with women. The true magnitude of this crystallized only recently - when some combination of the work I am doing to support women in connecting on a national level and my turning 45 caused me to take stock. Not all women have had the good fortune of experiencing themselves together in community, sadly many in our modern world have not. Society has fragmented the bonds between women and it is vital for our well-being that we foster and grow this opportunity anew - for ourselves, our sisters and daughters, and our brothers, sons and the Earth.

Recently, I was extending invitations to a gathering of A Circle of Women, the group I started with my friend Marsha Levine in 1991 to celebrate the women in our lives and the contributions they make, and honor this extremely special connection which exists among women. Something in the way one woman remarked, "*I don't feel comfortable with just women.*" indicated she hadn't had the kind of shared experiences which have shaped my life from the time I was little - experiences like sitting by my mother's knee, fascinated while her friends in bridgeclub and she comfortably and respectfully chatted about their families, hopes and dreams, or learning by their example in community organizations where they provided good works and modeled so well the principle of service.

Nor, it seems, had this woman had the life-informing experiences in community with children of her gender which I and my friends found in Brownies and summer camp; high school athletics where we learned to "excel with" rather than "compete against," while contributing to the larger whole; in our freshman women's dorm and sorority in college where we had an immersive experience of sisterhood and healthy intimacy among women.

What I wish for this woman, and women everywhere, is that she and they may know at least some of the special joy and sustenance to be found in community with women - the riches in all the variations of who we are, the many shapes and movements of the feminine so far beyond the canned media versions; the individual expressions and ways we cycle through our lives with no "*right time*" for anything, not career, not partnership, not children; the empowerment of sitting in the safety of a Circle, of speaking with a talking stick and being listened to, really listened to, witnessed and heard; the freedom of simply being oneself, and giving ones gifts so that all can benefit.

I have had the opportunity of sitting in Circles with hundreds of women, and also speaking with thousands more - men, women and young people regarding the value such gatherings provide. One question I hear asked, that I'd like to address right up front, is whether we "*dis*" men. Except for our very first gathering, when such things were still lurking on the surface and calling to be let go, we've easily stayed clear. Actually, our focus is on ourselves, on the complexities of being women today, our dreams, challenges and discoveries. It's simply about being women.

Another concern that calls for a response is the issue of "*exclusion*" and whether it is ultimately "*better*" to have both genders together. Everyone who knows me, knows I'm a great appreciator of men and love their company, indeed I also produce events where we all come together in the Circle. That said, my feeling is really quite matter-of-fact - there are many ways to know ourselves in community. Relating with those of our gender is simply one of these, and an extremely valuable and, I believe, necessary one on many levels. For it is in the Company of Woman that we learn the Ways of Women - as women have done with women and men have learned the ways of men with men throughout the ages. And only when we are clear and strong and have a healthy sense of our authentic Selves, do we have this to share in all our relationships.

There's a phenomenon taking place at this time, as evidenced in Paul Ray's now well-known study regarding the 44-million Cultural Creatives (one quarter of the adult population!) in this country who favor a refeminization of society. Commissioned in 1994 by the Fetzer Institute and Institute of Noetic Sciences, the study identified a new subculture of values that has been evolving in the United States over the past generation that reflects, "an ecological and spiritual worldview...a well-developed social conscience and social optimism," and places a strong emphasis on connection and community.

Every day more and more people are recognizing that to live in balance we must reunite feminine principles with their masculine counterpart - process with form, subjectivity with objectivity, pattern with fact, experience with analysis, the natural with the technical, receptivity with activity, expansion with contraction, inclusivity with exclusivity, soft focus with hard focus, interdependence with independence, being with doing. While these are not our providence alone as women, they are perhaps more innate in us as well as more engendered by society, and so our Responsibility.

A powerful force is building. Over the course of the last century, women's lives have undergone a dramatic and radical shift. We are living longer, healthier, more informed and choiceful lives. The promise of this age is unprecedented - through our growing awareness, power and esteem, women are quite literally midwifing a new way of being in the world.

The indicators are very good. Just look at the number of women present at consciousness-oriented conferences and seminars, of women-owned organizations and businesses and women in corporate America who are reshaping the corporate culture through our unique leadership styles.

As Joan Borysenko emphasizes in *A Woman's Book of Life*, "Our ability to connect, to nurture, and to make decisions based on present and future needs rather than past conventions are the hope of this planet and the children who collectively belong to us all."

I recently co-facilitated a gathering of women from throughout the United States in the heartland of Oklahoma - an extension of the work I've been doing locally with *A Circle of Women*, now about connecting women with women on a societal level and empowering women's voices to be heard. It was deeply gratifying to hear the visions women everywhere are having for ourselves and the world, and to see the courageousness we are displaying - in overt ways such as climbing a 40 foot pole and leaping into the air to catch a trapeze but, more importantly I feel, in the subtle ways of sharing the truth within our hearts and finding the permission within ourselves to be who we truly are.

We are living in an era unlike any other, a time when the wisdom drawn from every culture, from all of time and creation is available. In this there is great promise.

There is also a great challenge before us. The human family is suffering a Crisis of Separation that is impacting all our relations including the Earth herself. As Women we are called upon to nurture and grow our gift of relationality and help bring everyone together in the Circle. Now is the time to reach out amongst ourselves, beyond our previous competitions and grievances, our limited ways of thinking and being, and extend our hearts and hands to one another - to the younger generations of women and our wise elders, beyond our immediate communities to the larger community of women throughout the planet. By coming together in the *Company of Women*, we free ourselves to be our true Selves, and create a tapestry of connectivity through which we can unite the entire family of the Earth.