Sacred Sexuality

Reclaiming the Divine Feminine

A'ra Blair
Sacred Sexuality

Reclaiming the Divine Feminine

A'ra Blair
Foreword

I believe that Sacred Sexuality, Reclaiming the Divine Feminine is an important gift to women of every age, race, and culture. It is not just about sexuality. It is about reclaiming the truth of who we are as beautiful, feminine expressions of the divine. This book is about the soul remembrance of the sacred journey of the feminine and how to live it fully.

Over the last few years there has been a great deal of talk about the 'Divine Feminine'. I have watched national and international groups of women gather to honor our existence on the planet and invite the female population to step into a place of empowered living. There have been tele-seminars and webinars on how to reveal our divinity. There has been an outcry of need for women of the world to remember that innate power that lives within us all as we move forward in an expansive time in history.

In my life time, I have witnessed women being persecuted, discounted, and mistreated. I have also witnessed women rise in power, statute, and visibility in this world in amazing ways. The dichotomy of these experiences has often perplexed me. How can we be so wonderful and so misunderstood at the same time? Of course, there are no answers except that as a culture we are not awake in our treatment and care of women. I don't just mean mistreatment by men. We, as women, have not been taught how to honor and care for ourselves.

There are times in my personal life that I have been in deep gratitude for being a woman and other times that I wondered why I was here. I personally remember being overjoyed at my sensuality and my sexuality and the pleasures they brought me. I have also been angry that I have been used for the pleasure of others without consideration for my needs or desires.

Being molested as a child, on some levels, thwarted my expression as a woman. I never understood that I was a precious gift and that I needed to only share myself with people that truly loved and respected me. In my formative years, there were not books, workshops, or teachers that could support shifts in my consciousness,
hormonal changes, and navigating the discovery of masculine energy. The women in my family were often abused and traumatized. They had no sense of who they were or how to attract loving relationships. I often felt like I was in uncharted territory and did not have the knowledge that I could say no to things that didn't support me. I was never taught to trust my intuitive nature.

Many women today are struggling with their identity. They are in questions about speaking their personal truth, standing up for themselves, stepping into leadership, and how to consciously share their bodies. We are witnessing women feeling isolated, exhibiting addictive behavior, and in deep denial about non-supportive agreements. Women are using their sexuality as weapons or tools of manipulation. They are challenged with aging, different hormonal shifts, and looking outside of themselves for validation.

A'ra has put great attention and intentionality into guiding women into the realization of their power. She has walked this path on many levels and put a great deal of attention on her own healing. The authenticity and courage exhibited as she tells her story is heart-warming and inspiring.

Sacred Sexuality, Reclaiming the Divine Feminine offers an opportunity to look deeply into the amazing gift that you are as a woman so as to be a part of the collective consciousness, bringing Her to the planet in a powerful way. I invite you to take the journey. It may feel daunting, but you are worth it. Think about a world where women are fully empowered, living passionately, and being loved in extraordinary ways. I know that is possible if we are willing to claim the totality of our Sacred Femininity and Sexuality.

Take this journey with A'ra and enjoy the ride.

_Cynthia James_

Author/Speaker/Teacher
Introduction

Most of my life, I've struggled to understand my role as a woman. When it came to desire, sexuality, and intimacy, at some level I felt shame about my gender. Although I never had to wear a burka, an invisible shroud enveloped me. Even talking about sexuality seemed taboo.

When I speak of sexuality, I'm not talking solely about intercourse. Certainly intercourse is a beautiful physical experience under the right circumstances. But it is a small part of the fullness of our sexuality and sensuality. It is often that which is abused or misused in the absence of the sacred.

Sacred sexuality is our most intimate communion with the Divine. It's a state that takes us beyond the physical realm of sex and orgasm to a connection with the deepest part of our being, our creative Source and life sustaining energy. In this depth lies a wholeness and love that transcends any transgression, doubt, or absurdity that exists in our human experience. This sacred union with Source heals and transforms our mind, body, and emotions. It releases the past and opens us to a supreme understanding of oneness, truth, and beauty. Through intimacy with this inner Presence, transcendence occurs and life becomes a vehicle for the soul's growth. When we reach this depth of understanding, everything in our experience becomes part of the sacred path to enlightenment. Everything!

Given that, I have three purposes for this book and its companion workshop:

- To facilitate a deeper connection to the Divine Feminine by fully opening and embracing our sexuality and our sensuality.

- To reclaim our right to express the beauty of who we are as Divine sexual and sensual beings, without a need to explain anything to anyone.

- To recognize that a woman's connection to the sacredness of her sexuality is the
seat of her power.

We often get lost in our sexuality, mistaking it for love or downgrading it to just a physical act. In the broadest sense of the word, our sexuality influences and is influenced by our physical experience as well as our mental, cultural, political, familial, philosophical, emotional, moral, ethical, theological views. . .you get the picture.

Sensuality is how we receive and process our world and our experiences. It includes our six senses as well as other receptors and insights from the same categories that influence our sexuality. These influences often skew our perceptions and thus our responses. Yet, there is a natural flow of expression for us as sexual beings in the presence of the sacred. This sacred essence is neither and both masculine and feminine.

I did not grow up with an understanding of the divine as both masculine and feminine. Most religious and mythical stories portray an anthropomorphic God as male. Because of this, the aspects that are feminine in nature have not been valued in our cultures. Attributes such as nurturing, community, passion, intimacy, connection, collaboration, and beauty take a backseat to toughness, individuality, determination, perseverance, competition, and strength. The problem isn't with what are seen as masculine attributes. The problem is with the imbalance of their importance. When feminine attributes are missing in our concept of God, far too often they end up missing from our human experience and lead to a downgraded role for women in modern society.

For years, I thought my disenfranchisement with my gender role was solely my problem. The other women in my life seemed content with their position as mother and wife. My family followed the norm and they expected me to do the same. Any conversation about sexuality got framed under the birds and the bees explanation. I'm sure you are familiar with if not a recipient of "the talk."

As a result of not having any guidelines for discovering the truth about my womanhood, my experiences often led me astray. I didn't know how to hold my sexuality sacred. Through every mishap, I continued to long for the ability to stand in my truth as a sexual and sensual being with every right to express the beauty of who I am as a woman.

As a Spiritual Life Coach and counselor for over 10 years, I've come to realize that I have not been alone. Many of you gave up this right or got lost in the struggle right along with me.
How did this happen? At what point in our lives did we lose that deep connection to the Divine Feminine that is our birthright? In order to answer those questions, I stepped back in time and self-examined my life and the slow, subtle process used to mold girls into women. I found it is based in an unconscious, fear-based, expectation-rooted model, leaving women with no idea of whom or how valuable they are. This insidious cancer slowly chisels away at our Divine Feminine connection until our consciousness no longer recognizes Her when we look in the mirror.

Instead of seeing the Goddess, we learn to see all our flaws. Instead of acknowledging our greatness, we learn to devalue and discredit ourselves and our sisters. Instead of honoring the many stages of womanhood, we learn disdain as we struggle through puberty, periods, pregnancy, childbirth, menopause, and aging. Instead of owning our bodies as temples of Divinity, we became slaves to desire, need, and a culture that tells us we aren't good enough or that all we have to offer is our looks and our bodies.

We learn to compare ourselves to cardboard models on billboards and can't help but fail the comparison miserably. As a result, we overeat, under eat, binge and purge, try every fad diet or fat fighting supplement, have implants, nose jobs, liposuction, and face lifts. We see ourselves as fat, flat, deformed, too tall, too short, too skinny, too big. Our hair isn't straight enough, curly enough, short enough, long enough. It's not the right color or texture.

Many go to great lengths to change perceived deformities and unflattering features in an attempt to measure up to an ideal that doesn't realistically exist. This delusional model blares at us from signs, in books, on television, in fairy tales, and even from our sisters who point out our flaws in case we didn't notice. Together we spend millions of dollars each year on products to enhance our beauty instead of acknowledging its presence and purity in ourselves and other women.

Because of all of this, the Divine Feminine has retreated so far back in the distance that none of us would recognize her if we saw her. The irony is that every time we look in the mirror, She's there, looking back at us, waiting for us to acknowledge Her and invite Her into our lives.

For me, this happened on a grand scale in 2004. That spring I received an invitation to a Master Angel Gathering. I had become a Master Angel Emissary in 2001 during a course and ceremony led by Certified Angel Practitioners who teach how to tune into our angels and receive their guidance. The Master Angel Gathering, held in Estes Park, Colorado, called all Masters to join together to hold the space for one of the most auspicious of occasions, the return of the Divine Feminine to the
planet.

The evening of the event, we circled around a large, grassy, open area. There must have been 200 of us awaiting the Goddess's presence. As a spiritual intuitive, I receive my guidance as a Knowing in my body, often called clairsentience. Because of the magnificence of the occasion at hand, I asked for divine sight in order to see the Goddess's presence.

My prayer got answered. The brightest palette of colors unfolded before me, a glow that filled our circle and opened our hearts to connect with one another. I felt joy and exuberance, and Her gratitude to finally be with us, to be present to begin the work of healing on the planet.

Mind you, I'm a bit of a skeptic about these things. Although I am metaphysical at heart, I have a medical and scientific background, so I'm always looking for proof. This need for tangible, concrete evidence is a double-edged sword, one I've learned to use to my advantage. What I saw and felt that day deeply infused my consciousness and opened my heart to a radiance that I felt to the core of my being. For a brief moment, I felt the Goddess within me.

My work over the next several years prepared me to be a conduit for this feminine power. However, my longing for that continued deep connection to the Goddess could only be realized if I could stand in the power and sacredness of Her grace without getting burned. She is about truth. She is about love and compassion. She is about authenticity and complete exposure. Could I face myself and my past? Could I look at every aspect of my femininity and my sexuality in order to heal and move beyond all the judgments I held about my past? This idea scared the hell out of me because my path didn't seem sacred at all. If anything, it felt vulgar and disgraceful. I didn't want to stir things up that could crack me wide open. Things that could leave me lying at Her feet, a bundle of disappointment. As a result, initially I said, "No way!" Feeling that fear I turned my back on the Divine Feminine once more.

Several years later, my second marriage ended. When I found myself back in the dating scene, I vowed to do things differently. Online dating services added a new dimension to dating that I thought could be interesting. What I found is that the men hadn't changed. A little older, a little grayer, but their expectations and behavior seemed familiar. This discouraged me at first. How would I find my beloved in this sea of wolves? Only one answer made sense. I had to reclaim all of me, the good, the bad, and the profane. This included the Divine Feminine.
When I began to develop friendships with males on a spiritual path, I realized they were also dealing with finding their true expressions as sexual beings. Expressions that allowed them a sacred, balanced connection to both their masculine and feminine attributes. That realization prompted me to invite an awareness of the Divine Feminine to grow and expand within me.

I dove deeper into the idea of the divine manifesting as Feminine as well as Masculine. In my desire for a deeper connection to the Goddess, I cultivated the courage to express my Divine Feminine in Her fullness.

We as humans know the importance of the feminine touch in nurturing and nourishing us. Consider how much more powerful the Divine Feminine must be? I knew a key existed there, answers to life's struggles for everyone. So I extended the invitation to have Her as my Presence to guide my path, my purpose, and my healing.

My vision became to live the qualities of the Divine Feminine in service to humanity’s wholeness.

My mission: By claiming and embodying the Divine Feminine, my presence heals, transforms, and gives permission for the radical expression of sacred sexuality.

I've embraced this Divine Feminine passion for many years, and the transformations in my life have been nothing short of a radical healing. In 2009, after an extreme and painful year of transformation, I received guidance in meditation to change my name to A'ra. According to the Encyclopedia of Gods by Michael Jordan, the name is pre-Islamic Arabian and means holy place, blood of the altar, or sacrifice. I'll detail this name change experience in a later chapter. Suffice it for now to know that this was a big energy to step into.

At the same time that I changed my name, I met a man who took me on a relationship journey that brought me in touch with everything sexual within me. I experienced all the adventure, fear, ecstasy, desire, anxiety, repulsion, excitement, disappointment, elation, confusion, neglect, pleasure, degradation, and abuse that have affected women throughout time.

A flood of realizations and questions burst into my consciousness when I saw that my sisters and I were locked in a systemized ideal of femininity that didn't leave room for Divine connection. I wanted that connection—for all of us!

As I journeyed through what I call "My year of owning my sexuality," I called on the Divine to be present in my exploration and deepening of this intimate experience. As a result of my newfound awareness and insights, I crafted a workshop on Sacred
Sexuality. The first time I presented it, I got rave reviews. The constructive feedback across the board was that it needed to be longer and deeper.

As I began to develop that deeper workshop, downloads that were greater than anything I could present in a workshop began to write through me. I realized writing this book would make the opportunity for reclaiming the Divine Feminine more accessible.
How To Use This Book

While my target audience is women, I believe that we all need to reclaim the Divine Feminine in order to fully experience our wholeness. That being said, for my male friends who journey through these pages, thank you for the courage to delve into the feminine mystique. We welcome you.

Keep in mind that both genders have been brought up in a way that has disowned the Divine Feminine. Part of your journey through this book is transposing any of the feminine language and pronouns to fit your masculine essence at present. That may be turning the word Goddess into God, Her into Him, Woman into Man, and Girl into Boy. Or perhaps it's perfect for you as it's written. Either way, this will give you a deeper understanding of how women have been expected to read between the lines in the masculine dominated world of literature in order to find inclusion.

The Masculine has dominated far too long. And both genders have suffered as a result. Out of his loneliness and imbalanced experience, the masculine has gotten lost. In this confusion, he sometimes acted in not-so-pleasant ways. My hope for you is a deeper understanding of the women in your life and the gift that you are to them when you fully support, honor, respect, and value their full expression of the Divine Feminine, sensually and sexually. In this way, you will Reclaim the Divine Feminine, find wholeness and balance, and your life path will then unfold its greatest gifts.

The purpose of the information and exercises in this book is to assist you in embodying the Divine Feminine in order that you may experience your magnificence. This includes:

- The courage and confidence to fully express your beauty, your sensuality, your poise, your gifts and talents, and your power.

- Embracing all of who you are as an authentic and unique expression of the Goddess, even the not-so-pleasant choices, experiences, and traumas you may have had.
• Falling so deeply in unconditional love with yourself that no matter what anybody says to you or about you, no matter what anyone does to you, no matter how anyone shows up in relationship with you, that you come so fully from Self-Love that you can transform every experience into a loving one.

Know that when you reclaim the Divine Feminine, you step into a Power that knows your most intimate secrets. She has witnessed every act and action every minute of your life. She knows how to take all that you've done and all that you are and mold it into all that you came here to be.

Reclaiming the Divine Feminine is a simple invitation that tells the Goddess you acknowledge Her presence within you. Affirm,

Take me, use me, I belong to you. I trust and believe that you know my deepest, strongest desires, gifts, and talents. I am no longer willing to allow fear, doubt, guilt, shame, or self-loathing to stand between me and thee. Remove the obstacles in my life that I may serve you and in so doing, I may be of service to my world, my community, my family, my friends, and myself.

In my personal journey from patriarchal dominance to Goddess embodiment, I benefited from women's rituals. I offer them to you as a way to deepen your connection to your Goddess energy. At the very least, start each day by acknowledging Her presence.

As you move through this process with me, I suggest having a journal dedicated to this work. Plan to spend at least 15 minutes journaling with each reading. I encourage hand-written journaling. It accesses a part of the brain that is more authentic and connected to all things physical.

The qualities of the Divine Feminine are sprinkled like glitter throughout this book. In your journal, keep a running log of them, expanding on them and adding your own as you're guided. Begin to embody them in all areas of your life, especially the most challenging areas.

The journey you are about to take with me is not for the faint of heart. It will require work, dedication, and the willingness to question everything you thought was true about being a woman. As you do this, invoke a deep compassion for yourself. Compassion is a feminine quality that keeps you energized and out of judgment. This is important because I'm asking you to be brutally honest with yourself. I'm asking
you to own all that has happened to you and by you in regard to sex and sexuality. If you're willing, your life will transform in front of your eyes, and you will know the Goddess at the core of your being.

At the end of each chapter, you'll find the call to your truth entitled:

**Documenting Your Story/ Recognizing Beliefs**

These questions are to help you explore hidden beliefs, fears, self-judgments. They are by no means the be-all, end-all of what may emerge for you. They're meant simply as a guide to get you started in the catharsis of documenting your story. When answering the *how* questions, think in terms of a continuum from 1 to 10, 1 being *not very*, 10 being *very*.

This is your sacred time. You're purging what no longer serves you. On the other side of that purge is an incredible sense of joy in knowing yourself on a deep and intimate level. No one will see your journal notes unless you choose to share them.

After each "Documenting Your Story" section is a ritual entitled:

**Your Practice**

Along with a link to a guided meditation.


Take advantage of these opportunities to forgive, surrender, and create a gentle, compassionate experience with yourself. These rituals are designed to help you grow in self-love, self-respect, and self-nurturing. Only then will the Divine Feminine find room in your heart. Love is the elixir that the Divine Feminine craves. It is through love that she thrives. Once she is present within you on a conscious level, a sense of joy will envelop your life.

At the end of this book, you'll find a ritual for releasing your story and stepping more fully into your Sacred Sexuality as a full expression of the Divine Feminine.
What Happened to the Divine Feminine?

The Absence of the Sacred in Sexuality and Sensuality
Inviting Her back into our lives
Preparing the Space

One of the most brutal ways a woman can be devalued and stripped of the sacred connection to her body and her sense of self is through the malicious act of rape. It's an act of dominance with the intention of forcibly taking something from another. The actions of the perpetrator usually come from rage. The outcome leaves the victim in a place of fear, loneliness, hurt, inadequacy, guilt.

For many women, even after the event is over, fear and shame keep them perpetuating the rape in their mind. Their body has been used against them in an aggressive crime that leaves them feeling violated and dirty. Instead of the intuitive gift of connection through their senses, they often turn numb in an effort to escape the pain. Their body becomes a constant reminder of brutality instead of the pleasure center it was designed to be.

Because of our intimate connection with one another through the collective consciousness, it doesn't matter whether or not we have actually been raped. We are taught that it could happen to us at any time. This thought permeates our lives deeply, making every rape a part of our experience. If the seat of a woman's power is in her sexuality, any time one of us is stripped of her independence and forced into docile compliance, we all are.

Crimes against women such as these have been occurring for millennia, collectively creating a great injustice while stripping us of our right to know, experience, and express the Divine Feminine. We have been condemned, tortured, and ostracized if our opinions or worship practices were not in alignment with what men thought best for us. Our brothers have not escaped the injustice of this crime because it stems from a belief in separation which has perpetuated a false fear in men—based on a belief that if women have power, they'll not obey the men who know best. Men have justified this by thinking women aren't as capable as they; therefore, believing
women need men to rule them and keep them in line. In an effort to dominate a man's thinking, Fear whispers into his ear that if a woman is granted the right to her power, she will no longer need or want him. He will lose everything, including himself.

Check out any study of the various religions and societal norms from the beginning of human history and you will find a common patriarchal model. According to Many Peoples, Many Faiths, Women and Men in the World Religions by Robert S. Ellwood and Barbara A. McGraw, "... early in the evolution of the major religions—Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, regardless of what their founders may have intended ... a patriarchal social pattern developed ... the rulers in any social subunit were men ... Because of this, women lived under the authority of male religious leaders, fathers, husbands, and even sons in societies based on religious tenets that did not permit individual status and authority for women ... women's participation in the official religious practice was very limited and secondary to that of men. ..."

This relegating of the Divine Feminine into the shadows hurt not only women but men as well. To live the lie of separation, the masculine, patriarchal model authorizes and insists on the domination of the feminine. This denigrates both men and women to a limited sense that is void of Divine connection. In the absence of this sacred sense of self, men become obsessed with domination and control, an egocentric fixation to conquer anything that threatens their status quo.

For women, the absence of this sacred self forces them into submission. Into a subordinate role where every action can be conditioned into the right response. If you look, you'll see it in your family, in society, in business. It's an unwritten law that says, "Follow the rules or risk being punished!"

To the contrary, the Sacred Masculine sees through this diminished sense of self, offering protection, guidance, strength, and encouragement instead. In the presence of this higher sense of self, fear dissolves and kindness emerges as a firm rock of stability. The Sacred Masculine operates from a power that is based in unconditional love and acceptance. Like a healthy father, He sees all and knows all but allows all to find their own way. His word is suggestion and guidance rather than a mandate and is offered only when His wisdom is sought. The Sacred Masculine sees nothing to dominate; therefore, He is open to all possibilities. Wrapped in the arms of his confidence is an inner security that allows Him to support the Divine Feminine in fully expressing her sexuality and sensuality. He knows this will bring the power of a genuine Source to both. In the presence of the Sacred Masculine, ego takes its rightful place as servant to the master.
Examples of the Sacred Masculine can be seen in many of the luminaries of the world's religions. Jesus' interaction with Mary Magdalene when the men of the village attempted to stone her is a beautiful analogy. The men were acting from a place of ego, absent of compassion. They wanted to stone Mary as punishment for her lack of compliance. Jesus called all those men into their Sacred Masculine and asked them to make the decision from there. Their enlightened point-of-view allowed each to follow a gentler, intuitive guidance.

More so, in the presence of the Sacred Masculine, the Divine Feminine has the courage, safety, and freedom to fully express her feminine attributes without the risk of jealousy or condemnation. She stands in her truth even in the face of adversity. The balanced unity of the Divine Feminine and Sacred Masculine sees rape as simply the absence of the Sacred within the perpetrator's mind and actions.

Thus, reclaiming the Divine Feminine brings balance into our lives and into our society. This reclamation can only happen through awareness, acceptance, and non-attachment which are ironically Divine Masculine qualities.

Keep these qualities in mind as you move through the processes in this book. They're designed to help you reclaim the Divine Feminine. As you step into this bigger version of yourself, all that has caused you to shrink or cower into smallness must be brought into your conscious awareness, acknowledged, and released from any attachment to meaning.

Begin by inviting the Goddess into your life on all levels. Open to the self-love that is in your heart. The Divine Feminine is waiting to support you in expressing this deep self-love.

She appears in our lives offering so many gifts, yet Her presence is subtle. In the elegance that She exudes is a humility patient enough to wait for our invitation. When we feel Her stir within and say Yes to Her presence, She reveals what a vital part of our existence She is.

Courting the magnificence of the Divine Feminine is not an endeavor to take lightly. While She nurtures and protects us with a fierce, unconditional love and unbridled strength, the revelation of Her truth requires nothing less than our complete vulnerability.

Her true essence is seeped in self-love and self-acceptance, which She uses to teach us the true meaning of receptivity. In Her playfulness is an exquisite sensuality and innocent sexuality that reveals Her prolific genius, Her genuine power, Her
creative ability to dance in the complement of opposites.

She is sometimes wild, sometimes reserved; sometimes zany, sometimes pristine; sometimes bold, sometimes hesitant and shy. She is sometimes the story teller and sometimes the story. She can cry and laugh, feel excited and disappointed all in the same breath.

At times She may seem unreasonable, irresponsible, moody, and downright impossible, but that's just a reflection of our own insecurities. With patience and openness, all that is the Goddess will make sense and then it won't, but it won't matter.

She feels all Her feelings completely, basking in the sheer joy and excitement of being alive, in the moment, present with all that there is. She balances all of who She is with compassion and curiosity, and leaves no soul unexplored. She is here to transform lives.

It's a delicate walk, this courting of the Divine Feminine, filled with the promise of grace and beauty. When we open our hearts to let Her shine, life opens up to us, revealing humanity's wholeness.

If we are to reclaim and court the Divine Feminine, we need to recognize how she got disowned in our own lives. As you journey into your wholeness, I'll share with you some of the sometimes subtle, sometimes traumatic ways life pushed the Divine Feminine from my consciousness and my experiences. In my brutal honesty, I found healing. It wasn't always pretty, but it was absolutely necessary for me to look at it all.

Keep in mind that this isn't just my story. The names and circumstances may be different, but the general experiences are there in most of our lives. As you read each section, use my story to explore and journal your own. Even if you didn't journey down some of the dark paths I chose, chances are you've been affected by someone who did. Consider that woman as an aspect of you.

Let's start with a general discussion of orgasm. Many women have never had an orgasm. We've been taught that our role is to please the man, and if we find some pleasure for ourselves, how lovely for us. Many of us, male and female, aren't even sure what an orgasm is. It's been downgraded to the climactic explosion called ejaculation. Yes, this is definitely an intense experience that can bring much pleasure, but it's like, excuse the pun, eating the cherry and missing the cake.

There's so much more to an orgasm. In losing the fullness of the orgasmic experience, we've lost our power, beauty, and healing energy. When orgasm is honored as one of the most sacred connections to the Divine, the pleasure of the
experience takes us to the depths of ourselves and our power. Orgasm then becomes an experience worthy of its own expression rather than a means to climax and ejaculate.

Learning how to stand in our power as women is part of the journey back to wholeness. Standing in the power of the Divine Feminine breaks down the construct that caused us to lose touch with feminine values. This construct that taught us to submit to the power of the masculine in order to succeed in a male-dominated world no longer serves anyone. The Sacred Masculine is calling us to embody the Divine Feminine because the union of the two is absolutely necessary for a complete human experience.

This journey can be part of your spiritual practice. If you don't have a spiritual practice, consider this an opportunity to develop one. Let's begin by setting up an altar to the Divine Feminine. We'll bring all our baggage to the altar and invite the Goddess to transform it into juicy pearls that we can use to heal, transform, and experience great joy.
What would you like to heal in your sexuality, your relationships, and your life?

How honest are you willing to be with yourself?

How comfortable are you expressing your truth or exercising your power?

With whom or when is it most difficult to speak your truth?

How would you define orgasm? Have you had one?

What insights have you garnered from this first chapter?
Your Practice: Preparing Your Altar

Prepare your altar in honor of the Divine Feminine. See it as an invitation for her to fully engage in your life. As you create this sacred space, allow your imagination to run away with you. Avoid censuring yourself. Trust that whatever instructions, advice, or lack there of is perfect.

Imagination is a Divine Feminine quality that has been quelled in many of us. We further this mistrust of our imagination with self-criticism and judgments around not being good enough or not knowing how or the right way to do it. Just notice what comes up for you when you think about preparing your altar. Then invite the Divine Feminine to guide you in your preparation. There is no right or wrong way to create this.

Don't worry if it doesn't come together all at once. Another Divine Feminine quality is patience. Yet another, continued expansion. My altar continues to evolve with the guidance that comes to me. Be aware also that this guidance may not come in an obvious manner. It may sneak into your conversation with a co-worker, wink at you in a line from a song, or appear as an image in the clouds or a face in the moon. Be open to your guidance in all forms.
A Myth is Born

God is a Man
Women are subordinate to and dependent on men
Sex is to be used only after marriage to procreate

My desire to know the Divine in the most intimate way started as a young girl. I was taught the conventional Christian way to God, but it didn't make sense to me, at least not completely. All the "thees" and "thous" caused a lot of confusion. Besides, most of the people in the Bible who had any power were men. That didn't resonate with me. In fact, it created a distraction.

The idea of "God the Father" worked because I had an amazing relationship with my father. However, even that relationship had undercurrents of sexism. His derogatory comments said in jest made me think he believed women were subordinate to men. As a result, my beginning understanding of God the Father meant God favored boys over girls, even while loving us all.

For me, that idea became a key component in the degradation of the feminine gender. Thus began the loss of my relationship with the Divine Feminine and the loss of my innocence; however, I wouldn't discover this atrocity until years later when I began to heal my sexuality.

I grew up in the sixties and seventies when Women's Lib was taking off. That time confused a lot of people, old and young alike. For a young girl coming into puberty, I felt empowered and disempowered all at the same time.

Women's Lib taught independence, that women could stand on their own, be their own person, support themselves, have careers, make their own money, do it all and then some. I wanted to be that superwoman. I wanted the career. I wanted to rise to the top of some major corporation. I knew I had the brains and talent but my family didn't support my desire.

I grew up in a family of five girls. My three older sisters married and had children right out of high school. My mother didn't encourage even the possibility of other
options. She expected her daughters to get married, have children, and become someone's wife and mother. She couldn't understand why I didn't want children and the family life.

As the designated babysitter of my sisters' kids during my teen years, I'd had enough of taking care of children. In addition to watching my sisters' kids, I had a full-time babysitting job. The mother of the children I babysat, Pat, worked as a business executive for a data processing company. The computer age was in its infancy at the time so her role intrigued me.

Pat worked evenings, leaving for work at 4:00, so I often went over early to talk to her as she got ready for work. Each stroke of her mascara made me long to be just like her. While my sisters sat around in jeans and t-shirts changing dirty diapers and cleaning crusty noses, Pat transformed in front of my eyes. Her face glowed with a dramatic sensuousness; her business suits gave her an elegant flare. Even the smell of her perfume hinted at her power as a career woman.

Another powerful woman during my teen years was my tenth-grade ceramics teacher. She stood proud as a women's libber. She supported the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) which promised equal rights under the law for women and men. The more Ms. Jillian talked about the ERA, the more enthralled I became. I saw it as my solution to choosing a career over family life. I didn't know that it had originally been proposed in 1923 and had been fighting a losing battle for half a century. And still hasn't been passed.

When I talked about the ERA to my mother, I thought she'd be thrilled to learn she had rights. Not the case. She adamantly opposed the ERA seeing it as a threat to family life and the American dream. But whose dream?

Whenever I talked to my mother about my career aspirations, she pointed out why they wouldn't work. Why I wouldn't be successful. "Why would you want to do something like that? You won't be able to support a family on your salary." Or, "You don't need to take college entrance exams. Look at your sister Debbie. She never used them." But the hardest one to hear was, "Oh, you're just having pipe dreams. Why don't you marry Kevin? He's a nice boy and will provide well for you." I'm sure you can hear the perpetuation of dependence in my mother's advice.

Born out of the social norms of her generation, my mother's words often discouraged me. The concept of a woman being capable of taking care of herself was too foreign for her. As a result, she didn't have the tools to teach me how to be independent.
Although my generation planted the idea of women's independence, most of our experiences instilled a sense of dependence. In my town, even the women who went to college found themselves with a degree they never used and a husband who pursued his dreams while she reared his children. The message, "We need a man! Plain and simple," ignited a battle in me that raged for decades.

Amidst the "be independent, be dependent" battle, another storm brewed. The idea of sexual liberation clashed with the need to save oneself for marriage. The invention of the birth control pill in 1960 gave women a whole new freedom. A whole new relationship with their bodies. The playing field evened out making recreational sex as much an option for single women as it had been for single men. Women no longer had to worry about pregnancy as a result of their acts of passion, nor did they have to worry about shotgun weddings.

Many men loved the idea of women stepping into their own sexual liberation as it meant no more condoms, at least as a means of birth control. Women's Lib meant men no longer had to take responsibility. Sexual freedom equated to free sex, which was wonderful . . . that is, until he wanted a wife.

When it came to picking someone with whom to walk down the aisle, to mother his children and be forever faithful, only a virgin would do, however improbable and unfair that seemed to be. Women who had sex before marriage were often considered whores, sluts, bad.

That set the stage for the spell I grew up under. Confusion at best, utter fear at worst. How could I defy my family, society, the norm? Who was I to think I could be a career woman, own my own life, own my own body, make my own decisions when every decision on that path would force me to defy everything I'd ever been taught—about women, about sex, about life?

My journey toward independence bumped up against society's norms at every turn. The torrents of "You can't do that!" and "You are embarrassing us!" almost drowned me. Since talking about sex was taboo, my questions about sexuality stayed locked in my mind.

My first memory of anything sexual happened in kindergarten. Another little girl and I were playing on the playground, swirling around the bar that held the teeter-totters. She had a dress on. When she swung upside down, I noticed a hole in her underwear. A hole big enough to reveal her feminine parts.

I remember seeing her clitoris and feeling disgusted. Of course I didn't know it
was a clitoris at the time, and I didn't know I had one too. After all, none of my dolls had anything that looked like that. I thought she had some crusty scab or something stuck to her bottom. It made me think of her as dirty. She needed to clean herself in order to get rid of it.

I lived about three houses down from a family with young boys who were probably eight and nine-years-old. My mother didn't like boys. She considered them dirty, so she didn't allow me to hang around with them. They weren't even allowed in my yard.

One summer afternoon, when I was about seven, my mom became incensed because "those neighbor boys" were playing with each other. I don't know how I knew what she meant. I had no brothers and had not seen a penis, but I knew she meant they were fondling each other. AND THAT WAS WRONG. That didn't deter me. Like most little girls, I began liking boys around the age of nine. Since boys don't show the same interest that young, my friends and I often chased the boys who desperately wanted to get away from us. We'd gather afterwards and talk about how cute we thought Jimmy or Tommy was. This often led to teasing if one of our friends seemed smitten. "You love him," we'd giggle, coyly lifting our shoulders and batting our eyes. If we thought the boy was the least bit interested, we'd sing,

Kathy and Jimmy sitting in a tree.
K-i-s-s-i-n-g.
First comes love.
Then comes marriage.
Then comes baby in a baby carriage.
Sucking his thumb,
Wetting his pants,
Doing the hula hula dance
In his under under under pants!

Even our songs hinted at marriage as the obvious progression.

Because I didn't have any brothers, I didn't see a boy's penis until my first nephew, Ricky, was born when I was 12. Although he was the fourth grandchild, he was the first boy born into our family in two generations. The praise was over the top. I remember my dad saying, "Finally, a grandson." Like that's what he wanted all along.

One day my sister was changing Ricky on the table, showing me how to change a boy baby. "When the air hits the boy's pee-pee, it often makes him pee. That's why
you want to keep it covered. Otherwise he'll pee all over everything." My dad walked in and smiled so big. "Look at those family jewels." Family jewels, that's what he called my nephew's genitals. Although we all laughed, another subliminal message got planted. The value of male genitals over female genitals.

By thirteen, some of my girlfriends had already tried sex. It scared me too much, especially given the way my mom had explained the "facts-of-life." She told a story similar to the following . . .

"Your Aunt Ruth got pregnant when she was only 16. The father of the baby left. Ruth didn't tell anyone that she was pregnant, and because she was heavy, she didn't show.' She met another boy, and they soon married. Your aunt's plan was to pass the baby off as her new husband's child.

"The night she went into labor shocked everyone, including her young husband. She ended up giving birth on her kitchen table. A baby girl came out. That baby was me."

I remember the shock that rippled through my mind and body when my mom got to the punch-line. I gasped. My throat and heart dropped into my stomach. I felt nauseous. How could that be? I'd grown up thinking of Ruth as Aunt not Grandma. I spent weeks with her in the summer.

She stood almost five-foot-ten. Her bigger-than-life personality preceded her everywhere we went. When she took me for ice cream at the neighborhood five and dime, everyone knew her by name. "Hi, Ruth, what can I get for you today?" the grocer would call out when we walked into the store.

"Just here to buy my niece a vanilla sundae," she'd reply.

She showed me the best places to pick raspberries and made me little tarts with dough made from scratch if I came home with a bucket-full of fruit, which I usually did. She bought me Bugles to eat while we watched Bonanza in the evening. I'd curl up into her large, robust frame, feeling safe and secure in her presence.

After my mom shared how horrible it had been growing up knowing she'd been born out of wedlock, Aunt Ruth went from being a loving presence to a harlot who should have been burned at the stake or shunned by wearing a Scarlet "A." All because she had sex before she got married. The shadow of shame had been cast. Having sex out of wedlock was an unforgivable sin in the eyes of God, period.

According to my understanding of that version of Christianity, sex was only to
procreate. As a result, I spent most of my young life believing my mom only had sex five times. With my faith instilling a procreation version of God's will, coupled with my mom's scare tactics of being a child growing up in misery as a result of "lust," and the idea that boys were dirty, I stepped into puberty with a warped idea of sex and sexuality that was anything but sacred. Yet something within me drove me to defy the odds, to look beyond my experiences to a deeper meaning.
As a young girl, what were you taught about God? How did that mold your view of women? Of sexuality?

What are some of your first memories about sex, male body parts, female body parts?

How did you learn about the facts of life?

What social, cultural, and familial norms influenced your beliefs, behaviors, and decisions about sex, marriage, career?

How independent did you feel as a young woman? And now?

What other insights have you garnered from this chapter?

Witness your little-girl-self complete with everything you judged good about her and everything you judged bad. Spend some time holding her, showing her compassion and love. Use the following practice to activate forgiveness as you nurture her back into your wholeness.
Meditations.SacredSexualityBooks.com

Invite your little-girl-self to your altar. Sit with your hands on your heart, imagining her there. As you breathe in, see and feel a beautiful emerald green light filling your heart center. Close your eyes and take in a few breaths of this healing light.

In your mind's eye, see you and your little-girl-self at the doorway to your heart. Enter the chamber of your heart together. See your altar in your heart space and invite your little-girl-self to have a seat. As she sits down, allow the emerald green light of love from your heart space to melt any tension, anger, or fear. Feel into forgiveness. Allow this healing green light to enevlope people and situations that may have caused her pain. Let go of the past and invite compassion to reveal your true essence of love and joy.

Ask your little-girl-self what she needs to feel safe, loved, and honored. Are you willing to provide these things for her? A word of caution. If you say "Yes," mean it and follow through. This is where you begin to build the self-trust muscle, right here with your little-girl-self. Do not make any promises to her you cannot or will not keep.

Share with your little-girl-self your promise to her. Seal it with a kiss and a hug. Feel the healing green light of your heart chamber wrap both of you and your childhood experiences in love and compassion.

When you are ready, bring your awareness back to your room, to your altar. Place a symbol of your little-girl-self to reside on your altar, a reminder of your promise.
Puberty—Friend or Foe?

Breasts & Bras
Body Image & Pornography
Blood and Betrayal

For many women, there's a certain degree of trauma associated with becoming a woman, especially in American society. Puberty is not something that's celebrated. It's considered a problem, treated with scorn, or looked at as a necessary evil. Like many women, I didn't have an open door with my mom to discuss the changes within my body. The facts of life were given, but not in a way that helped me understand and cope with the emotional impact of the physical changes happening at a rapid pace. I didn't experience ceremony and celebration for the emergence of my womanhood. There are some organizations offering rites of passage rituals today, but not very many. When I grew up, they didn't exist.

In addition, breasts were a comparison tool to mark who would be the most successful attracting a boy. This perpetuated the ever elusive idea that we needed a man to feel fulfilled.

As adult women, we know that our breasts develop in strange ways, often one before the other. The perception to a teen, however, can create a dimorphic body image. This is one of the reasons padded bras are so popular with the newly developing pubescent girl. This became a bitter cross for me to bear my thirteenth year.

When each breast independently emerged from my child's body as if they had a mind of their own, I thought something was wrong with me. My nipples tingled with the sensation of growth. The protrusion in my shirt flooded me with embarrassment as the boys gawked at the freaks of nature poking out from under my shirt.

At the department store, I stood in front of the rows of bras, wondering how to choose. What brand? What size? Will my breasts get as big as my sister's? What if someone saw me there, unsure, not knowing what the hell I was doing? I shrunk into my ignorance.
Red-faced, body flushed, I wondered if I would be allowed to try on bras in the dressing room. Trying to act as if I knew what I was doing, I grabbed several brands and sizes.

One of my sisters had told me to buy a AA, padded bra. That way no one would know I wasn't developing proportionately! That confirmed that something was terribly wrong with me. Why weren't they developing the same? It felt as if my body was betraying me.

When I finally found a bra that fit, padded of course, I felt elated. Now I just had to get through the checkout line. A half hour passed as I wandered through the store afraid that I might be seen buying a bra. They'd laugh for sure because clearly I didn't have any breasts. Resigned to suffering the worst embarrassment ever, I finally headed to the cashier. To my relief and surprise, no one paid me any special attention.

Once I got comfortable with wearing a bra, it became a badge of womanly honor. My girlfriends and I often compared where we were in the development process. One girl always had the luxury of being bigger than the rest of us and of course, one had to be the smallest. A song emerged from this competition that also included choreography.

"Ready girls? Arms up, elbows out, thrust the elbows back and the chest forward with each phrase...

We must, we must, we must, increase the bust!
The bigger, the better the tighter, the sweater
The boys depend on us!

The song created a subtle division. A crack in our sisterhood.

One of the strongly held beliefs within the crowd of girls that I hung around with in my early teens was that you'd have bigger boobs if you let boys fondle them. The idea probably came from a boy. The idea scared the bejeebees out of me. The thought of kissing a boy sent me running for my Barbie dolls let alone getting close enough for him to touch my breasts.

One day while changing into bathing suits, a friend shared how embarrassed she was about her breasts being different sizes, and how obvious it was in her shirt.

I enthusiastically shared with her how she could correct it by wearing a padded bra. Innocent enough, until news got out to the boys in the neighborhood. I then became a mockery.
The boys created a tag line. "Barb Lippitt is stuffy, not fluffy," an allusion to the then popular Three Musketeers chocolate bar jingle. The girls chimed in, promoting the further disintegration of our sisterhood.

I felt sick like the whole world had suddenly deserted me. The subtle thought that I'm not good enough, pretty enough, sexy enough, started to dismantle my self-worth. The loneliness inside swirled my stomach into a constant ache. It drove me to do things in order to get people to like me. Things like jumping in the pool with all my clothes on. Or buying people chips and pop from my baby-sitting money. The fix was temporary. The feeling of being lost always returned.

When I shared with my mom what was happening, she blew it off like it was just some childhood prank. Until she walked by the local department store and saw the sign "Barb Lippitt is stuffy not fluffy!" written in big letters on the side wall. Her anger told me she knew how I felt. As painful as the experience was for me, I didn't say anything to any of my friends. No one knew how much it bothered me. In that lack of acknowledgement, the teasing quickly died. The betrayal didn't.

Even within my family of girls, something separated us. Perhaps it was the five-year age difference. Maybe jealousy or anger. For instance, the sister next oldest to me told me I had ugly gray eyes. She said it out of spite for having to baby sit me, but the image stuck. Every time I looked in the mirror I saw those ugly gray eyes, even though my eyes are blue. They seemed to mock me, saying, "What are you going to do about it? No one thinks you're pretty!" I searched teen magazines, desperately seeking beautiful women who had the same eye color as me. Not there. Not in my early teens.

In junior high, one of the girls in my homeroom class thought I looked like a rabbit because of my big front teeth and pug nose. I hadn't grown into my face, so those two features stood out. The name Rabbit stuck throughout junior and high school in spite of growing into my face. As my preteen years blossomed into my teen years, friends told me I should become a model. They said I had the prettiest blue eyes and a great smile. I couldn't see my beauty in either of those features. I'd look in the mirror wishing I could see what other people saw. Instead I saw a rabbit with gray eyes. It wasn't until my sixteenth year when Farrah Fawcett appeared as one of Charlie's Angels. Because of my blonde waves, people said I looked like Farrah. As a result, I found my beautiful eyes and smile. However, that wasn't for three more years.

One of my best friends developed early and had very large breasts. Naturally, she always had a boyfriend. I believed it was because of her chest size, so I knew I'd never have a boyfriend because I still wore a size A. Much better than the AA I started
off with, but not by much. Not enough to cause any boys to take an interest in me. Not at 13.

One boy, John, seemed to like me. I liked him, too. We'd actually known each other for a couple years because I hung around with his younger sister. Before hunger and hormones, we didn't really pay each other much attention with the exception of neighborhood team sports. That's an area in which I excelled. Whether Red Rover, team tag, or Capture the Flag, I usually ended up on the winning team. I was fast, strong, and usually one of the tallest girls in my age group, so when captains chose their teammates, they usually chose me as one of their first picks. I loved that I was good at all the games I played.

John was tall and thin with curly, strawberry-blonde hair, freckles, and thick lips. He had a shy streak that kept him humble. His best friend, Ronny, went steady with my friend, Carly. Both Ronny and Carly were popular. All the girls went gaga over Ronny. He was tall with thick, chocolate-brown hair, dimples, and brilliant, midnight blue eyes. He was a year older than us and had a really cool banana-seat bike. Something about him gave him an air of mystery. I think it was because he didn't go to the same school as the rest of us. I knew Carly had had sex with him, but everyone seemed to be okay with that. She wasn't a whore because they'd been going steady for many months.

Carly's lack of a reputation for being easy follows what I found in the workshops I deliver. In actuality, the girls who were sexually active with their boyfriends often didn't end up labeled as whores or sluts. However, if a girl was willing to go to first or second base and then denied the boy the homerun, she could end up with a reputation out of spite.

The cruelty experienced during the teenage years can be compounded greatly today as a result of the internet. Sexual bullying can tarnish a person's character beyond repair. The shame associated with sexual bullying further ostracizes the teen from his or her peers. Because of my personal experience in my teen years, I can identify with the loneliness these teens feel. Fortunately, the media is bringing awareness to this new type of bullying because of the number of teens who have committed suicide, often over their sexuality.

My girlfriend Carly's reputation stayed in tact. In fact, her relationship with Ronny continued into marriage. During the time we hung around together, we both had fulltime babysitting jobs. Mine was a couple hours after school each day. Carly's went into the evening; therefore, hers became our usual hangout. One evening, Ronny decided to have a kissing contest. Everyone would have the opportunity to neck with
him and he'd be the judge of our prowess. As he sat on the enclosed front porch, waiting for each of us to come out and have our turn, I stood inside trembling because I didn't know how to French kiss. Terrified, I tried to swallow the large bubble of air that bulged in my throat.

Before long, my turn came. I walked out on the front porch and sheepishly smiled at Ronny. I hadn't told anyone, but I too loved Ronny even though he teased me relentlessly.

He smiled back and motioned me over. I sat on his lap and puckered up. Ronny started laughing at me. He laughed so hard he couldn't kiss me. I got up off his lap and ran home, feeling the tears stream down my red face. I had to get out of there before the other girls could question me or join in on his amusement at my expense.

Looking in the mirror, I cried at what I saw. The ugliest, most hideous looking girl stared back at me. I thought for sure that's what he was laughing at. The next day I found out the truth. He started calling me Fish Lips because I puckered when I tried to kiss him. Because my name was Lippitt, I soon became The Incredible Mr. Limpet, after the Don Knotts' Disney fish movie. That incident chipped away at my already suffering self-esteem.

As adults, we often chalk up self-esteem issues in adolescence as normal. But normal doesn't make it right. Although men and women have both feminine and masculine attributes, we tend to resonate more with our specific gender. Thus as women, we deepen our Feminine connection by being with our sisters. Furthermore, because we tend to process well in groups and accomplish more together, our genuine concern for others further enhances our communal nature. It's what fosters our capacity to nurture and support. When this need is not honored, instead infused with division and competition, we lose a sense of trust in women as confidants and allies. When this connection is absent, our self-esteem plummets, distorting our self image. Eventually, there's no room for the Divine Feminine to express herself.

Pornography compounded the degradation of my body image. Next to the toilet in the upstairs bathroom of the house where I babysat lay a stack of Playboy magazines. When I first opened one of those magazines, I was amazed at the beautiful women posing naked. I didn't really understand what pornography was, but I intuitively knew this was something that I wouldn't be able to discuss with anyone.

As I gazed at those beautiful women, I fell in love with their bodies. Each enhanced physique was so stunning. Beautiful breasts, full and voluptuous, soft skin, breathtaking faces, dramatic eyes looking back at me, perfect smiles. Curvaceous
bodies leading down to beautifully displayed vaginas. To me they represented the epitome of what a woman was supposed to look like. Looking at my own pubescent body, I couldn't imagine ever having a figure that beautiful. My body looked deformed in comparison.

The babysitting job lasted three years. Even though I felt guilt and embarrassment, I continued to look at the pictures, which continued to reinforce the image I had of my body. My fascination with those women's bodies made me question my sexual orientation. Did looking at beautiful women's bodies mean I was a lesbian? Because of my Christian upbringing, even the question felt sinful. Secrecy and separation perpetuated the guilt I felt as I continued to tuck my questions away in my mind.

Despite all that was fostering low self-esteem in my pubescence, my body continued to morph into its womanly physique. My breasts, to my delight, continued to grow evenly, although not as big as I wanted. Curves narrowed my waist and broadened my hips. Thighs expanded into what I considered fat, and my butt plumped up beyond what I thought normal. However, boys started to notice me and that felt good.

The day blood filled my panties, I panicked. I'd gone to the bathroom during seventh grade math class and there I saw it. Panty-liner pads hadn't been invented yet, so I had to use a bulky feminine pad with tails on front and back that fit into a garter-like belt around my waist. It felt like I had a bath towel stuck between my legs. I knew everyone could tell I had my period. In addition, I had to spend the rest of the day wearing the bloody panties, which I thought for sure, stank. That day made me feel dirty and smelly when it should have been a time of excitement and celebration. A rite of passage into womanhood.

When I told my mom how much I hated the pads, she introduced me to tampons and showed me an easy way to insert them. "You're fortunate they have feminine products today. When I was your age, we had to use cloth-diapers as our pads," Mom explained. "We'd bring them home to wash at night, but we had to carry the dirty ones with us all day." I felt so grateful and happy that I had better options than she had. However, the next time I got my period, I cried. Not because of fear or disgust, but because the cramps in my abdomen squeezed my insides like a vise, churning and twisting me until my lower abdomen felt like a pretzel.

My biblical upbringing told me this was a woman's curse for having led men astray when Eve convinced Adam to eat the forbidden fruit. I didn't care about any of that mumbo jumbo. Whatever it was, it hurt, and I wanted the pain to stop. That's
when friends introduced me to Midol.

I hated that time of the month, because it came with cramps that grew more severe with each period. Eventually, my mom sent me to the doctor and he put me on a prescription for non-steroidal, anti-inflammatory drugs specifically designed to lighten the severity of menstrual cramps. It worked like a charm.

I didn't understand why that painful, icky experience each month was called your friend, but the language became common.

"I've got my friend, so I can't go swimming."

"I've got my friend, so I can't go to the party."

"I've got my friend, so I can't wear a dress."

"I've got my friend, so I can't fool around."

The hormonal changes I went through brought in a low-grade depression that I didn't recognize as such because the stigma in society kept anyone from talking about such feelings. Whenever I tried to talk to my mom, she told me I was silly for feeling that way. "Just change your thinking and choose to be happy instead." Not so easy for me.

Between the ages of 13 and 16, I had several friends who gave in to their boyfriends and had sex. Every month, when they were due, they'd freak if they were a day late. "That's why it's called your friend," said one girl. "Because you want it to come." One girlfriend actually thought she could only get pregnant if she French kissed a boy. She had intercourse with him, but no tongue during their kisses.

Fortunately, I had accurate information about intercourse and pregnancy. Even though my mom shocked me with the story of her birth, she also filled me in with the facts about puberty, menstruation, pregnancy, and childbirth. In addition, having three older sisters, I'd witnessed most of that, having become an aunt shortly before my eleventh birthday.

Knowing about these womanly things was a gift, considering most of my friends knew very little about what was happening to their bodies. It made me feel smart and important and I did my best to educate my friends.

Looking back, why didn't my friends' mothers tell them the truth about their bodies? Why did coming into this amazing experience have to be so ugly and painful,
filled with confusion, disgust, and uncertainty? I'd like to propose that mothers change that pattern and create ritual and ceremony for their daughters, nieces, grandchildren. A rite of passage that celebrates this amazing time in a woman's life. A creative way that says, "Welcome to your wholeness. These are the women who will support you on your journey into the full expression of who you are."

As adult women in young girls' lives, we need to share with them the truth about their bodies, complete with resources for them to explore the natural physiological changes going on that we all share, that we've all gone through. No young girl should feel like a freak because she doesn't know the truth or understand her physical development. These truths need to be filled with facts, not judgments and stories aimed to scare them into being good little girls. If hormonal changes are affecting mood, girls need a place to talk about what they're feeling and thinking. Otherwise, as in my case, self-medication and self-harm become strong options as does suicide.

By the time I was in high-school, alcohol and pot became a regular way for me to escape the pain of my teenage years. Suicidal ideation was something I battled regularly. In retrospect, I believe the pain I felt was caused by a disconnect from my Divine Femininity.

I remember one day when the girl across the street got pregnant. She was 16 years old. My mom was mortified for the girl's mother. "Don't you ever get pregnant and ruin the Lippitt name," she told my little sister and me. "If you do, you'll have to have an abortion."

An abortion, what was that? And how could I get pregnant? I was still a virgin. I know now that my mom's past was glaring her in the face, seeing that young girl across the street, pregnant out of wedlock. I know today she probably saw herself in the unborn child. But the teenage me that received her warning heard a different message, "You screw up, you're on your own."

Not a problem, until I started having sex.
What myths did you hear about breasts, menstruation, and sex? Did you have accurate information? Did you have anyone to talk to about the changes you went through physically, hormonally?

How old were you and what memories do you have about developing breasts? How did you feel when you shopped for a bra?

How old were you when you started menstruating? Where were you when it started and how did you feel? Was there anything sacred about that time? Did you suffer from cramps? PMS?

When and how old were you when your friends began having sex? When did you? Did you talk about it? Did you have a reputation?

How did you feel about your body in your early teens? Were you ever teased because of your features, characteristics, or traits? How did that make you feel? Do you still carry some of those feelings? Have your daughters had similar experiences? How do they handle it? How do you?

How easy or comfortable were your female friendships growing up? How about now?

What other insights have you garnered from this chapter?

Witness your pubescent-self complete with everything you judged good about her and everything you judged bad. Spend some time holding her, showing her compassion and love. Use the following practice to activate forgiveness as you nurture her back into your wholeness.
Your Practice: Honoring the Beauty of Your Breasts at Any Age

Meditations.SacredSexualityBooks.com

The following ritual uses the chakras, the seven energy centers of your body. They are located at the pelvic floor/root, lower abdomen/sacral, solar plexus/truth center, heart, throat, brow or third eye, and crown of the head, they carry your prana or vitality.

Invite your pubescent self to your altar. Move your awareness into her. Become aware of your breath. Let each breath fill you with Feminine energy as it moves from the Crown Chakra down the front of your body through each chakra to the Root Chakra. Exhale up your spine to your Crown Chakra. Do this several more times, ever aware of the Divine Feminine breathing you.

As you continue to breathe, bring your awareness to your Heart Chakra. Notice how the breath of air rises and falls in your chest. Expand your awareness to include your breasts. Feel into any insecurity your pubescent-self may have felt about her breasts. Breathe into the insecurities until you feel them melt away from her. Witness your breasts as they bloom into their present shape and size. Feel your pubescent-self merge into oneness with you.

Move your awareness to your present-self. Celebrate the amazing capabilities of your breasts as centers of nurturing, sustenance, and pleasure. Cup your breasts as you send them love and feel their tenderness. If you have had a mastectomy, bring even more love to your chest area. Forgive and release any negative thoughts or judgments you may have had about your breasts, the cancer, or the surgery. Feel into compassion for yourself and your journey. Allow the Divine Feminine qualities of love, tenderness, compassion, and forgiveness to tingle through your entire body. Feel yourself beginning to reconnect with all that is Divine in you.
Missing a Friend

Hormones and Boys
Love and Sex
You're Pregnant, Now What

Human Development theories document the fact that girls mature faster than boys on average by two to three years. In part, perhaps this is the reason responsibility for abstaining from sex has traditionally fallen on the girl's shoulders? It's an acceptable belief that boys are going to want to have sex when they come into puberty, because their hormones are raging. What this says is that they're not responsible. After all, they're not saddled with the pregnancy.

Although girls also have hormones wreaking havoc with their bodies, changing them into women, it is taboo in many societies for girls to have the same desires for sexual pleasure or release. On the contrary, they're often taught to be the "good little girl" and say no. Even if the girl does say no, that No is often not respected. There are continual accounts of how the hormonal drive to have sex has led a boy to lose control, overtake the girl perhaps in an act of passion, and force her against her will. Even then, the girl is held responsible. If she hadn't gone so far, dressed so provocatively, teased him into the act. If only she'd said No sooner. This is changing in recent years, but the stigma and responsibility is still thought to rest with girls. Yet, even with all the pitfalls of puberty, hormones, and body image, girls manage to find their way through the ritual of dating.

The older homes back East had fruit cellars in the basements. My friend Amy's sister, Leslie, had turned their fruit cellar into a hangout complete with beads, lava lamps, incense, and music. The whole psychedelic atmosphere invited intimacy.

At 15, Leslie had a reputation in the neighborhood. As a result, she had a lot of boyfriends. One day, Amy and I snuck down to look through the peep hole of her fruit cellar and saw a boy humping Leslie. Throughout the summer, when my friends and I had sleepovers, we often pretended to hump each other, imitating Leslie in jest. Although innocent at the time, what a child witnesses fosters their thoughts, actions, and behaviors. I was already wondering about my sexual orientation and this added
confusion to my immature mind's questioning.

In my naivety with no full scope of what was happening, one night I told my mom about Leslie. Mom was mortified. Concerned about letting us hang around with the Olivers, Mom told her friend, whose daughter, Veronica, was part of our group. Veronica's mom questioned her, and Veronica told the other kids. Everyone got mad at me for "telling" and shunned me from the group. They no longer considered me their friend. It felt so degrading to be discounted in that manner that I learned never to open my mouth about anything again, especially to my mother. Another breakdown of trust among the sisterhood.

Junior high brought a whole new set of experiences and friends. At 14 years old, I had the luxury of being able to leave the street. As a result, I found new friends in a new neighborhood. One of my new friends, Kristy, came from a large family. On weekends, we regularly had slumber parties. One time, in the middle of the night, I felt someone's hand move up my thigh. Shocked I gasped and rolled over to see that the perpetrator was one of Kristy's older brothers. He saw me and ran.

I had been sleeping in one of his sisters' beds in a room big enough for five of the girls to share. He probably thought I was one of his sisters. I can only imagine how many of his sisters he molested and how many times. I felt so scared I was trembling. I didn't know what to do. I didn't say anything because I didn't think anyone would believe me. I certainly didn't want to risk losing another group of friends. That type of fear and intimidation causes girls to question their own truth and shut down to avoid confrontation, ridicule, and isolation.

That same year, between eighth and ninth grade, I met my first real boyfriend. A group of us hung around a secluded area of train track called Black Bridge. The tracks ran through the woods and over a creek. My girlfriends and I walked the mile to our hangout every evening in the summer to be with the boys, listen to music, and drink beer. Many of them also smoked pot, but I didn't do drugs. My sister had a friend who did drugs. She ended up having a baby with deformed arms. I didn't want that.

That summer, Dan and I started going steady. We'd drink beer, listen to music, and neck for what seemed like hours. The early 70's were still steaming with the free love of the 60's, percolating what would become the pulse of the disco era. Music supported our emerging hormones with tunes like Bad Company's "Feel Like Making Love," Foghat's "Slow Ride," and Bruce Springsteen's "Born to Run." I learned very early how persistent boys could be, especially when their hormones are running the show and beer and music cloud their senses. Dan loved trying to feel my boobs. My responsibility was to say no.
That changed over the next few years. I don't know when the switch happened, but it became okay to let boys fondle our breasts, maybe even touch us elsewhere on the outside of our clothes. A lot of it was based on peer pressure and the perceived idea that "the other girls" were doing it, so it must be what you're supposed to do, at least if a girl wanted to have a boyfriend. However, it wasn't okay to go all the way. That made you a whore or a slut. Stories about girls giving blow jobs in the lunch room instilled a fear of getting a reputation if you had sex. Ironically, the very boys who tried to convince the girls to have sex were the same ones that started the rumors that made girls afraid to have sex for fear of getting a reputation.

All of this behavior continued to create confusion for me. Who and what to tell, and who and what not to tell? How to get a boyfriend and how to keep a boyfriend? What was acceptable and what wasn't?

Those girls who ventured outside the acceptable norm got ostracized. The problem was that none of us knew where the boundary of the "acceptable norm" lay. *How far do we let the boys go?* was a constant question in our minds. There should have been adult female confidants to teach us how to connect with our Divine Femininity for guidance on such matters.

Pregnancy was definitely far beyond what was acceptable. If a girl got pregnant, she was treated as if she had a disease. She often left school either because she was too far along or to avoid the constant ridicule and shame. The boy, steeped in denial, usually walked away without looking back. At least that was the perception we had at that age. I have since learned from talking with several male friends my age who had gotten girls pregnant back then, I know they too were riddled with guilt, but had no outlet. Their only recourse was to be the cool, tough guy and deny their involvement.

One girl who got pregnant made the decision to stay in school. When I saw her in the halls, she usually walked alone as if what she had was contagious. She always looked sad, clutching her books to her chest with both arms, looking down only a few feet in front of her as she walked. Secretly, I felt sorry for her. In addition to figuring out how to graduate, have a baby, and step into the monumental role of a mother at 17, she had to deal with the shame and isolation of an act probably born out of what she thought was love for a young boy. The boy long gone and the reality that all he really wanted he got can crush a young girl's heart and trust muscle. Furthermore, a young life is starting that may never know its father.

That type of isolation and shame cuts through the heart to the soul, making the whole idea of being female a curse instead of a sacred experience. We were not taught how to rally in the time of one of our sisters' needs, which is what the Divine
Feminine is all about. It is not surprising that by the time we reach high school, there's barely a glimmer of the Divine Feminine visible.

In contrast, the entitlement boys often feel when they're not taught responsibility for their own maturity can lead to a disrespectful disregard for women. For example, while at a graduation party for a friend, a guy friend gave me a ride to the store in his souped-up Chevy Nova. On the way, he reached over and tried to grab my breast. Shocked, I pushed his hand away. He wasn't my boyfriend, so what gave him the right? He got mad at me and pinched my breast so hard he left a bruise. Cradling my breast, tears in my eyes, mortified by his act, I looked at him with distain. It hadn't even registered that he had done anything wrong. "You jerk! Take me back to the party," I insisted, which he did.

That year I entered tenth grade and blossomed. Suddenly, boys found me attractive, even though I didn't understand why. I didn't see myself as being pretty. I certainly couldn't measure up to the porn stars. Years of being called "Rabbit" and "Gray Eyes" left me with a self-image that was far from beautiful.

Still, the attention was nice. At sixteen, I started dating a senior. While at a pool party one night, sitting on the patio of his parent's home, he and some friends convinced me to smoke pot. That opened a whole new experience. The in-crowd now accepted me because smoking pot was cool and I was dating a senior. Pot-smoking soon became another way to escape that low-lying depression that hung above me like a dark cloud.

A lot of my sadness and depression was due to my ability to feel what others around me were feeling, especially the women in my family. I didn't realize I had empathic abilities. This Divine Feminine attribute when understood and cultivated, keeps us connected to one another and in touch with our intuition at the feeling level.

While getting high one morning before homeroom, I met a girl in the crowd of kids socializing just outside the school doors. She became my morning pot-smoking buddy, mainly because I listened to her and she desperately needed someone to talk to who would not judge her. She told me she was sleeping with the guy for whom she babysat. His wife didn't know. She said she couldn't say no because they had taken her in when her parents kicked her out. She was scared his wife would find out and didn't know where she would go if that happened.

Many girls grow up in an atmosphere that demeans who they are as women. There are far too many young girls who are the victims of abuse and incest in their homes. Many run away, turning to prostitution out of desperation. They've been
battered, abused, betrayed, unwanted, and unloved at home and end up attracting the same situation on the streets. Instead of being honored as representing the Divine Feminine in human expression, they're devalued as less than, unworthy, and non-essential. The female gender is not honored and sex is not portrayed as sacred.

You can hear it in the language with such phrases as "You swing like a girl," or "You're a sissy." Even my mother's comment about "...not ruining the Lippitt name" degraded the feminine, as if a name is more important than a person.

I listened to my friend's experience with empathy and concern. I didn't know what to say to her or do for her, but at least I could be a friend. My empathic abilities brought a lot of troubled girls to me during my teenage years. They'd share with me secrets about their sexual experiences that made them feel dirty, ashamed, and angry. I simply listened. I held their confidences. Because of their stories, although 16, 17, and 18 were a blur of parties, pot, alcohol, boys, and broken hearts, I graduated at 18, still a virgin.

My senior year, during spring break, I went to Florida with a friend's family. I met a boy who amazingly enough, was from my hometown. He was four years older than me, a working man, with a 280Z. Impressive to a young high-school girl. We hooked up when we got back to Buffalo, days before my eighteenth birthday.

That summer I fell in love for the first time. After about four months of dating, and a lot of pressure from him, I thought perhaps I was ready to go all the way. For some reason, I had a need to talk to my mom and dad first. I'm sure it was influenced by the popular television series One Day at a Time. In one of the episodes, Mackenzie Phillips' character, Julie, talks to her mom about wanting to have sex with her boyfriend Chuck. Bonnie Franklin, as the mom character, Anne Romano, handles the conversation beautifully. After sharing with Julie all the possible outcomes, she leaves the final decision to Julie.

I wanted that type of response from my parents. Unfortunately, they weren't the hip 70's parents that Bonnie Franklin was on One Day at a Time. My dad's response was, "They don't care what you look like, whether you're pretty or ugly, fat or skinny, short or tall. All they want to do is stick it in you."

My dad's words shocked me. That's not how Matt felt. We loved each other, I was sure of it. Against my parents' advice, I gave in to having sex with Matt. However, in the midst of the act, lying on my parent's couch, just as he was about to enter me I got scared. I pushed him away and asked him to leave. I spent that night navigating an emotional storm that left me drained and more confused in the morning. I thought for
sure the next time I saw Matt he'd shower me with feelings of love and compassion for how delicate this decision was for me.

Not the case. He showed up cold and detached. I thought he was mad at me. Maybe he didn't think I cared. Maybe I needed to go all the way to show him I did. I didn't want to lose him, so I gave in. A typical response for girls and women. When we finished, I asked him how he felt when I made him stop the first time. He said, "I knew it was only a matter of time before I'd have you." I was crushed. Was my dad right? The response I wanted would have shown how much he cared about me, not how much he cared about getting in my pants! That first attempt must have been enough to break my hymen, the membrane, often called the "cherry," that covers the external vaginal opening. As a result, he didn't feel it break, so he didn't believe I was a virgin. Not only was I deeply hurt, a deep anger and resentment toward him began to brew. Everything my dad had said was true! That resentment stayed with me through many relationships with men.

What should have been one of the most sanctified feminine experiences, that which would usher me into womanhood, was shattered in that moment. This is often the case for young woman who have sex before they are truly ready. Like Julie on One Day at a Time, young girls need an adult woman confidant with whom to discuss their desires. Someone who can guide them into making conscious, confident choices about sex. Choices made from self-love rather than need or fear. A female mentor would give young girls tools to make appropriate decisions for themselves rather than tell them what to do or scold them for their desires. Without this type of guidance, the sacredness of a young girl's sexuality can end up in a sea of disillusionment and confusion as the boys move on without a seeming care or concern. I didn't know how to handle the emotions that showed up with the realization that all Matt wanted was sex and a trophy on his arm. Things got really complicated a few months later when I missed my period. After the second month, I had to face the fact that I was pregnant. Now what?

That question nagged at me for several weeks as the first stages of pregnancy engulfed me. Fear and anger mixed together in an internal traumatizing soup. Nausea and vomiting welcomed me to each day. A hard reminder of what I'd gotten myself into. I prayed my mom wouldn't hear me. She'd hate me for sure.

My breasts felt tender and painful. Almost overnight, my clothes felt too tight. A barrage of questions haunted me every waking moment. I had been on the pill. What happened? Why didn't it work? What do I do now? Have the child, keep the child, give it up for adoption, have an abortion, tell the father, not tell the father? The turmoil of making a decision clenched at my chest. Who can I tell? Where do I turn?
I knew I couldn't talk to my mom. She had already told me what would have to happen if I got pregnant. Our relationship through my teenage years had been tumultuous at best. As a result, from the day I turned 18, I had been on the verge of moving out or getting kicked out of my parents' home. Pregnancy would cinch the deal for sure.

Because I didn't feel comfortable talking to anyone for fear of being judged, I anguished in my loneliness. Shame and guilt kept me from telling any of my friends. I showed up at house parties and hid in the shadows, hoping no one would notice how sad or scared I felt, or that I wasn't drinking or smoking.

I hated Matt because of his indifference. I hated that men had it so easy. I didn't want children. Everything was wrong. Shortly after that first sexual experience with Matt, I met someone else and started dating him too. Matt had been such a jerk and this new guy was so nice to me, treating me like a lady. There was only one problem. He was much older than me and married.

We hadn't had sex yet, but in that moment, I wished we had and that the baby was his. I even went as far as to try and go all the way with him so I could say the baby was his. Thank God fate stepped in and prevented that. That would have wreaked havoc in many lives.

Alcohol and pot were on hold due to the pregnancy, so the staunch reality of my situation glared at me. God had definitely deserted me. With no idea what to do, I wandered around in a state of oblivion, wishing it would go away. I begged God to make my decision for me by taking the baby back. God wasn't listening, which only made me feel even more alone and even more worthless. How could I possibly be someone's mother when I hated myself so much?
At what age did you start exploring your sexual boundaries and limits? What was that like for you? How did your parents respond?

What shame or guilt did you harbor as a teen? What secrets did you have? What fears forced you to keep those secrets?

Recall the music and television shows that influenced your teen years. Did they accurately describe your experiences? Did you feel valued as a woman? By whom?

When did you start smoking, drinking, using drugs?

Recall your first real love and the loss of your virginity. Did you feel ready or were you pressured into it? What other peer pressure did you succumb to?

Did you or any of your close friends get pregnant in high school? What was that like?

What other insights have you garnered from this chapter?

Witness your adolescent-self complete with everything you judged good about her and everything you judged bad. Spend some time showing her compassion and love. Use the following practice to activate forgiveness as you nurture her back into your wholeness.
Your Practice: Your Sacred Moon

Meditations.SacredSexualityBooks.com

Invite your adolescent-self to your altar. Breathe with her in a circular motion. Breathe in, imagining the breath running down the front of your body through each chakra. Breathe out up your spine and out the crown. As you breathe in this way, envision a Circle of Powerful Women. Who would you have in your circle? It can be anyone, past or present, historical or familiar. See their faces. Invite your adolescent-self into the center of the circle. Honor her presence and what she brings to the circle and to the collective womanhood.

How would you have liked your mom or mother figure to show up in your life? What would you have liked to hear or receive? Recreate that time as sacred, designed just for you.

Allow each elder to share with your adolescent-self their wisdom about moving into womanhood:

- What to expect and how to honor her menses cycle, her moon
- What to expect with intercourse
- How to know what love is
- How to clean and care for herself
- How to nurture herself
- How to keep her sexuality sacred
- Pregnancy and childbirth—honoring the sacred cycle of birth and rebirth of the soul
Now share your wisdom, hopes, desires from the present you, mothering her into her womanhood. Present her with a gift that she can place on the altar as you welcome her into the realm of the Goddess that she is. Take some time to consider this gift as you invite the Divine in you to guide you to the perfect symbol of her worth. Allow it to emerge over the next couple days.
Carly, my friend from babysitting days, knew a girl on my block who had had several abortions, so I asked Carly to get me some information. I am eternally grateful for her integrity in keeping my pregnancy a secret. She too had gotten pregnant, but had lost the baby. I so wished that would happen to me. She told me about Planned Parenthood and helped me set up an initial consult.

The day I walked into the clinic, I felt like the worst person in the world. In that moment, every sin that had ever been committed rested on my shoulders. After the consult, I sat with my decision for a few days. Since I knew who the father was, Planned Parenthood encouraged me to talk with him and explore all options before making the final decision.

When I told Matt about the pregnancy, he sat quietly for a few moments then asked what I wanted to do. I told him about my visit to Planned Parenthood and what I was considering. He never really shared how he felt and I didn't ask. He simply said to let him know when I decided. Petrified that my mother would hate me if she ever found out, I saw an abortion as my only choice. I scheduled the appointment for a dilation and curettage called a D&C.

Matt drove me to the hospital the day of the procedure and waited the four hours in the waiting room until I was done. They put me under anesthesia. When I woke up, I no longer had an embryo inside of me.

The shame and guilt that followed felt worse than the fear I felt when I found out I was pregnant. I didn't know what to do with it. I cried for hours as I waited for the discharge orders. A nurse came in to check on me periodically. Other than that, I lay in a cold, sterile hospital room by myself, alone with my thoughts about what I'd just done. Had I really just killed my baby?
My Christian values kicked in, adding to the guilt and shame. How could God ever forgive me? I certainly couldn't. Had I really explored all the options? Should I have told my mom?

Silence filled the car on my way home from the hospital. When we got back to my apartment, I tried to share with Matt how distraught I was, how bad I felt, and the regret that had engulfed me upon waking from the procedure, but his Catholic upbringing had him wracked with his own guilt. He told me how an abortion was against everything he believed in and he had to go to confession in order to be absolved from the sin.

He yelled at me, telling me how I could have had the baby and his mother would have raised it. That opened up a whole new kettle of guilt, shame, and self-loathing. I hadn't even considered telling his mom, or how this act would affect his belief system. Mainly because we never really talked, not about us. Not about our relationship or how we felt about one another, and especially not about the pregnancy. I believed that his mom didn't like me because I was Protestant. Now I knew she'd never accept me. I couldn't accept me. And now he didn't either.

While writing this, I am filled with caring and compassion for that young, confused, scared 18-year-old version of me who had no idea how to live her life, let alone how to give life. With no connection to the Divine Feminine, she made decisions based in fear. Those decisions took years to heal.

Abortion is a controversial topic that can spark a heated debate in the best of company. Each time we watch this play out in the political, social, and moral arena, every woman who has had an abortion relives her decision and the trauma that goes with it.

As part of my healing work, I've debated the issue in living rooms, classrooms, and political gatherings. What of rape and incest victims who end up pregnant. What of women whose lives are at risk should they carry a pregnancy to term? The question of abortion is often an ethical dilemma for these women. Do these instances justify a woman's right to choose even in the minds of those who consider themselves "pro-life"?

The case of a woman's right to have an abortion hit close to home for me before I was even of age. My mom shared a story of a young woman who lived down the street whose baby died in the first trimester. For some reason, her body didn't naturally expel the dead fetus. That was during the 1960's, and abortion was still illegal. Because of the law, she had to carry the fetus to term, knowing she would give
birth to a dead baby. No woman should have to suffer that anguish.

My cousin had multiple sclerosis and almost died when she gave birth to her first son. The doctors told her she wouldn't survive a second labor and delivery. I don't know if she ever got pregnant again. I do know she wanted another child because they adopted. But given that was also the 1960's, in addition to her trauma of not being able to carry another child, the very act of sexual intercourse with her husband put her life at risk because of the laws.

As a result of my pregnancy and abortion, I became privy to several girls who used abortion as their contraception, racking up two, three, even four abortions during their teenage years. According to the Guttmacher Institute (GI), 47% of women having an abortion had at least one previous abortion.

I don't believe that abortion should be used as a form of birth control. There are far too many other options to prevent pregnancy. In contrast to this belief, I also believe abortion should be an option. Unintended pregnancies often happen in spite of contraceptive use. This was true in my case, and I'm not alone. An estimated 54% of women having abortions had used contraception (GI).

The dichotomy of my beliefs is in line with the many dualities that seem to be part of a woman's experience. I mentioned several of these earlier and believe this is a gift from the Divine Feminine. When women are aware of the Divine Feminine as a guide and companion, dualities become opportunities to find common ground. Socrates stated that wisdom is the ability to hold two opposing views in the mind at the same time. In order to cultivate this wisdom, we have to reclaim the Divine Feminine and allow Her to guide us to a consensus that honors all rights.

As you examine your beliefs about abortion, I invite you to open to a higher truth, one that allows you to hold alternating views. Regardless of your beliefs, understand that for the woman who has had an abortion, the emotional trauma that follows can take years to heal.

It's estimated that one-third of American women will have an abortion (GI), so you never know whether the woman you are talking to has had one and whether she has dealt with and healed the emotional trauma that came with it. Keep this in mind when this topic comes up for debate. Even if you are an adamant pro-life supporter, compassion will fuel your stance far greater than condemnation.

Many of the controversial topics surrounding the legal issues of abortion are driven by religious views. I believe in this country and our constitution. There is a
reason why freedom of religion, speech, and the press are civil liberties guarded by the First Amendment. This country was founded by people who fled England in order to worship and speak their truth without fear of punishment or death.

Given that, although religion has the right to influence the beliefs of people exercising their right to freedom of expression, also allowed by the First Amendment, it should not be criteria for creating laws, especially a law that governs a woman's body or her right to choose. I'm grateful that Congress allows the use of Medicaid funds to pay for abortions where a full-term pregnancy puts a woman's life at risk and in cases of rape or incest (GI). However, even this allowance is constantly under scrutiny by those whose views are extreme.

In contrast, the idea of castration in rape and incest cases in the United States isn't even a consideration for legal statutes. Rape and incest are crimes of violence and dominance that disempower women and rob them of the sacredness of their sexuality. Yet the consideration of a law against a man's body that could curtail such violence is seldom if ever up for debate, although some states allow castration as an option in exchange for a lighter sentence for repeat offenders.

Given my belief and support of our First Amendment rights, including freedom of expression, those with differing views have the right to their opinion. I sympathize with those who see abortion as murder, and I'm sure they are deeply troubled at the over one million abortions annually in the United States (GI). The solution I offer is the reclaiming of the Divine Feminine, which would ultimately reestablish the sacredness of sexuality to guide our decisions and laws.

The freedom of expression afforded by our First Amendment became the backdrop for my teenage years as the 1970's ushered in women's push for equality. Everything about feminine sexuality that had been oppressed came up to be freely expressed. The Women's Liberation Movement and the Equal Rights Amendment created an outlet where women burned their bras in solidarity claiming their rights to explore their sexuality.

For many young girls coming into their womanhood, those times created a great deal of confusion. I was no exception as my teenage years have demonstrated. Even in the midst of this fight for independence, the deep-seated belief in the need for a man to take care of us continued to influence our relationships.

Several of my girlfriends married right out of high school and started families in the traditional sense. I fought that desire, opting for a career. However, with no support from friends or family to pursue that path, the fight drained me. My sisters
and most of my friends had settled into family life. I ran from it in every way possible. The last thing I wanted was to be trapped in a marriage as someone's wife and mother. I wanted my own identity, yet I kept tripping over my self-loathing. The abortion had sent my self-worth to a new low.

My relationship with Matt lasted three more years. Even though he treated me like I was some type of door prize, I stayed. I didn't want to be alone. My heart was actually with the married man whom I also continued to see, but he wasn't available. In my ignorance, I believed it was only a matter of time before he left his wife for me. After all, he told me he loved me. I desperately wanted someone to love me. Someone to make me feel worthwhile, to believe in me and help me find my way in the world of business. Ten years my senior, he was gentle, dignified, wealthy, and well-established in his career. I always felt happy when we were together. He made me feel like I could accomplish anything I set my mind to do. I thought I'd found my Prince Charming.

Neither Matt nor Prince Charming were right for me. The secret drama that seeing both of them created sent me running from the emotional pain and turmoil brewing inside me. My involvement with them began the pattern of attracting unavailable men. Throughout the next several decades of my life, I attracted men that fit that pattern perfectly—unavailable and incapable of honoring me. With each failed relationship, my anger grew. Initially it manifested as self-harm as I drank or smoked pot to numb out. Being in an altered state made my inhibitions and sadness disappear. In that state, I felt happy and free.

It also made it easier for me to deny that sleeping with a married man, someone belonging to another woman, a sister when viewed from our Divine Feminine sacredness, was wrong. In my emotional, spiritual, and intellectual immaturity, I was able to justify it by reasoning that it must be her fault if she couldn't keep her man.

The degradation and disgrace that go with committing adultery is devastating on so many levels. The moral and emotional devastation for all parties extinguishes any sense of love, loyalty, or logic. No one wins. Everyone loses. Whether or not either relationship survives, self-esteem, self-respect, and any sense of trust, love, and belonging are damaged for good. Unfaithfulness creates a scar that tarnishes the sacredness of sexuality on the deepest level, that of the Spirit.

Having affairs simply seemed the thing to do. Pop culture continued to fuel our sexual tension. Music supported infidelity with songs like, "If Loving You is Wrong, I Don't Wanna Be Right," "Me and Mrs. Jones," and "No Tell Lover." The disco scene not only brought eroticism to the dance floor, it showed it on the silver screen with
movies such as *Dirty Dancing* and *Saturday Night Fever*. The gang banging scene in *Saturday Night Fever* showed how out of control the pressure for the freedom of sexual expression had gotten.

In the midst of my own adulterous acts, I witnessed two sisters' and several cousins' marriages fall apart because of infidelity. Watching them go through such painful heartache brought me to my knees. It took years of forgiveness work and soul searching amends to move past what I'd done. After watching those loved ones struggle to pick up the pieces of their shattered lives, I decided to end things with Matt and my married friend.

In an effort to clean up my act, I enrolled at Trocaire, a two year college in Buffalo in pursuit of a journalism degree. I set my sites on attending Buffalo State College once I graduated from Trocaire. Shortly into my first year, I met Mark, a guy who treated me better than I could have imagined. His family loved me and I loved them. We dated for two years, but with my inability to love myself and lack of connection to the Divine Feminine, I couldn't remain in a relationship with such a generous, loving, giving person. My sabotage of the relationship was subtle at first, but it did the job.

The classes I had scheduled for my first semester at Buffalo State were a dream come true. I planned on moving in with some girlfriends and had given the college the new address before I moved. When those girlfriends decided not to renew their lease, I decided it was probably better to stay at home to save money. However, I neglected to notify Buffalo State. As a result, when the tuition due notice came, I never got it, which prompted the college to cancel my classes as a "No Show." When I found out, it devastated me. In an attempt to create the career life I wanted, I started talking to recruiters to see if maybe the military could offer me some options. The idea that I'd get to travel and that they'd pay for my education lured me in. Because I had some college, the army offered rank. I'd enter the military as an E3, a Private First Class. I signed up.

Four months later, I left Buffalo and Mark behind. When I came home on leave after basic training, I felt suffocated. Everything in Buffalo felt wrong. I didn't belong there. When I left the second time, I wanted to cut all ties. I stopped all communication with Mark, refusing to answer any of his phone calls or letters, giving him no explanation. The way I ended things was mean and hurtful, and I still regret hurting him in that way.

I saw him several years later, and he was willing to pick things up where they'd ended even though I then had a two-year-old son. Unfortunately, I still hadn't healed
or reclaimed the Divine Feminine, so I ran away once again. Years later, after my healing, I learned that he got married and fathered four daughters. I was glad to know he went on to love again and create a family.

The month before I started writing this book, I visited Buffalo for the first time in almost a decade. I reconnected with old friends and the subject of Mark came up. He had been my one regret in love, the one I let get away. When I looked him up on Facebook to see how he was doing, I learned he'd died two month prior. I send you love and blessings, Mark. May your light always shine brightly.
Documenting Your Story/
Recognizing Beliefs

How did societal norms affect you during your teens and twenties?

What are your early experiences with intimate relationships? Who hurt you? Whom did you hurt?

What are your views on abortion? Have you or any of your friends had one?

Do you believe that laws should govern abortion rights?

What constitutes an affair for you? Have you ever had one? Have you ever been cheated on?

What beliefs prompted your decisions about career and/or family? Did you feel a need to choose? Are you satisfied with your decision?

What other insights have you garnered from this chapter?

Witness the young-adult woman you were in your 20's complete with everything you judged good about her and everything you judged bad. Spend some time showing her compassion and love. Use the following practice to activate forgiveness as you nurture her back into your wholeness.
What is it that you value in relationship? Create a list of the most important aspects you want from a partner. For example, I want . . .

. . .to be valued, heard, ravished,
. . .to experience a sense of humor, charity, adventure
. . .to share intimacy, common goals, service work

Once you've created your list, come up with the top ten and put them in order. The top three are your non-negotiables.

With your list in front of you, ask yourself these questions:

1. Is the person I'm with showing up in this way for me?

2. Am I showing up in this way for him or her?

3. Am I showing up in this way for myself?

4. What do I need to shift or change?

Breathe your Divinity into this shift infusing it with all that's necessary to support you in creating the changes you need to make in your life.
Basic training for the army revealed strengths I never knew I had. Physical endurance and stamina as well as leadership abilities emerged, putting me in touch with a masculine inner power. As the second oldest woman in my company, the younger girls looked up to me. They sought me out for solace and to motivate them to keep going through the struggles of basic training.

This was also my first experience with the homosexual world. I didn't find out till the end of the training that several of the girls were lesbians, but it didn't matter to me. I simply didn't have an issue with it.

Advanced training (AIT) for Air Defense Artillery mixed the women with the guys. Our sleeping quarters were still segregated and because there were only 2-4 women per company, females from the various companies were housed together. However, our training happened with the men in our individual units.

Since the men's basic and AIT were combined, they still had basic training requirements to pass. As a result, the women had to go through the requirements again. This included the physical fitness test: pushups, sit-ups, and a two-mile run.

The four women that joined the men in Company B increased the numbers to 199. Yes, 195 men and four women. The drill sergeants were also men.

In advanced training, the prejudice against women in the military became real to me. My Private First Class status made me the highest ranking of the four females, so whenever any of us did something wrong, the drill sergeants made me drop and do 10 pushups. That happened a lot. No problem. It gave me an outlet for my anger. As a result, I got good at doing pushups. When the guys started complaining that the standards for women were easier because we were weaker, I'd simply challenge them. Not only did I max my pushups, I could do 10 pushups over the max. The drill
sergeants rubbed that into the guys, which really made them resent me. However, I felt empowered and powerful.

Interestingly, I actually found it easier working with men. They didn't complain nearly as much as the women did. When it came to team training, we saw past the gender differences and got the job done. Still, whenever the drill sergeants put me into a leadership position, I had more pressure to prove myself. I took on that challenge, allowing the anger from the unfairness of it to give me the courage and strength to stand up to some pretty big men.

One day, the drill sergeant chose me to act as the platoon sergeant. One of the guys refused to carry out the orders I'd given for the class. Private Smithe didn't like his duty assignment and refused to do it. He was one of two guys in my company who were huge, one black, one Samoan. Private Smithe happened to be the black guy.

Basic and AIT were my first interactions with people outside of my race. Since I'd been raised in the traditional white society of Buffalo, the consciousness of my upbringing toward black people had been fear. Basic training had started to shift that. One of the girls I'd become friends with was a black woman from North Carolina who had never been around white people. She got the same message about whites that promoted fear toward us.

Having to address Private Smithe intimidated me, but I refused to let it show. I knew I needed to confront him in order to get him to follow my orders. After that, the rest would be a piece of cake. I felt ready for the challenge.

Let me describe Private Smithe. Six-foot-five, 250 pounds, buff from 10 weeks of basic and advanced training. Dark black, chiseled facial features, large lips, permanent frown and scowl, glaring eyes. Let me describe me. Five-foot-eight, 130 pounds, white, blonde hair, blue eyes, shaking interior, glaring eyes.

I called him to attention and asked him to explain his problem. I don't remember how the rest of the conversation unfolded except to say we found common ground and he followed the orders I'd originally assigned.

Later in the week, he pulled me aside and congratulated me on my courage to stand up to him. He said I'd earned his respect, which also earned me the respect of his Samoan buddy.

When I got to my permanent party, the ratio of men to women wasn't much different. I was one of nine women in a company of 209. The First Sergeant called me into the orderly room when I first arrived and told me he was reassigning me to
supply rather than sending me down-range to work as the hawk-missile crewmember for which I'd been trained.

Once I got my bearings, I realized he pulled all the women to fill the slots of more traditional female roles, like orderly room clerk and supply clerk. I hated that. Before long, he pulled me from supply to be his orderly room clerk because of my administrative skills.

The women who had rooms in the barracks got housed down a hall designated only for women. Of the nine women in my company, four of us had rooms in that corridor along with females from other companies. After a couple weeks, I learned that the other three single women in my company were lesbians. This was before the Clinton years of "Don't ask, don't tell."

I became good friends with these women as they showed me the ropes of military life. We also hung out together when off duty. They introduced me to the night life in El Paso, Texas, which included gay bars. I liked going to the gay clubs because the music was awesome and I just wanted to dance. My friends never left my side. They said they were concerned that if people thought I was single they'd hit on me. I think they may have been concerned about people finding out I was straight.

The opposite was true in the straight clubs. It wasn't acceptable for two girls to dance together in a straight club in El Paso like it had been in New York. It was actually dangerous. The prejudice against gays in the military was bad enough. However, Texas was particularly dangerous for homosexuals. AIDS had just surfaced and most saw it as not only a homosexual disease but a punishment by God. That fueled the prejudice, giving those who hated gays a justifiable right to persecute them.

My involvement with homosexuals caused some of the people in my unit to question my sexual orientation. I still did too. Because I was still so angry with men, part of me wanted to be a lesbian. I met a bisexual woman in our barracks and wondered if that could be true for me. We talked about experimenting together, but when it came right down to it, I had no desire to go through with an intimate connection with her.

Chauvinistic ridicule continued to undercut women while I was in the Air Defense field. I had to constantly defend my right to be there. When the guys couldn't find my physical abilities inferior to theirs, they attacked my sexuality. Before long, they started rumors that I was sleeping around.

Granted, in a unit with that many men, half of which were single and living in the
barracks, and me the only single, straight female, I certainly had my choice of partners. Yes, I explored that newfound sense of freedom. The idea of sex without commitment was right up my alley. Over the course of my year in that unit, I had sex with three guys, all of whom had become friends. They weren't the ones spreading the rumors.

During one field exercise, the rumors had gotten so bad that our Commanding Officer pulled me aside to talk to me about a rumor that I'd been sleeping with one of the lesbian soldiers. I laughed, which surprised him until I explained the situation. When the First Sergeant returned from a meeting with the executive staff, he came to see me at central command where I was operating the communications for the mock training in which we were engaged. He told me that someone in the headquarters meeting said they knew he and I were having an affair. They had pictures of us to prove it. Since we weren't having an affair, the person was obviously lying. I laughed and said, "You too?"

"What do you mean?"

"They have me sleeping with everyone else in the unit, it was only a matter of time before they had me sleeping with you, too!" He had no idea and felt really bad that all of this had happened under his watch.

The lies became insignificant when several military colleges had sent letters requesting my continued education with them due to my high aptitude scores on the military entrance exam. Everything seemed to slip into place for me to get an education and have a lucrative career as an army officer.

However, old habits and behaviors die hard when there isn't a conscious effort to change the old beliefs and patterns that created them to begin with. The group that I hung with drank and partied a lot, which was part of the army way of life back then. It wasn't long before I found myself involved with a couple different married men. My lack of self-worth as a woman had been on reprieve because of the intensity of developing my masculine, soldier-like qualities. When I found myself back involved with married men, my lack of self-worth resurfaced as disgust. Something drew these men to me and I didn't know how to say no. It felt like a drug, a stronger pull than the alcohol I'd been consuming in mass quantities.

My promiscuity continued to create a wedge between me and the Divine Feminine and I really didn't care what happened to me. My motto became, "Live fast, die young, leave a good-looking corpse!" With that attitude, my drinking escalated, giving my libido a mind of its own as I spiraled out of control.
One night I stumbled into the barracks and passed out in my room. I woke up to one of the soldiers in the unit fondling me. Having stripped me of my clothes, he was touching and kissing my private parts. I have no idea how he got down the hall that was supposed to be guarded by the Sergeant in Charge of Quarters (CQ) let alone how he got into my room. My initial reaction came from a place of fear and anger. Fear at the idea that I was being raped, anger at all the times I and other women had been sexually abused.

My mind flashed back to the incident with my friend's brother fondling me during a sleepover. I lost it and jumped out of bed screaming. The guy ran. In the silent darkness that followed I felt myself slip into a deep, dark place. No one came to my rescue. Embarrassed, I sat for several minutes wondering what I needed to do. Summoning all my courage, I got dressed and went to the CQ to tell him what had happened.

When the First Sergeant came in, he immediately pulled me into his office. After I shared my story, he said the soldier who had molested me had gone AWOL absent without leave.

Later that day, a feeling of degradation settled in as I learned that the soldiers in my unit blamed me for the soldier who tried to rape me going AWOL. They ostracized me as if I had been the perpetrator.

This is often the case for rape victims. They're put in the position of blame, insinuating that their actions and behavior invited the rapist to attack, defile, and degrade them. In addition, the crime is ignored and the woman left alone to contend with the traumatic scars that alter her life forever. Most women are beaten, abused, even killed by their rapists because rape is a crime of violence, not of love or lust.

In an effort to keep themselves safe, many women go into hiding, trying to pretend the incident never occurred. In their isolation, they too begin to blame themselves. They live in fear and pain because you cannot make such a malicious act go away. It destroys many of their lives. It's a blatant disregard for feminine values that thrives in the absence of the Divine Feminine.

If you Google rape, you will find story after story of women who have suffered this atrocity and how they were ostracized or left alone to contend with their trauma. For example, a 20/20 investigation aired on ABC News in January 2011 revealed that "more than 1,000 young American women have been raped or sexually assaulted in the last decade while serving as Peace Corps volunteers in foreign countries. In some cases, victims say, the Peace Corps has ignored safety concerns and later tried to
blame the women who were raped for bringing on the attacks."

In addition, the number of sexual assaults on women in the military is appalling. Unfortunately, many go unreported because it could cost the woman her career. This is especially true if she is in one of the Officer Candidate Schools. Most rapes and sexual assaults are ignored by the leadership within their respective military, swept under the carpet in an attempt to save face and preserve pride in leadership.

If the woman is married to her rapist, it's as if the marriage contract gives him permission to have his way with her body without her consent. Before the 1970's, an American man had the right to rape his wife and she had no legal recourse against him. According to Wikipedia, it wasn't until the mid 1970's that states within America removed the exception that precluded spouses from being prosecuted for raping their wives. Wikipedia further states that as of 1999, 33 of 50 U.S. states regard spousal rape as a lesser crime. The perpetrator may be charged with related crimes such as assault, battery, or spousal abuse. In December 1993, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights published the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, establishing marital rape as a human rights violation.

Unfortunately, we still have a ways to go. The following statistics were taken from the Rape Abuse & Incest National Network website (RAINN.org). Their statistics come from resources such as the National Institute of Justice and Centers for Disease Control & Prevention:

- There is an average of 207,754 victims (age 12 or older) of rape and sexual assault each year.

- That means that every TWO minutes, someone in the U.S. is sexually assaulted.

- 54% of sexual assaults are not reported to police.

- 97% of rapists will not spend a day in jail.

- Approximately 2/3 of assaults are committed by someone the victim knows.

These atrocities are much worse and more prevalent in other countries such as India and Afghanistan and throughout the African continent.
Organizations such as RAINN have instituted programs to educate and prevent these atrocities against women. RAINN has teamed up with college students to fight sexual violence on campus. You can learn more about RAINN at www.rainn.org.

My initial response to being raped was similar to most women. Embarrassed, I withdrew. In my isolation, I began to question right and wrong, including whether I had the right to accuse since I'd been drunk when I went to bed.

I don't know if they ever found the soldier that assaulted me or if the JAG prosecuted him for going AWOL. I do know that no rape charges were ever brought against him. In my mind, I couldn't wait till the whole incident would blow over so people would forget about it and I'd be off the hook for ruining someone's career.

That didn't happen immediately. First, the lie-filled rumors continued about me. One day, Staff Sergeant Blair, one of the soldiers I had been dating, needed something from supply. When he walked in, no one was at the counter. He made his way around to the back of the supply room, a huge area where we laid out army tents to clean and repair. He stopped short when he heard my name. Several soldiers were sitting in a circle, talking about how they had slept with me. This made SSG Blair really mad. He immediately took issue, walked in on the group of men and threatened each one of them if they ever said anything bad about me again. Because he had a mean reputation, that was enough to scare people and the rumors stopped.

My knight in shining armor had arrived. SSG Blair ended up leaving his wife for me and we moved in together in June, less than a year after I entered the service. I had just turned 25 in May. Little did I know, my worst nightmare had begun.
Have you served in the military or another predominantly male field? If so, what was your experience? Have you run up against prejudice?

Has being a woman helped you or held you back in your career? Have you had to defend your rights as a woman capable of doing your job as well as a man?

Do you feel comfortable talking about sex? Have you ever been promiscuous? Do you find yourself in judgment of yourself or others?

What are your views and experiences with homosexuality? Have you questioned or experimented with your sexual orientation?

Have you been abused, sexually assaulted, or raped? What resources have been available for you to heal this? Did you take advantage of them?

Are there any other traumas you need to heal? Do you feel comfortable and safe reaching out for help?

What other insights have you garnered from this chapter?

Witness the young woman you were, stepping onto a career path complete with everything you judged good about her and everything you judged bad. Spend some time showing her compassion and love. Use the following practice to activate forgiveness as you nurture her back into your wholeness.
As part of healing my own rape and sexual assault and in order to be of service to other rape survivors, in 2010 I became a trauma resolution specialist. I use a technique that clears the energy of past traumas that have been stored in the body and the psyche as dense energy. In traditional psychology, this trauma is called Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). What I have discovered through this training is that the more we relive the story of our sexual trauma, whether abuse, rape, or other forms of violence, the darker and denser the energy gets.

This next ritual is designed to create a healing at your energetic core. Be aware the healing process may take you several days to allow all of the unwanted energy to dissipate.

Our tendency from years of conditioning is to avoid or stuff anything that may cause us further pain or suffering. However, anytime we run from anything, we give it power to control us. You've been cultivating the Divine Feminine within you through the processes in the previous chapters. Call Her in now to help you claim that part of you that another has abused. By claiming it, you create the opportunity to bring it back into sacredness and holiness.

Begin by sitting in front of your altar. Take several deep breaths focusing on the following mantra.

Breathe in, telling yourself, "I embody."

Breathe out, saying, "The Divine Feminine."

Visualize the Goddess in your minds eye" Invite her to your altar. Feel the power of her presence" Allow a light to form around you both as you enter into a sacred bond together. Commit to releasing any and all remaining trauma that may still reside in your body.

Think about a time in your life when someone caused you pain or trauma. It could be physical, sexual, or emotional" Once you recall a time, notice the feelings. In order to feel the pain, it must have an energy. Notice where you are feeling this energy in your body"
It's common at this point to start reliving the story. That's because it's easier for us to live in our mind than in our bodies and emotions. However, in order to release the story, you have to release the energy that's keeping it locked in your body. Notice the story and acknowledge it, but bring your awareness back to the energy.

See the energy as a dark, abandoned room that's been left in disarray. Allow the light of your Divinity to fill the room. In the center of the room is that part of you that has been traumatized, crumbled into a self-protective ball. Go to her. Notice the wound of dark energy in her body. Place your Divine hand on the wound, allowing the light to heal it like a soothing balm. Hold her until she feels safe until the energy completely dissipates. until you feel her relax into your arms and all that's left is light. Together, stand and walk out of the room.

Once outside, notice the story that created the energy. See a helium balloon completely envelop the story and the room.

- Is there anything about this story that continues to serve you?

- Can you see any reason to continue to hold onto the story?

When you feel the story is complete, let the balloon go. Watch until it is completely out of sight.

Gently bring your awareness back to this present time, this present moment, sitting at your altar. Breathe your mantra, "I embody. . . The Divine Feminine." Slowly open your eyes, stretch into a big yawn. Bring your hands to prayer mudra in front of your heart. Bow to that essence of you that's willing to heal. Bow to your Divinity.
In July 1985, I received orders to serve in Germany. Reading the orders, my smile took over my face. One of the main reasons I joined the military was to see the world. Europe sounded exciting and enticing and I couldn't wait to go. I continued to explore the various military colleges that had been pursuing me, hoping to find one overseas. Something needed to change in order to get my life back on track and out of the craziness I'd stepped back into. To my delight, SSG Donny Blair put in a request for orders to go to Germany with me.

In August, we took a trip to the Grand Canyon. As we were driving back, I saw a vision of an angel in the clouds. It looked like she was talking to me. In that moment, I had what I call a Knowing that I was pregnant. As uncanny and holy as the moment felt, I realized in that instant, my whole life just changed. No more Germany. No more college. My visions and dreams disappeared once again.

Sure enough, because of my pregnancy, the Army cancelled my orders for Germany. Shortly afterwards, Donny received orders to go to Germany. Because of the pregnancy, and the fact that Donny and I weren't married, the military wouldn't send me with him. The only way for me to go was if we got married or I got out of the military. Because of the pregnancy, I received an Honorable Discharge and by January of 1986, I was no longer an active duty army soldier.

When my First Sergeant found out Donny and I had plans to get married, he offered to buy us boxing gloves as a wedding gift. He'd known Donny for many years. I should have known by that comment that the ride would be a rocky one, and it was. We left for Germany in February. I was 6 1/2-months pregnant.

The moment I arrived in Germany, my back labor began. I didn't know a soul nor did I have a connection to home. Because there were no vacancies in military housing,
my husband and I got a place on a German farm. As nice as the German people were, none of them spoke English.

What was I doing in a foreign country with a man I really didn't know, taking on the role of step-mother to his ten-year-old son, ready to give birth to my own with no idea what to expect? I felt lost and alone. No other English speaking people lived in close proximity to me and it took 30 minutes to get to the military base. We only had one car which Donny needed to get to work. That left me feeling stranded in my own home.

Pregnancy and childbirth are sacred times that should bring with them a village of support from other mothers who have walked the path in front of the mother-to-be. Most ancient tribal text describe the beauty of community coming together to support a woman's pregnancy and childbirth. The importance of community, a Divine Feminine quality, fosters a sense of belonging and acceptance. In ancient tribal traditions, wise crones held the high watch, keeping young girls connected to the Divine Feminine. As each girl moved through the phases of womanhood, she learned from the crones how to tap into her intuition and allow it to guide her path. Like hunting and gathering, the oversight of the wise crone is a concept that has faded into obscurity.

In our drive for independence, American society has prided itself on individualism. In its emphasis on the importance of individual self-reliance, a masculine quality, it has lost the underlying support of the community that makes it possible for the individual to succeed. In an attempt to keep the status quo patriarchal model in place, women have been separated from our need for community and taught that marriage and family are their number-one priority.

For me, that played out as a lack of community to support a new move, a new home, a new baby, and a new lifestyle. Instead of community, I found myself in isolation.

Fortunately, the military has a mentor program for new soldiers in foreign countries. The soldier assigned to us and his family helped tremendously. SSG Marlow’s wife Donna came to my aid, providing comfort, knowledge, and support through the third trimester of my pregnancy and my childbirth. Her jovial spirit and genuine desire to be of assistance provided a much needed refuge from the fears that invaded my thoughts.

My friends and family had a baby shower for me in the states before I left, but my mom had told everyone not to get any of the big items such as a crib, changing table,
car seat, or buggy because she thought we'd get all those things once we got to Germany. We didn't have any money, so that didn't happen. Donna had several small children and let me borrow the baby items I needed.

To me, Donna had mastered the role of motherhood. Her three beautiful, well-behaved, intelligent children were the epitome of joy and laughter. She, too, lived in a farm house with plenty of room for the children to run and play. Her landlords loved her and spoke enough English for them to communicate.

Donna and Carl had been in Germany for over five years, married for ten. They constantly entertained a diverse group of friends. Officers and high-ranking enlisted soldiers who, like Donna and her husband, Carl, had money.

Because the German mark valued $3.50 to the American dollar, she had the added luxury of surrounding herself with beautiful treasures from small trinkets to living room furniture. Their travels took them all over Europe. The children went to a German grade school where they learned the German language. In addition, Donna was beautiful and had an amazing, petite figure. I saw her life in direct contrast to mine. Not only did we not have any money, not only did I feel trapped in a desolate place to live, not only did I lack the ability to provide for my new baby, I felt fat and frumpy and friendless.

The last month of my pregnancy, my back hurt constantly. The only comfortable position I found was to rest in the yoga Child's Pose. Depression soon set in and I found myself overwhelmed with no place to turn. The pain of my back labor exacerbated the depression and vice-versa. Donny's field duty took him away for days and weeks at a time, so I spent a lot of time with Donna, wishing that I had her life. I wanted to be anyone but me, anywhere but where I was. Feeling disconnected from everyone and everything led me to hate my life.

There's no doubt in my mind that my feelings toward my life influenced not only the final weeks of my pregnancy, but also the labor and delivery. It's important to nurture, care for, and love oneself. This is critical when we are in the process of bringing a new life into this world.

My pregnancy experience mirrored my feelings about myself and my life. Pregnancy is a great barometer of our internal thoughts and feelings, so if you're not enjoying your experience, check in with your thoughts, feelings, and actions. Change what's negative by affirming your wholeness. Since the baby feeds off of the mother's feelings, why not feed it a wholesome diet of joy and love rather than anger, desperation, and self-loathing? I wish someone had given me that advice during my
During the last few weeks of my pregnancy, lying down hurt my back, sitting up hurt my back, and standing hurt my back. I had no desire to eat. I just wanted the baby to come out. Unfortunately, the baby had a different plan and didn't come on my due date. Why would he? Given what I felt and the fact that those feelings were being transmitted to him he probably did not feel very welcomed or wanted.

After days of pain and discomfort, I decided to venture out, hoping that activity would make him want to come. Before I knew it, I found myself walking up a steep mountain slope in the middle of the woods. The warm, May temperature, tempered by a cool breeze. Pine trees and luscious hardwoods stood majestically all around me. The rich, dark earth below my feet felt soft but firm. Clouds peppered the sky above. It felt glorious and exhilarating walking up that mountain. That connection to nature brought a sense of peace I hadn't felt in a long while.

When life is heavy, nature is a beautiful place to go to forget about self and connect with something bigger. I did that on the hike that day. Although I didn't fully realize it at the time, my communing with nature had planted a seed that would blossom into a new spiritual path.

Seven days after my due date, my contractions started. We drove 30 minutes to Landstuhl Army Medical Center in Reinland-Pflaz, Germany only to find out my contractions were false labor called Braxton-Hicks. We returned home, but the contractions continued. The next day I couldn't stand it any longer. On our trip back to Landstuhl, I thought for sure I'd have the baby in the car. In the exam room the nurse once again said it was false labor and sent us on our way.

I'd been afraid to eat anything, but the 24 plus hours of labor had zapped so much of my energy I felt weak. Donny took me to a local pub and insisted I eat something. As soon as I finished, the labor started again. I insisted on going back to the hospital. The nurse looked annoyed with me as she escorted me into the exam room. When she finished her exam, she tried to send me away but as I sat up, my water broke. Her mood changed instantly.

As they wheeled me into the delivery room at ten minutes to midnight on May 17th, I declared, "I'm going to have my baby on my birthday." My labor continued for 13 1/2 more hours with my baby in and out of fetal distress. My cervix wasn't dilating. Because of the distress, we discussed the possibility of a Caesarean birth.

Fortunately, my cervix finally dilated and the nurses rolled me into the delivery
room. Exhausted, I didn't know if I'd have the strength to push the baby out. His distress added another problem.

I'd never seen the doctor who delivered my son as the doctor that saw me through my final trimester of pregnancy wasn't a delivery doctor. I don't remember her face. I don't think I saw her. I didn't know her name. She didn't introduce herself. The only thing I remember is her yelling at me not to scream. But the pain felt unbearable. After what seemed like days, with the assistance of a suction device, Josh finally came into the world. His head had been turned, so instead of the small crown pushing through, the entire length of his head from forehead to occipital pushed through, ripping my vaginal opening nearly back to my anus.

As I recall the circumstances of my childbirth experience with my present philosophy, I see how the trauma I experienced, as well as my new baby's trauma, mirrored the internal trauma of my thoughts and feelings. Consider that the Divine Feminine aspect of us is the medium in which our thoughts and feelings are creating our reality. In other words, it's the soil that allows our seed-thoughts to grow. The depression I battled, coupled with thoughts of self-loathing and self-degradation, created an inner landscape of trauma which manifested in a traumatic pregnancy, labor, and delivery.

It's amazing how quickly the pain and trauma that is sometimes associated with childbirth can disappear when we come face-to-face with new life. As the nurse laid my son on my chest, I felt a love and connection that melted my heart and opened my consciousness. In that moment, I felt the presence of God and, for a little while, as I held and stroked his tiny head and counted his fingers and toes, I knew everything would be okay. Something in that tiny baby moved me to my core and I opened to a higher calling. I wanted to provide my son with all the opportunity he'd need to live a happy, healthy life, so I resolved to be the best mother on earth.

When I first returned home with my new baby, the initial joy I felt when I first held him lingered. Because Donny and I had decided to bottle feed, I didn't learn how to nurse while in the hospital. However, formula cost much more than we expected. In addition, when my milk came in with no release, my breasts felt incredibly painful and tender. After several nights of me trying to endure, we finally decided that I should start nursing.

Not having the wisdom of a neonatal nurse to assist me, I struggled and blundered in my attempts to get Josh to take my nipple. He continued to fall asleep. I'd wake him up to nurse, finally get him to suckle, and he'd fall asleep again. This constant cycle created a lot of tension within me that I in turn fed to Josh.
As women, our breasts are centers of nurturing, nourishment, and pleasure. This incredibly potent Divine Feminine attribute gives us the ability to sustain life. Breastfeeding is also how we create the initial bond that establishes a foundation of love, trust, and support as our children grow. In addition, it allows the new mother to give her infant his or her first defense against the outside world. Mother's milk is packed with vitamins, nutrients, and disease-fighting substances called antibodies that help protect our babies from numerous illnesses. From a metaphorical position, it's no wonder that I struggled with this basic experience of motherhood. My inability to nourish and nurture myself left me void of love, trust, and support. How could I offer something to my child that I didn't have?

My struggle to master feeding my baby left him crying and me feeling like a failure. Not having a connection to the Divine Feminine in community for support, my adjustment to motherhood turned into one blunder after another. There were times when his cries became blood-curdling screams. I had no idea what to do for him. At his checkups, the doctors assured me everything was fine and that I should just let him cry it out. I tried that, but it didn't seem right.

His screams verged on tantrums, an impossibility for an infant so small unless there's something very wrong. In his fight for attention, his cries caused him to turn his entire body around in the crib. This is also impossible for one so young. When he started spiking temperatures above 101 degrees, my intuition yelled at me, "Something else is happening with him." However, in my ignorance of motherhood and lack of ability to listen to inner guidance, I didn't listen, I sought the wisdom of doctors and my husband instead. They told me everything was fine, he just had a little temp. Not until his scrotum became the size of a man's fist did others recognize a problem.

From two to six weeks of age, he was in and out of the hospital with temperatures above 104 degrees. Doctors ran test after test from blood draws to spinal taps but found nothing. At one point they thought perhaps he had cystic fibrosis. When he began to projectile vomit I panicked. His weight dropped below four pounds at four weeks of age. After a week in the hospital and more invasive tests, doctors finally diagnosed him with a hydrocele, a fluid-filled sac surrounding a testicle that results in swelling of the scrotum.

Although this is common in newborns, it's typically not painful. Therefore, Josh's excruciating pain concerned the doctors. For this reason, they wanted to monitor him more closely. Although surgery was an option, his age was a concern. The doctor's goal was to treat the symptoms and keep him comfortable, hopefully delaying surgery for a year until his body would have a better chance of surviving the anesthesia.
In an attempt to create a deeper connection to God, I started to study the Bible. I prayed a lot, mostly for understanding and strength and that somehow, things would get better for my son.

At Josh's six week checkup, his new doctor, who had just arrived from the states, noted Josh's distended abdomen and sent him for an X-ray. Moments later, the doctor entered the waiting area in a fluster, his nurse carrying a bunch of papers.

"We don't know what the problem is yet, but we need your consent to do immediate exploratory surgery on your baby. There's a mass on his intestines and we're not sure what it is. It could mean he'll end up with a colostomy."

Gulp! The nurse handed me the consent forms. "Please sign, Mr. and Mrs. Blair. If this mass explodes, your son will die."

The next 12 hours were a whirlwind. The doctor explained that the surgery itself would take about two hours, but the delicate nature of anesthesia on one so young would take an additional 4 hours to put him under and bring him back out.

Donny and Docie, my stepson, lost it. I immediately shifted my focus to God. I sat in the waiting room and prayed until I felt a sense of peace. Then I called my mom in the states and asked for prayer there. She worked in the Sisters' pantry for a Catholic hospital in addition to being a deacon in her church. Prayer was plentiful for my little baby boy and he was going to need it.

When the doctors finally came out of surgery, they had good and bad news. They'd gotten the mass, a large cyst at the beginning of the small intestines. However, the location of the cyst eliminated the possibility of a colostomy as we cannot live without our small intestines. Plus, the weight of the mass had strangled enough of the intestines that they were concerned about overall function if they removed what had been strangled. As a result, they'd left the incision site open in hope that blood would spontaneously begin to circulate through that area of his intestines. He'd need an additional surgery in 48 hours for which they'd be flying in a specialist from Italy.

I felt the blood drain from my body. Dizzy and scared, I turned back to prayer. The same wash of calm that had sustained me through the night returned. Just then a nurse came in to tell me I could see him in the neonatal intensive care unit.

When I walked into his room, unprepared for what I'd find, I felt the hours of calm that prayer had given me slip away. I moved into panic and pain. He lay in an oxygen-tented incubator. His bandaged belly meant no oral source of nutrition. His nose had a reverse "G-tube" to empty stomach acids. He had an IV in one hand for
antibiotics and other medications and an IV in the other hand for nutrition. Electrodes on his chest and arms lead to an EKG machine continuously monitoring his heart. The sound of his cries pulled at my heart strings. All I wanted to do was make him better. But I couldn't. That power didn't reside within me. All I could do was love him the best way possible.

The nurse showed me to a rocking chair and quickly moved all the tubes and lines out of the way so I could hold him. Once I had him in my arms, I poured love into him, wetting his lips with a washcloth in order to sustain his cries for oral gratification in the absence of food. I wept as I rocked and sang him lullabies.

When he finally slept, the nurses urged us to go home and get some rest ourselves. Unprepared when we'd headed out the day before, none of us had eaten. Exhausted, I finally relented to my husband's urging to go home. I had to get my strength up for whatever would follow. Josh was not out of the woods. Only time would tell.

I cried all the way home until I fell asleep. When I woke, I felt numb. Once inside our home, panic rushed through me. What if he didn't make it through the night? I shouldn't have left him. He needs me and I'm so far away. My thoughts crumbled me until I had nothing left. Donny helped me to bed, but I slept fitfully.

When I opened my eyes the next morning, the Bible lay in front of me on the nightstand. I stared at it for several minutes. Could faith pull me through this? Slowly sitting up, I reached for the Bible and opened it to a random page. The passage told me that the power lay within me to command Satan to leave and he'd have to oblige. I summoned up all my courage and said aloud, "Satan, be gone!" Nothing happened. I set the book down and grabbed my robe.

As I walked to the kitchen, I remembered the Bible study I did on faith. I found my packet and read some of the prayers. They made me feel centered and grounded in Spirit once again. In that moment, I completely surrendered Josh to God. My prayer became, "God, I love my baby and I want him to pull through this. I know you can make that happen. Not my will but yours. I know that if you have to take my baby that you'll give me the strength I need to handle it."

As terrifying as that was, it also brought a sense of peace. Somehow in facing my worst fear, I was able to release the fear and allow God the freedom to guide my life and my love for my baby.

The second surgery took as long as the first, but the results were amazing. Blood
had begun to perfuse the small intestines to such a degree that the surgeon could save all of it. Although the possibility of several other problems and complications hovered, the second surgery was a success. Josh survived. He spent the next week in the hospital in the neonatal intensive care with socks on his hands so he wouldn't irritate his incision or mess with the dressing. I sat in a chair next to him with my hands reaching through the crib slats, touching and caressing him, grateful for how God had delivered him. How he'd given Josh back to me for however long that may be.

One of the possible complications we needed to prepare for were difficulties with his intestines and digestion if the scar tissue prevented sufficient growth of his intestines. A second, more serious complication the doctor shared was the amount of small cysts they found on the blood vessels in the intestinal wall. They feared these were indicative of cystic fibrosis, a disease that causes thick, sticky mucous to build up in the lungs and digestive tract.

Because of the unusual way in which the disease process presented in Josh's body, the doctor asked for our consent to publish Josh's case in medical journals in order for it to be used as a teaching tool.
Have you ever had children? How many? If so, how did you adjust to motherhood? Did you have a supportive community to help you?

Have you had to deal with your child having a major illness or surgery? Have you lost a child?

Have you ever lived in a foreign country or far removed from friends and family?

What is your experience with prayer, with religion, with spirituality, especially if you are a parent?

What other insights have you garnered from this chapter?

Witness yourself as a new mother complete with everything you judged good about her and everything you judged bad. Spend some time showing her compassion and love. Use the following ritual to activate forgiveness as you nurture her back into your wholeness.
Your Practice:
Divine Mother Meditation

Meditations.SacredSexualityBooks.com

Come to your altar. Set the tone by lighting candles and playing soft, soothing music. Settle into your sacred space by relaxing your shoulders. . . jaw. . . temples. . . hips. . . thighs. . . arms. . . Place your hand on you lower abdomen. Begin circular breathing. Breathe down the front of your body, pausing at your lower abdomen, your womb, the site of the second or Sacral Chakra. Rest your hand there. Breathe out, up your spine, releasing at your Crown Chakra. Do this several times.

Close your eyes to allow inner vision. See yourself in front of a cave. As you enter the cave, notice the warmth and inviting essence that surrounds you. To the right is a heart-shaped lantern. Take the lantern and move deeper into the cave until you find a passage.

Follow the passage, allowing the inviting nature of this sacred place to sooth and caress you into this womb of the Divine Mother.

Feel the warmth of this nurturing environment and allow it to move you deeper still. Become aware that you are expected here.

As you reach the center of the womb, you notice a beautiful being seated in the middle with outstretched arms, inviting you in. You nestle into her loving arms, allowing the security of her strength and beauty to envelop you in love.

Feel the awe at being held and nurtured in this way. As you melt into this Divine Being, your hearts blend. You feel the barriers and blockages in your life fade away, dissolved by her love.

Her Sacred Heart energy heals and renews you, filling every void with her essence. Feel her supporting you, guiding you, encouraging you.

Ask her what it is that you are to birth in order to fulfill your destiny. Wait as she answers. When you feel complete, thank her and move back out of the womb, carrying the radiant love of her presence within you. Return to your present space and time. Journal what you experienced and what you learned.
Leaving on a Jet Plane

Failed Plans
Isolation & Abuse
The Final Straw

When Josh finally came home from the hospital, life became a whole new experience. Within a month, the military moved us into housing closer to the base. Our German neighbors loved our little family and went out of their way to welcome us. The community at large took us under their wing. I spent time in social gatherings watching Josh get passed around from grandmother to grandmother. Even though I didn't speak German and most of them didn't speak English, I felt welcomed and safe.

The sun filled our new home from every window making it light and peaceful. Josh began to flourish. Because all the major muscles in his abdomen had been cut during the surgery, the development of his large motor skills had quite a setback. Once his abdomen healed, I began the process of teaching him how to roll over.

I had no formal training in physical therapy but my intuition guided me into exercises with him that had amazing results. I finally had a joyful, thriving baby who quickly began developing his physical abilities. Within six months, he crawled; within nine months, he walked. However, my marriage kept stumbling.

I had moved past the party life, especially now that I was a new mother with an infant who needed me. However, Josh's dad, my husband, instead of becoming more loving and supportive, became abusive and controlling. He isolated me from any friends that he did not consider acceptable and quoted misogynistic Bible passages to diminish me as a woman and prove his Godly authority over me.

Little by little, I felt myself succumbing to Donny's version of me. The more controlling, jealous, and possessive he became, the more I shrank. When he drank, he got angry. To avoid his rage, I went to bed and pretended to be asleep.

Despite his father's tantrums, Josh continued to grow and blossom into a beautiful toddler. However, he had a temper that paralleled no other I'd seen in one so small
often passing out because he'd lose his breath. The doctors informed us that the breath holding was not deliberate and instructed us to handle it with nonchalance so Josh wouldn't use it as a way to manipulate us.

I devoted most of the next six months to motherhood, reading everything I could to help me be the best mom possible. I held Josh often, played with him, took him for walks and explored his world with him. I observed his growth and development with as much joy and curiosity as he did.

Motherhood is a special gift that women get to experience. The act of creating life, of giving birth, of raising and nurturing another soul is an incredible honor. The Divine Feminine shines in this role and when we let her, she'll guide our every step. It's important to hone our intuition in order to receive Her expert guidance. This isn't as natural for some as it is for others, but it's there in all of us. It comes with a fierce desire to protect at any cost. This fierceness showed up for me as I witnessed how Donny parented Josh.

A strict disciplinarian, Donny often used physical punishment with Docie, his 10-year-old son. The more of his parenting I witnessed, the less I wanted him to raise Josh. The more time that went by, the more I thought of Josh as my son and not Donny's. Everything inside of me said, "Get out of this marriage." My intuitive voice spoke so loudly that I had to listen.

In February, when Josh was nine months old, we planned a trip stateside so my family could meet him and we could have him baptized. In my mind, I saw that as my out. I carefully planned my packing with the idea of taking everything of importance to me and everything necessary to begin life with Josh on my own.

Our visit to Buffalo felt right. I knew that's where I needed to be with Josh. Unfortunately, my mom didn't see it that way. She told me I hadn't given my marriage enough time and sent me back to Germany. My mother's betrayal took me years to heal. How could she not have seen how dysfunctional this marriage had become? That I needed to leave Donny in order to lead a healthy life? That Josh and I would both suffer if we stayed with him?

The next two years unraveled my psyche and sent me into a state of unfathomable confusion about who I was. The marriage didn't serve me or my son. I felt trapped, helpless, and hopeless. Meanwhile, Donny slowly chiseled away at what was left of my self-worth by telling me how stupid I was as a mother for not knowing certain things about Josh's growth and development. Donny had raised three other boys, so he knew what was best. He'd yell at me if I didn't respond to him the way he wanted me
to or if I showed any attention to another man, including a simple hello. He criticized my cooking, finally expelling me from the kitchen since I clearly didn't have the skill. Those things combined with his misogynistic rants made me feel like the scum of the earth. Eventually, I even questioned my identity. I felt what little rights I had slowly slip from my grip as he molded me into a compliant servant completely dependant on him for my survival.

Everything wrong he made my fault and, no matter how I tried, I couldn't seem to fix things. He didn't want me to work. He claimed it was because he wanted me home with the baby full-time. In actuality, he didn't want me out of his sight, making friends that would interfere with his control efforts. Because I didn't have an income, I couldn't and he wouldn't pay any of the bills that were solely in my name. He said they weren't his responsibility. As a result, my credit plummeted, making me even more dependent on him.

Because he viewed women's bodies as dirty and unclean, we had very little sex and then only when he wanted to and only in the missionary position. He was most horny when he drank and would threaten me when I feigned sleep to avoid his advances.

I didn't think I had the right to question what he said or did to me. That's just the way it was. I believed that most of it was my fault. Still, a question kept gnawing at my consciousness. Was it really my fault? A still, small voice inside kept me connected to a bigger reality. Today I know that voice as the Divine Feminine. Back then, I heard her saying, maybe even shouting, "Wait a minute, this can't be right. . ."  

I am not alone in experiencing abuse. According to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, one in four women will experience domestic violence in their lifetime. The following information, including incidents of violence and the related costs are just a few of the statistics I found on the Coalition's website:

Over a million women are victims of assault by an intimate partner every year.

- Intimate partner violence results in more than 18.5 million mental health care visits each year.

- 30% to 60% of perpetrators of intimate partner violence also abuse children in the household.
- Most cases of domestic violence are never reported to the police.

- Costs exceed $5.8 billion each year, $4.1 billion of which is for direct medical and mental health services.

- Victims of intimate partner violence lost almost 8 million days of paid work because of the violence perpetrated against them by current or former husbands, boyfriends, and dates.

- This loss of paid work is the equivalent of more than 32,000 full-time jobs and almost 5.6 million days of household productivity as a result of violence.

If you are a victim of domestic violence or abuse, it's important to know you're not alone. It's also important to know that there is help for you. If you've safely left the situation, good for you. Now it's time to let the healing begin. I'll cover more of that in my next chapter.

If you're still in an abusive relationship, get help now. Contact the National Coalition online at www.ncadv.org. Under "Resources," you'll find a state coalition list. Click on your state to see the resources available. You can also call the National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-SAFE (7233).

If your life is in imminent danger, call 911.

It's important for you to know that no form of aggression, control, or abuse is acceptable. No matter how much you may love the person, you must love yourself and your children more, enough to walk away. The perpetrator will not change unless there is a reason to. Until you do something different, they won't.

The tension escalated in our household as Donny continued to emotionally abuse me, using degradation and isolation. He also continued to physically abuse Docie. The increased tension created a never-ending cycle of abuse, which escalated with every incident.

The cycle of abuse is standard in abusive households. The abuse can be physical, emotional, sexual. . . Humiliation, dominance, blame, isolation, and threats are a few of the manipulative behaviors abusers use to coerce their victim into submission.
After the abusive outburst, the abuser goes through a period of guilt. This is usually followed by excuses and rationalization for their behavior. It includes blaming the victim and making them the reason for the outburst.

The abuser then does everything in their power to keep the relationship in its "normal" flow. This is often called the honeymoon period. The abuser turns on the charm and the victim, who truly wants to believe that the abuser will stop, believes his empty promises. Donny did this with candle-lit dinners, flowers, gifts, and nights on the town.

As things return to normal, there is a phase of peace and calm in the relationship and household, but only for the victim. The abuser is already watching and waiting for the victim to "screw up," justifying their set-up for another attack.

According to statistics on the psychology of the abuse cycle, unless an abuser gets help and takes responsibility for his actions, the abuse will not end; the cycle will continue.

I knew that if I continued to allow Josh to be raised in a violent household, the chances of him becoming an abuser would double. In addition, I didn't want him to be Donny's next victim.

Living in a foreign country made it virtually impossible for me to leave Donny, especially since he controlled our finances. The only way I could leave on the military dollar was if they saw the marriage as a failure. Unfortunately, the military chaplain didn't think our family had a problem. Because Donny hadn't actually physically assaulted me, the chaplain didn't see his treatment of me as abuse. Donny also hadn't cheated on me. Without physical abuse or adultery as a reason, the chaplain wouldn't declare the marriage unsalvageable, which meant the military wouldn't pay for me to leave.

I used to lie in bed, wishing Donny would cheat on me so I could leave him. During that time, Docie's behavioral problems began to escalate. He got in trouble at school, picked on kids in the building, started sniffing aerosol cans.

One day, the Polizei, German police, showed up at our door with Docie. He'd been caught stealing by one of the local store owners. The Polizei quickly notified the military police and an investigation ensued. The military police informed us that this could result in an international incident that would warrant Docie returning stateside to be prosecuted by a juvenile court. I secretly prayed this would happen. If Docie got sent home, we'd all be sent home.
It didn't. Instead, we received a warning and Docie had to do community service. Because of the incident and how it embarrassed his dad, Donny beat Docie harder and more often. My role became protector and counselor. I'd try to shield Josh from witnessing the beatings while trying to talk Donny down. Respite came only when Donny's unit had a field exercise. These often took him away for up to seven days at a time.

In addition to the week-long field exercises, Donny also had weekend shifts that were 48 hours long. After one particular weekend, he came home dead tired and wanted to go to bed. That's to be expected. I'd put Josh down for his midmorning nap and since we only had one car, which Donny had over the weekend, I thought it'd be a good time for me to go grocery shopping. Donny didn't like that idea. It didn't make sense to me to wait until he woke up so he could go with me. To him, it was another form of control.

My questioning soon instigated an argument. When he threatened me, telling me I needed to wait until after he woke up if I knew what was good for me, something in me snapped. I fought back. Before I knew it, he'd pinned me against the wall by my neck and jaw, feet dangling, breath blocked. Just as black spots began to fill my eyes, he let go and I crumbled to the ground. His apologies came immediately as I sobbed in the corner.

Because Donny had gotten physical with me, a couple days later, during our weekly visit with the chaplain, I finally had the courage to share what happened. I'd been too afraid to tell about Docie's beatings for fear that nothing would be done and we'd all be worse off. When the chaplain heard that Donny tried to strangle me, he finally opened his eyes and saw the abuse that riddled our marriage. Within a month, Josh and I were on a plane back to the states. During that month, Donny was as sweet as he'd been when we were dating even helping me pack to leave. He had every intention of us getting back together when he returned stateside. I didn't say anything about wanting a divorce for fear it would rock the boat, but that's what I had planned. I hated the idea that I couldn't help Docie, but my priority was Josh's welfare and that meant getting him away from that abusive environment. Docie eventually ended up back with his mom.

When I stepped off the plane in Buffalo shortly before Christmas, a new trepidation unfolded. Could I handle raising a child on my own? God had given me my baby back. God had rescued me from an abusive marriage. Surely, God wouldn't let me down now.

The concept of a male deity sitting on a cloud somewhere, watching every move I
made still had its hold on me, even though I knew there had to be something more. I'd sit for hours talking with my father about God and Jesus and the power of faith. He could quote the scriptures better than most ministers. By the time I'd left Germany, I had read the entire Bible. Most of it didn't resonate with me and I certainly couldn't quote it. I read the gospels again because I loved the way Jesus taught in parables. I never took anything I read literally. However, as much as I craved a deeper spiritual connection, it seemed to evade me.

As I contemplated what to do next, my mother made it clear my living with them was a temporary arrangement. Her answer? Find a man to take care of me. There it was again. That double-edged sword that kept me trapped.

I spent time with my old boyfriend Mark that month, but the truth glared at both of us. Our lives had changed. We no longer fit. I wasn't what he wanted. He wasn't what I wanted. Our time had come and gone.

In February, Donny returned to the states. I'd worn out my welcome with my parents. With nowhere else to turn, I headed to El Paso with him. Friends took us in. Fortunately, Donny left within a couple weeks for training in Washington state. For the time being, the divorce was on hold.

I got a job with a temporary agency and began the process of trying to figure out how to support myself and a small child. Because I wasn't bi-lingual, I couldn't find a job in El Paso that paid more than $5 an hour, which barely paid the rent on an apartment. I finally landed a job in a bank that at least paid child care expenses. This allowed me to get a one-bedroom apartment. Inside, I still carried all the tension of an abusive relationship. Easily startled, I felt like I was walking on egg shells. Still, being out from under Donny's physical control, I felt relief, like I'd been sprung from prison. I relished my new freedom.

Friends rallied to help me furnish my new place, including a hide-a-bed couch for me so Josh could have the bedroom. Before long, the cost of living on my own began to cave in on me, but something drove my determination to succeed. I figured out easy and inexpensive meals thanks to Campbell's soups. Even though I didn't have a kitchen table, we made meals fun by having Josh's Sit-n-Spin double as an eating nook.

One day, an old lover from my military days came to visit me. He was still married. His visit came out of a need to find some closure with us. I had the same need. I shared with him the trauma I'd gone through with Donny and how scared I was to raise Josh on my own. I don't remember the whole conversation, but something he
said resonates with me to this day. "Go out and make a wonderful life for yourself. If a man comes into it, great. If he doesn't, you'll still have a wonderful life."

Something in that statement made me realize I could do it. Within a week, one of the girls at the bank with whom I'd recently become friends asked me if I would drive with her to Colorado so she could make the trip overnight. She had an interview with Coors Brewing Company. I readily agreed. I had vacation time and had always wanted to visit Colorado.

Joanne got the job with one caveat. She had to start in a week. I checked the want ads and saw that there were plenty of people hiring and the pay was at least twice what I could make in El Paso. We drove back to Texas, packed up the four-bedroom house she'd lived in for 10 years, gave our notice at the bank, and the two of us headed off to start our new life in Colorado.

I quickly landed a job with Rocky Flats Plant, complete with incredible benefits. In addition, I was able to get back into the military in the Army Reserves. Living with a female roommate who had a teenage son seemed the perfect answer. It felt like I'd finally gotten my life back.

However, the next year took me to another bottom as Joanne was a cocaine addict. I had tried cocaine years ago, but it didn't appeal to me. However, her addiction brought a whole new group of shady friends into our environment. As a result, I ended up in another abusive relationship. This time, the man physically abused Josh. Just before Christmas that year, I received orders to go to Desert Storm.

The military had ordered a 48-hour alert, which meant I had to be ready to go in 48 hours if they called. Josh was only four. Children have to be five in order to fly alone. Taking Josh back to my family in Buffalo was my only option. He'd have to remain there the entire time I was on alert in case I was called to active duty. Because I was still getting on my feet financially, I couldn't afford a plane ticket for both of us to fly him home. Instead, I took him back to Buffalo by bus. The trip proved disastrous. During the holidays, the bus lines overbook, forcing travelers to fight for passage. Not an easy thing while managing luggage and a sleeping four year old. Each stop meant another round of exhausted pushing and shoving while Josh cried, and my arms turned into lead holding him while trying to carry luggage.

The visit home was bittersweet. Although it felt good to once again celebrate the holidays with my family, knowing I'd have to leave Josh behind broke my heart. I hated the choices in front of me as a single parent. The last thing I wanted was for him to end up with his father and half-brother, away from my supervision. I felt blessed
that my parents were willing to take him for the time being.

When I returned to Colorado, my life took a nose dive once again. This time, it nearly cost me my life.
How have you made excuses for others inappropriate treatment of you? Does your fear over what your friends and family will think or say prevent you from seeking their help?

Do you recognize the signs of abuse whether in your own or in the relationship of women friends? Are you in an abusive relationship now? Are you ready to get out?

Do you know what to do if you're in an abusive situation and want out? Who are the people you can turn to for support and assistance? Who can you call? Where can you go? Do you know how to find shelter and safety?

Has your child ever suffered at the hands of another? How did you respond?

Have you had to leave your child for an extended period of time? How did that feel?

What other insights have you garnered from this chapter?

Witness yourself as an abused woman complete with everything you judged good about her and everything you judged bad. Spend some time showing her compassion and love. Use the following ritual to activate forgiveness as you nurture her back into your wholeness.
Seated at your altar, connect with your breath. Feel yourself relax into this breath. .. Relax your shoulders. .. hips. .. jaw. .. temples. .. tongue. Now follow the breath to your center. Connect to your body. What do you feel, taste, smell, hear, see? Notice the energy associated with your five senses. See the energy as a white light of awareness. .. Expand your awareness to fill the room. .. Move your awareness out to connect with the women in your community. .. to the women in your state. .. in your country. .. to women all over the planet. Allow yourself to connect with women back through history. In the noticing is the connection.

Part of this connection is the awareness of the collective trauma suffered by women everywhere throughout time. Just be present with that awareness.

Know you have stepped on the path of deep Spiritual healing. As you heal yourself and reclaim your truth, you do it for women everywhere, throughout history. Breathe that in.

Part of this connection is the power to expand into a new paradigm. Expand your awareness to women of power today. .. tomorrow. .. See the future fully integrated with the feminine values of compassion, empathy, nurturing and nourishing, support, collective cohesion, unity, community, love, joy. Connect with women standing in their femininity, in the sacredness of their sexuality. Connect to the power that exists to heal and bring peace. In the noticing is the connection.

Know you have stepped on the path of deep Spiritual enlightenment. As you stand in your power, you reclaim power for women everywhere, throughout history and into the future. Breathe that in.

When you are complete, bring your awareness back to the present moment. Place a token on your altar as a remembrance. Create an affirmation to be a part of the collective feminine energy that empowers, that strengthens, that enables women to cut their ties to abuse and become beacons of influence and leadership. Speak your affirmation aloud throughout the day. As pillars of resilience, we stand triumphant in the human spirit when we stand up for ourselves, end the trauma, and move beyond it to what lies ahead as Divine Feminine expressions.
Within three days of returning to Colorado, I experienced excruciating pain. It felt like someone had used a machete to clean out my gut. After several trips to the hospital, they finally admitted me, diagnosing me with Hepatitis A. A week later, they discharged me. Nearly 20 pounds lighter, they told me that in order for my liver to fully heal, I could not drink alcohol for at least a year.

Shortly after my discharge, I sunk into a deep depression. I couldn't find a reason to stay on the planet. Everything seemed to be crumbling around me. My son seemed better off with my family. He certainly didn't need a loser mother like me in his life. I'd lost my marriage. I lost my baby, now I was losing my health. Nothing made sense and it didn't matter.

I sat on my bed with a bottle of pain pills in my hand. My roommate worked the evening shift. By the time she got home, I was usually asleep. She wouldn't suspect a thing. Surely the world would be a better place without me. In that moment, the first of many Divine interventions interrupted my plan.

My best friend back in Buffalo called. She had a hunch, so she called to check on me. She wanted to know what was going on. I broke down, spilling my plan to her, sobbing uncontrollably. After helping me find a treatment center in the phonebook, she made me promise to drive right there as soon as we hung up. This was in the early 90's, before cell phones.

I drove to Charter Hospital, smoking a joint on the way. After talking to a counselor, they admitted me because of my suicidal ideations. They put me on 24-hour suicide watch in an isolated room because of the Hepatitis protocol.

I spent 30 days there. During the first week, the pipes broke on the psychiatric side of the hospital, so they moved all the psyche patients to the chemical dependency
side. While there, I attended groups designed to help people with addictions. As I listened to the stories, I became aware of how similar they were to my family history.

As ridiculous as it sounds to me now, it had never occurred to me that there was something wrong with my drinking and pot smoking. Since I couldn't drink for a year anyway, I decided to quit all drinking and marijuana use until I figured out whether or not I was an alcoholic.

One night I had a dream. In the dream, I was up at bat. When I looked toward right field, I saw Jesus standing in his robe, a red baseball cap on his head, a big smile on his face, hands clasped and shaking back and forth on either side of his head, cheering me on.

My journey to wholeness started in earnest that morning. Something inside me stirred and I began the path of reclaiming myself and my spiritual connection.

Over the next 10 years, I practiced several self-help modalities to get a handle on the emotional rollercoaster ride that had been my life. Working the Twelve Steps of Emotions Anonymous showed me how out of control my emotions had gotten and that no human power could restore me to sanity. Only God could and would if I decided to reach out and turn my will and my life over to him. Assertiveness classes, forgiveness work, and an inner child journey made that possible. Science of Mind classes enhanced my understanding of the Power in the universe that I'd always called God. I began to see God as both masculine and feminine, as loving and supportive, as present in my life now, willing to guide and direct me and my path. I studied meditation in order to learn how to connect more fully with this Divine Power. I attended motivational seminars and spent two days a week in therapy for several years, learning how to shift from a depressed, confused, conflicted little girl to an adult woman capable of not only taking care of herself but her son as well. I didn't drink for five years and eliminated drugs from my life altogether. When I decided to drink again, I did it with an understanding that there's a time and a place and an amount that is acceptable, none of which had been part of my understanding in the past.

As I walked through the emotional storm of my life, I got in touch with my promiscuity and how my hyperactive libido had me looking for love in all the wrong places. However, as I started healing the trauma from the abusive relationships, my anger toward men escalated. Years of cowering, hiding, and blaming myself turned into anger and resentment. My healing journey took a detour as I used sex to get even for years of bottled up emotional pain. I stayed in relationships long enough for men to fall in love with me then walked away with no concern for their feelings.
Fortunately, that destructive path was short-lived. As I got in touch with my anger toward men, my mother, and my family, I also saw how angry I'd become toward myself. I recognized my inability to express anything but anger, which I viewed as a strong emotion that kept me safe. I had to come to terms with how I used my anger and my sexuality to get even with men for their treatment of women. How I'd used it to justify all the affairs.

When I looked the affairs in the eye, owning my part in each and every one of them, I knew that in order to have true peace, I must make amends. Although this would have created more harm than good had I done it face-to-face, especially if the wives of these men didn't know or had already worked through the betrayal, my spiritual path showed me how to work within the realms of Spirit to heal my infidelities and their effects on the women I'd betrayed. I started by owning my part and admitting to God, myself, and my Emotions Anonymous sponsor what I'd done. I apologized to those I'd hurt, provided it wouldn't cause further damage. I forgave myself and committed to living a life of higher morals and values. I got involved with several volunteer organizations to help those in need as a way to give back to community instead of being the drain I had been in the past.

The shame and guilt I felt had put a cage around my heart. Forgiveness unlocked it. Forgiveness on many levels, including a vow to help women everywhere heal. I had no idea what that would look like, so I left it in the hands of the Divine to guide and direct my path.

In 1994, I met my second husband, Daren, who stepped into my life with his own anger from his past. Together, we healed our stories and raised my son who had his own share of difficulties and wounds from the traumas he suffered while with his father. Daren and I also supported each other in pursuing our educations and careers.

For me, that included my military career, which gave me many opportunities to travel for training. During those times away, playing army or attending leadership development courses, a different type of life presented itself. It felt good to be away from the tumultuous experience of raising my son. Infidelity in the military is commonplace. On several occasions, I found myself tempted to cheat on Daren. Because of my healing journey, I recognized that did not fit the new version of me I'd worked hard to create. In addition, I simply could not hurt a man who had done so much for me. He'd stepped into a parenting role with my son that required all the courage and stamina one could possibly possess.

Docie had abused Josh while under their father's care. Josh had been five years old. As a result, his fear manifested in acting out behavior that led to school
suspensions and expulsions as well as drugs and legal difficulties. His life of crime began during his tenth year and continued into young adulthood. No matter what services we wrapped around him, his destructive behavior made it impossible for anything to work. Some of the charges against him included destruction of property, breaking and entering, theft, truancy, and carrying a concealed weapon. His law-breaking and unacceptable school behavior took us into the courtroom on a monthly basis throughout his teen years. I could not have handled my son's erratic behavior without Daren's support. In all honesty, if I had been married to someone whose son behaved the way Josh did, I don't know if I would have stayed in the marriage.

As my love for Daren grew and his for me, we melded into a cohesive team in which to heal our past and be present as a dynamic team, guiding Josh through his many trials and struggles. Although I shut down sexually to avoid the temptations of cheating, I expanded in the other areas of my life. Daren and I not only grew up, we grew close in love, intellectual connection, emotional stability, and spiritual depth and understanding. We honored our body temples through healthy nutrition and regular exercise, which gave us the energy and stamina to walk the path of parenting Josh. Our family outings included whitewater rafting and canoeing, biking, rollerblading and hiking 14,000-foot mountains. We camped, backpacked, and scuba dived in our travels, exposing Josh to a variety of healthy lifestyle choices.

Raising a difficult child to manhood, loving him unconditionally through every storm he weathered, helped me to grow into a powerful advocate. My individual work, the support from Daren, and the spiritual path I stepped onto supported me in figuring out how to be the mother Josh needed. Daren and I volunteered for organizations that supported families struggling to raise difficult children. We both mentored kids with mental health issues.

Daren had always been a strong advocate for women's issues. This helped me heal at a deep, profound level. My inner work opened me to the inner advocate. In pursuing practitioner classes to licensure as a Spiritual Counselor, my view and understanding of the Divine as both Feminine and Masculine opened me to a greater expression of Spirit in my life. Nia, a sensory-based movement practice that empowers people by connecting the body, mind, emotions, and spirit, encouraged me to dance with my sensuality and sexuality. I began to claim the Divine Feminine, supported by a man who saw the need for the Goddess's presence on this planet.

Most of Daren's and my time, efforts, and energy went toward helping others, raising Josh, pursuing our educations, and developing our careers. With my nursing and communications degree as well as my coaching and counseling licensure, I found myself supporting more and more people with mental, emotional, and physical health
challenges. The healer in me attracted a variety of career opportunities from traditional hospital settings to complementary medicine centers. I thrived doing work I loved. Daren fell in love with higher education and also pursued two degrees. Unfortunately, the relationship took a back seat to our pursuits and our intimacy waned. When Josh turned 18, Daren and I began pursuing separate interests. I dove deep into healing through women's groups that honored the sacred. After reading *The Red Tent*, a group of us formed a sisterhood with the intention of healing ourselves. We had a goal to become a conduit for the Divine Feminine in order to heal the planet.

Within three years, the parallel lives Daren and I found ourselves living no longer worked for either one of us. One weekend in June of 2007, my sisterhood spent a weekend in the mountains in ritual and ceremony. I took into the weekend an intention to come to terms with whether I wanted to stay in the relationship with Daren. Daren set off for Yellowstone with the same intention for clarity.

During one of the shamanic rituals, I received a snake as a new totem. The snake in the animal tarot represents death and rebirth.

When we returned home, we both knew it was time to move on. I remember the pain I felt at losing my best friend. We decided to seal our decision with a bike ride. Riding the greenbelt trail created a ceremonious way to connect in our goodbye. While on the ride, a snake crossed my path and I knew the decision had been divinely guided.

My greatest fear after Daren moved out came when I contemplated dating. I didn't want a repeat of my past patterns and I certainly didn't want to hurt or be hurt in the name of love. The fear loomed so great that I questioned whether I wanted to awaken my sexual desire. Although I'd healed a great deal, my sexuality became the final frontier. Because my sex drive had diminished to zero in my marriage, I wondered if perhaps I'd become frigid.

The week after Daren and I decided to split, I retired from the United States Army Reserves. My final military occupation had been as a nurse in a hospital unit where I served as a non-commissioned officer in charge of nursing education and staff development. Because of the war, our First Sergeants continued to get called to active duty. As a result, being a Master Sergeant, I stepped into the role of acting First Sergeant for the 300-plus personnel hospital unit in Colorado.

My leadership training and experience in the military provided me with tools to manage people; however, that training came with a strong emphasis on developing my
masculinity. This served me well in many areas. However, intuitively I knew the time had come to develop my Feminine side. That meant waking up my libido, but could I do that successfully, morally, ethically? My past promiscuity and inability to say No glared in my face. Could I really handle the power of my sexual desire?

As I stepped into this new expression, I realized that the woman I'd become had been cultivated in many realms of life. Mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and physically, I'd grown into a well-balanced, powerful, confident woman. My awakening libido finally had a container to hold and express its power from a place of sacredness.

One morning in meditation, a deep Knowing bubbled up inside of me and formulated as a directive in my mind.

"You are no longer Barbara."

It caught me off guard as if someone had walked into the room and casually mentioned that I had a whole new life. Someone did - the Divine Feminine aspect of who I am.

My linear mind tried to get my head around the idea of changing my name. After a few moments of letting it sink in I asked, "Then who am I?"

"ARA."

That could work, I thought. After all, it's still part of my name. But what did it mean? According to my book of Gods and Goddesses, A'ra, spelt with an accent over the A is pre-Islamic Arabian. The name means holy place, blood of the altar or sacrifice. It felt really big, too big for me to step into. The rest of the morning took me deeper into trying to understand the role being laid out before me.

I contemplated it as I got ready for my Practitioner Huddle, a meeting of my practitioner and ministerial friends and colleagues from my church, the largest in the Science of Mind movement with over 5000 congregants, over 200 practitioners, and at least 10 ministers. These are people who have walked a spiritual path to the depths of their ability.

On my way to the Huddle I received another message from my Knowing.

"Announce your name change at the Huddle."

The idea of making such a profound personal announcement in this group was not
part of my plan. I still had some lingering doubts and had not truly claimed the name. It felt far too vulnerable. However, the need to share this at the Huddle persisted, getting stronger the closer I got to church. As I pulled into the parking lot I made a deal with the Goddess. "If I'm really to announce this," I said, "make the process for sharing my announcement simple the minute I walk through the door."

At the Huddles, there is time for announcements before we move into process. However, the list for announcements is usually set before the Huddle and one must find one of the Practitioner Counsel members to have an announcement added. Not an easy task in a room full of 200 people trying to sign in, check service lists, grab flyers and agendas, and find a seat.

The minute I walked in the door, the practitioner to whom we send our requests for announcements via email stood staring at me with a big grin. He gave me a hug and a hello. In the middle of the hello I blurted out, "I have an announcement." It startled me to hear myself say it.

Without missing a beat, he added me to the list, no questions asked. "You'll be following so-and-so."

Gulp.

When I got up to share, it flowed from me as if something bigger spoke through me. After the Huddle, several of my fellow practitioners shared similar stories for their name changes. Others told me how much it fit me—much better than my old name. One said, "Oh, you just got rid of the Barb in your life."

Another explained, "Well, of course! You've been affirming it all along. Whenever someone has called you Barb, you complete your name saying, ara'!" How true. I always hated the name Barb, but what an "aha moment" to recognize I'd been affirming my new name for several years.

In addition, we had a guest speaker that day who taught us a new breathing exercise to enhance our spiritual connection. She used the repetitive sound mantra, RA, explaining it as an archetype sound symbolizing light or fire. In essence, our divine or spiritual light.

One of the ministers explained that the vowel sounds of A (as in father) and Ra (as in run) represent the Heart and Throat Chakra respectively. The time had come to open my heart and throat into this new identity.

By the time I left the Huddle, I felt both elated and in shock. Because the name
felt so big, I wanted to cower. To go back to the way things were as Barbara. That something bigger quickly transmuted my fear into determination and I said Yes to what would unfold.

That evening, I attended a friend's birthday party/drum circle. When the drum leader heard I'd changed my name, he presented me with a drum to replace the one I'd recently broken. The new drum had Egyptian hieroglyphics painted all over it. The artwork was a tribute to the Sun God, Ra.

The confirmations I continued to get throughout the rest of the month convinced me that Barbara was fading. A much bigger version of me had already begun to unfold. Fortunately, those confirmations came with the courage and guidance to step fully into all that having that name entailed.

Over the next three years, I opened to my new sense of Self as the Divine Feminine expression known as A'ra. During that time, I explored one of the biggest areas of my life. That is, who was I as a sexual being and how does one find the sacred in the sexual?
Have you ever suffered from depression or other serious mental illness or struggled with alcohol or drug abuse?

Have you gone through a divorce? Have you healed? What's your relationship like with your Ex? What would you like it to be?

What areas of your life still need to be addressed and healed? Of what are you most ashamed? Of what do you feel most guilty?

Where have you made significant changes in your life? Where would you like to?

Who do you need to forgive? Who do you need to ask for forgiveness?

What resources have you utilized to help you move into wholeness? Are there rituals you have explored or practiced?

What other insights have you garnered from this chapter?

Witness yourself as the victim complete with everything you judged good about her and everything you judged bad. Spend some time showing her compassion and love. Use the following ritual to activate forgiveness as you nurture her back into your wholeness.
Getting to "so what" is about letting go of the stories you've told yourself about the events of your life. Your story gave the event a certain meaning that's only true because you told yourself it's true.

Throughout the course of this book, you've documented your story. Go through your notes now and pull out a significant event whose story has a hold on you. Preferably one that influenced your life in an adverse way. For example, if your girlfriend slept with your boyfriend, you may have created a story that women aren't trustworthy.

Once you have the event selected, get clear on the facts of the event and the story you created about the event.

For Example:

Fact: My girlfriend slept with my boyfriend.

Possible Stories: My girlfriend and boyfriend betrayed me. My girlfriend didn't love me. My boyfriend didn't love me. I'm not lovable. You can't trust women. You can't trust men. I hate my girlfriend. I hate my boyfriend.

Notice the difference between the fact and the story.

Journal as many answers to the following questions until you feel complete.

- What emotions do you still feel when you tell this story?

- What about this story is serving you?

- What would happen if you released this story?

- Are you ready to release the story?

Once you get to the point of release, put the statement "So what" in front of your original fact statement, e.g., "So what that my girlfriend slept with my boyfriend." If it has a charge, notice where you're feeling that in your body. Relax that part of your...
body as you get in touch with that feeling. Sit with it, giving it all your attention until you feel it dissipate. Then go back and answer the questions again. Repeat this until there's no longer a charge.

Continue this process with other stories you documented in your journal.
Sacred Sexuality

Exploring boundaries
Pushing the Edge
The Pleasure Principle

Conscious breakups are not any easier than unconscious breakups. If anything, they're harder because they require us to feel every emotion. There were times during my divorce process when I wished Daren had done something to give me a reason to hate him so I could quickly move on.

I struggled daily the first year after Daren moved out. At the same time, I knew I needed to walk through the pain in order to heal. About a year after my divorce, I became friends with a man who introduced me to a Beyond Divorce workshop.

In that workshop, we explored the struggles of going through a divorce as a spiritual being. I highly recommend a divorce workshop. I can't begin to place value on the self-knowledge and self-forgiveness that I gained as well as forgiveness of my ex-partner. The exercises and connections I made with others going through the same pain and difficulty facilitated a deep healing for me.

Moving back into the single life left me with a lot of questions. I questioned what I wanted in a future relationship. I realized that all the ideas I had about sexuality had been dictated to me by a societal and cultural norm based in a patriarchal, puritanical model of right and wrong. None of the ideas that I had about sex and sexuality had been my own.

I supposed that what had been labeled wrong or bad didn't have a basis in truth. With that supposition as my starting point, I lived in the question, "What is true, healthy, and right about sexuality and relationships for me?" I decided to explore my sexuality and desire with an open mind and heart. It included questioning my sexual orientation. I wanted to push beyond the boundaries of right and wrong that I'd lived with most of my life.

Given my promiscuity and infidelity, you'd think I'd already done that. But what I
realized is that those acts were based in my rebellion against the status quo. An unconscious, unhealthy rebellion based in fear, anger, and doubt. This time, my exploration involved exploring the boundaries of what I felt or thought consciously with a sense of sacredness. I invited the Divine Feminine to show me how to step more fully into my sexuality and to guide me in my search.

In order to break free from my ingrained belief system, I read books that gave me a greater sense of openness. Intimate Communion and The Way of the Superior Man to start. The Ethical Slut helped me explore polyamorous relationships. I'd always questioned whether or not humans are divinely designed to be monogamous. I'm still not sure. Monogamy has been ingrained into our collective consciousness and established as law. But what if we collectively viewed either as an acceptable choice when approached with love? There are plenty of monogamous relationships that fail because they're not consciously entered into from a place of unconditional love and acceptance. Infidelity is prominent in our culture. Clearly, something must be skewed in our understanding.

What I discovered about the polyamorous community intrigued me. They often have a single devoted partner. Within that partnership is an agreement to explore their sexuality with others. This is something that is defined by those who are involved in the relationships. There's no one-size-fits-all. For example, some partnerships may agree to their significant other having another lover while other partnerships may invite a third or fourth person into their love making.

Most polyamorous people interviewed for The Ethical Slut shared that exploring love and sexuality in this way opened them to a richness in their primary relationship. They became acutely aware of their bodies as pleasure centers. That carried into their primary relationship and enriched their intimate time together.

I explored that path for a short period of time. It helped me gain clarity on how to know what was right for me. What I came to believe is that as long as no one is getting hurt and everyone agrees to the terms of the sexual encounter, it's okay to follow the desire that our body's crave. This is a natural flow, which led me to believe that the Divine ordains that we explore our sexuality as an intimate experience with Divinity.

The natural physiology of the body, which is in and of itself a Divine, symphonic design, is filled with cravings. Those cravings are designed to get our needs met and keep us in homeostasis. Our lungs crave air, our brains crave learning, our muscles crave movement, our bones crave weight bearing. We don't think about these cravings because they're continually being met. They are in an intimate relationship with the
Divine. It would do us well to spend time in meditation exploring how well our bodies receive what they crave.

On an emotional level, we crave love, attention, fulfillment, acceptance. Yet, our conditioning often sets us up to block the receptivity of these cravings thus blocking our ability to get our needs met. Pain and suffering follow along with blame, judgments, and criticism of self and others.

Our cravings are governed by our second chakra. This Sacral Chakra is not only where our sexuality and sensuality reside, it's also the chakra that governs our sense of taste and our creativity. Just as what is tasteful to the mouth is different from person to person, so is sexual taste. We wouldn't get mad at someone or tell them they are wrong because they like mushrooms on their pizza and we don't. We'd simply order another pizza or, better yet, share it half and half. And just as our tastes for food grow richer and deeper as we mature, so do our desires.

Given this, my exploration took me into clarity on my desire, my craving if you will, to intimately know the Divine within me, to especially know the Divine Feminine expression that is me. In my book, Communing with the Infinite, I talk about this deep desire and my path to awakening my awareness and the many ways Spirit continually guides us. This path of sacred sexuality is a continuation of my awakening process.

What if each orgasm took me into direct realization of my divinity, my connection with the Divine Feminine? What if this realization of my divinity guided me into a unity with the Sacred Masculine? What if each sexual encounter with myself or another opened me to a greater understanding of my true nature as both Divine Feminine and Sacred Masculine? What if I allowed it to push up against the status quo? What if I allowed my true nature to push me beyond my comfort zone like most growth opportunities do? What if it took exploring the edge and going beyond?

With a willingness to do just that, I donned this desire and set out on a quest to find out what I really wanted in relationship—sexually, sensually, emotionally, physically, creatively. I knew one thing for certain, there needed to be a Divine perception that expanded my limited human perspective. In addition to the exploration being sacred, I had three limits. One, nothing I explored could in any way cause irreversible harm to another. Two, nothing illegal could be involved. Three, I had the right to say no to anything and everything at any time. Of course, I also had the right to say Yes anytime, anywhere, and as often as I pleased!

My friend from Beyond Divorce suggested I create a whole new image for
myself, encouraging me to get more provocative and alluring with my wardrobe. I hadn't considered that. Because I'd put on weight in my marriage, my style of dress had become more conservative and baggy. It helped hide the extra pounds. Now that I was twenty pounds lighter, those clothes had become even looser, hiding the attributes of my figure.

I found a discount clothing store and spent several hours trying on more form-fitting clothing, looking for my style "a classy yet sexy style that revealed the curves of my body and the maturity of my sexual expression. I emerged from that shopping spree feeling confident and beautiful in my new clothes. I felt more like me than I'd felt in a long time. However, when it came time to wearing the new clothes in public, I felt naughty, almost ashamed. I recognized those feelings simply as change. However, the discomfort didn't stop there.

As I began to explore the realms of my sexuality, every discomfort imaginable arose to convince me to retreat. With each discomfort, the question of right and wrong clawed at my consciousness. I continued to return to the Divine Feminine in meditation for guidance. As I continued to push past my edge, eventually I found myself swimming in a sea of silence. The mind chatter that had dictated my thoughts about sexuality had disappeared. I truly had a clean slate on which to create my own interpretation of sacred sexuality.

In *The Prophet*, Kahlil Gibran has this to say about reason and passion. "Your soul is oftentimes a battlefield, upon which your reason and your judgment wage war against your passion and your appetite."

My soul is often a battlefield. How profound. The entire verse explains this war. It's all based in separation. Reason and Passion are two separate entities vying to be right. The answer is Oneness. The joining of reason and passion in a synergy that gives permission to explore, knowing we are safe and secure in the Divine. When I take that stance, I know that I am supported in my quest. I am the pilgrim searching for a new land. A new place to take up residence. One that allows me to be expressive in my own right. One that allows me to cultivate the land according to what I want to plant.

"Among the hills, when you sit in the cool shade of the white poplars, sharing the peace and serenity of distant fields and meadows—then let your heart say in silence, God rests in reason.' And when the storm comes, and the mighty wind shakes the forest, and thunder and lightning proclaim the majesty of the sky, then let your heart
say in awe, God moves in passion. 'And since you are a breath in God's sphere, and a leaf in God's forest, you too should rest in reason and move in passion."

~The Prophet.

As I moved in passion, exploring life beyond the edge, many opportunities that were not there earlier began to emerge. First, a partner willing to explore the bounds of his sexuality. This created a safe place for me to open to a greater expression of the Divine in sexual partnership.

Ecstatic dance became a weekly practice at Rhythm Sanctuary. I attended my first night on New Year's Day. The perfect day to step into a new practice and a new commitment to connect with the Divine. I had no idea if I'd know anyone in attendance, which caused me to feel quite a bit of trepidation. To move me beyond the fear and doubt, I invited the Divine Feminine to guide my interactions. I set an intention that I would see the Divine in every set of eyes I looked into and then see myself in those eyes.

As I feared, I only knew two people, but not well. As I danced through the night, I connected with so many strangers through my eye meditation that I felt like I'd known them all along. We gathered afterwards to share food and connect verbally as there's no talking on the dance floor. Everyone seemed to have a confidence and surety about the journey they'd been on in the dance. The intimacy experienced between the dancers is something I treasure. There is no judgment, only love. There is no fear, only love. There is no criticism, only love. There is no wrong, only love.

Other practices such as Puja Grove took me into a group exploration of our sensual and seductive nature through dance and connection exercises as a spiritual practice. We explored the realms of flirting and holding and honoring each other by sharing intimate secrets and fostering trust, beauty, and unconditional love.

Tantra gave me a broader understanding of the nature of sexuality. It revealed a supreme understanding of life in human form and love as a pure expression of the All. There are many workshops that explore tantric ritual in sexual intercourse. However, tantra is a much broader subject. It encompasses everything about our human nature, especially how it is an expression of the Divine. The supreme goal in true tantra is what's called Mahamudra. A total orgasm with the universe. A melting into wholeness.

The practice of Pure Awareness revealed an incredibly expansive view of life beyond our core conditioning. Pure Awareness is a state of being where one is absolutely tapped into the Divine. It's a way of experiencing Life with the fullness of
who we are. It's a quiet, peaceful place, pregnant with possibility and bursting with potential.

Engaging in the practice of Pure Awareness meditation deepened my understanding of Oneness, which allowed me to see beyond my stories and recognize all of life as a part of who I am. I came to the realization that everything is exactly as it should be and I am perfect, whole, and complete just as I am. My only "to do" is to express as the unconditional love that I am. I had such a beautiful awakening that I decided to become a Pure Awareness Coach.

The sacredness of these experiences poured forth with such pleasure, I could hardly contain my excitement. Inhibitions disappeared. Fear and doubt disappeared. Hesitation and trepidation disappeared.

This *Pleasure Principle* carried forth into all areas of my life. Eating delicious, healthy food became an orgasmic experience. Caring for my body became an orgasmic experience. Serving others became an orgasmic experience. My coaching and counseling became an orgasmic experience. My home took on a whole new expression of Divine energy blessed by these orgasmic experiences.

My relationship with my friend from Beyond Divorce proved tumultuous as we explored the boundaries of our sexuality together, but we pushed on, both wanting to break out of old patterns. We started social dancing, taking lessons in Blues, Lindy Hop, and Tango. We'd practice for hours at home, which turned him into a strong lead and me into a smooth follow. At social dances, sociability and socializing are the primary focus, so everyone dances with everyone. My dance experience mimicked my sexual exploration, giving me an avenue in which to accept all new experiences. My and my partner's struggles stemmed from both of us having been in traditional relationships for decades. As a result, old ideas of right and wrong had been well-established in our minds. Neither of us wanted those old ideas from the past to dictate our future.

After some deep soul work in our respective men's and women's groups, through yoga, and studying books on spiritual relationships, we finally shifted ours into a beautiful experience. Our relationship blossomed with the holidays as we shared the season of Love from a place of deep connection to each other and to the Divine. We continued to provide a safe place for the expansion of the relationship while assuring each other that our exploration was perfect.

For Valentine's Day, he took me to my favorite restaurant, bought me flowers and a beautiful bracelet, and took me to a lovely Valentine's Blues Dance at our favorite
venue, The Mercury Caf. We'd practiced a difficult but fun dance routine for weeks and enjoyed debuting it that night. Unfortunately, the high we were on was short-lived. Shortly after Valentine's Day, I hit a wall. In an instant, my world seemed to crumble around me. I found myself back in judgment and condemnation, questioning whether anything I'd experienced could ever have been sacred.

My partner became emotionally unavailable, refusing to acknowledge the downward spiral I'd slipped into. As he pulled further and further away, refusing even to discuss my struggles, I felt myself disintegrating, alone, lost, and confused. What happened to our love? What happened to our journey? What happened to me?

As the relationship crumbled, I realized my biggest problem was that I'd stopped inviting the Divine Feminine to guide me. My meditation practice had waned, I'd stopped many of the rituals that kept me centered, and I'd missed several of my women's groups. As a result, old thoughts and behaviors about not being good enough crept back in, creating enough of a gap in my connection to Spirit that I felt like I'd landed back at square one. In order to feel into the depths of my despair and disappointment, knowing the only way past them was through them, I reignited my spiritual practices, spending much time in meditation and tears, reacquainting myself with my original goal of embracing the Divine Feminine. I rallied close female friends around me for support as I figured out my next move.

Shortly after my friend moved out, I attended a workshop for spiritual counselors designed to help us create our vision and mission statement. I spent the next few weeks cultivating my mission and vision until they became the finalized version I originally shared with you at the beginning of our journey.

My vision: To live the qualities of the Divine Feminine in service to humanity's wholeness.

My mission: By claiming and embodying the Divine Feminine, my presence heals, transforms, and gives permission for the radical expression of sacred sexuality. In other words, my presence supports the right for everyone to heal and to explore their sacred sexual self.

I spent some time during that summer on Cape Cod, immersing myself in deep healing work after the breakdown of my relationship, including Imago Relationship Therapy. Something about being with the ocean and a close girlfriend opened me to a deep healing. Through the therapy, I was able to take personal responsibility for what was mine, which lifted me to a higher realization of myself as an expression of the Divine Feminine. I felt completely cleansed and open. The breakdown of the
relationship hadn't set me back at all. It pushed me forward because of the way I handled the breakup. I came from a place of Divinity rather than fear and loathing. That opened me to a crucial realization in the process of understanding sacred sexuality. The power and gift of the *Pleasure Principle*.

Living the qualities of the Divine Feminine in service to humanity's wholeness is how I came to understand that a woman's power lies in her sexuality. When supported by the masculine, a woman's sexuality has the potential to create masterpieces in all realms. A man's power lies in his ability to entice and massage a woman's sexual power without fear or need to dominate, own, or oppress. In the seductive dance of blending masculine and feminine power lies the healing balm that unfolds men and women's highest potential in their careers, social, and service work—the energy that can heal the world and facilitate world peace!

Imagine two people completely surrendering to one another in the most intimate and beautiful way. Imagine this surrendering pushing beyond the physical pleasure to a deep emotional oneness. Imagine seeing the Divine in your partner and them seeing the Divine in you. Imagine the connection of deep soul-felt loving, exploding in your mind, pushing out all doubt and fear. Imagine this incredible feeling of being filled up. Imagine you both sharing a sense of knowing that everything in your life has profound meaning. That you see every moment as a blessed event in your life, a magical dance. Imagine an acceptance so complete that it allows the extremes of the profane and the sacred.

While at a Dance Utopia meditation retreat later that fall, I discovered the practice of Oming or Orgasmic Meditation. This beautiful ritual and connection to the Divine is a practice that gives permission to a woman to own her power and make her needs known while supporting a man in claiming his. It opens up a whole new realm of sacred sexuality through the grandness of the Divine Design. The ultimate realization of the *Pleasure Principle*. It's a complete surrendering. It's an offering up of our intimate connection to the Absolute. It's a melting into another in the midst of orgasm with absolute trust. It's a deepening that goes beyond the physical orgasm to an emotional state of pure, unadulterated love of everything and all things. The intellect merges with the Divine and aligns in this loving, losing self in the other and the other in self. Everything loses its meaning and the meaning of everything finally makes sense.

This provides the footing by which the Reclaiming of the Divine Feminine can unfold.
What do you believe is right or wrong about sex? Where did those ideas come from? Have you given yourself the freedom to consciously explore your truth about sex? Do you have a partner that supports exploration?

What has been your experience with alternative lifestyles, multiple partners, multiple partners at once or orgies? Have you ever questioned your sexual orientation?

What do you consider kinky sex? Do you engage in it? What is your deepest, darkest desire?

How do you express the sacred in your sexual and sensual experiences? Do you find pleasure in it? What practices would you like to incorporate into your sexual and sensual expression?

What other insights have you garnered from this chapter?

Witness yourself as a sexual being complete with everything you judged good about her and everything you judged bad. Spend some time showing her compassion and love. Use the following ritual to activate forgiveness as you nurture her back into your wholeness.
Your Practice:
Releasing Old Beliefs about Sexuality

The following are a list of words that have the potential to trigger your beliefs about sex and sexuality. In order to heal, we need to be able to look at what we consider the beautiful as well as the profane. We also need to honor that those are different for everyone.

Close your eyes. Relax into the moment. Take several deep cleansing breaths, relaxing your shoulders, jaw, hips, tongue. Open your mind to the willingness to explore new truths. When you're ready, open your eyes and begin.

As you go through the list, notice your response to the words. Notice the response in both your thoughts and in your body. Take your time.

- vagina
- promiscuity
- penis
- sex
- daughter
- sexuality
- gonorrhea
- pussy
- dick
- lesbian
- vibrator
- multiple lovers
- mother
- fondling
- cock
- cunt
- pornography
- syphilis
- sensuality
- labia
- aphrodisiac
- transgender
- rape
- wife
- VD
• AIDS
• serial monogamy
• monogamy
• celibacy
• orgasm
• infidelity
• orgy
• transsexual
• dildo
• lover
• gay
• husband
• masturbation
• HIV
• son
• fuck
• voyeurism
• polyamorous
• betrayal
• intimacy
• bisexual
• fornication
• homosexuality
• incest
• teenager
• herpes

Journal five minutes about anything that came up for you. Witness from your Divine Feminine, that part of you that is the nurturer, accepting and compassionate, capable of unconditional love.
Reclaiming the Divine Feminine

The Sacred within the Profane, the Profane within the Sacred
Purpose through Pleasure
The Divine Feminine in Action

My sexual journey may seem a bit extreme. It does to me, too. Truly, could I have traveled down any darker passages that are the scorn of women's sexuality? I certainly don't recommend some of the experiences I've had. I'm blessed that within that darkness, the light of my truth and connection to the Divine Feminine emerged. Perhaps it took those experiences for that connection to happen for me. Your growth and connection to the Divine Feminine is a personal matter. I share my story so that you have the courage to face yours in all its sacredness and profanity.

Recounting my sexual history has been a huge catharsis. Even in the feedback from my editors, the first two people to read this, a man and a woman, I found clarity and healing. I have touched the face of the sacred and the profane, sometimes at the same time. This has not been an easy process. It's been a labor of love that I hope you have stepped into with an open heart and mind.

The more I explore the Divine in relationship, the more I realize that every relationship is a direct reflection of me. When I work with clients who are in turmoil in their relationships as a Relationship Enhancement coach, I often use the mirror theory. In mirror theory, the hurdles and obstacles are never about the other person. They're always about something we haven't owned within ourselves. When we address our relationship experiences from this stance, the most challenging relationships become opportunities. Difficulties become avenues to wholeness. The profane is seen in the sacred and the sacred in the profane.

As I neared completion of this book and the development of its companion workshop, I started the planning process to present an expanded version of my workshop at a friend's retreat center. However, my friends turned me down. They told me their board counsel didn't think it was a good idea to have any workshops dealing
with sexuality at their center. While at a dance, the real reasons emerged. A mutual friend shared that my retreat center friends didn't think I was good enough to present at their center. I felt crushed.

Later that evening, I sat in my meditation room, feeling myself sink into an abyss. I cried and surrendered and cried some more. I didn't want this responsibility any more, to be walking this path, to be out beyond the beyond. Surely, the Divine could find someone better to continue the momentum I'd started. The pain that surfaced made me nauseous. I couldn't eat. I couldn't sleep. The pain fueled my emotional state the next day and all I wanted to do was run away.

Instead, I drove to my current partner, Tony's, home, intending to end it with him as the pain was overwhelming and I felt strangled by guilt. Not surprisingly, he became defensive as if he sensed I was blaming him for my deep funk.

He took me in a way that touched a deep dark part of me, a longing that I had suppressed, thinking it not sacred enough. As he pulled me close, I felt his hot breath close to my lips. He grabbed my hair at the nape of my neck, pulling my head back, his hazel eyes glaring into me as if connecting with my soul. His usual gentle caress turned forceful as he pushed me down on the bed and fell on top of me, forcing his tongue into my mouth. My mind shouted at me to stop him, to take back control, but a deeper longing shut out my internal thoughts. I easily succumbed to his raw, sexual energy. The intensity of the moment drove waves of desire through my entire body. Just then I felt him pull back enough for me to see him questioning. Had he lost control, too? He pulled me into him so tightly, I saw and felt his desire pressing against me. My breath caught in my chest. Every inch of my body became an erogenous zone that his skillful fingers finessed into submission. Each touch sent an electrical charge to my intimate parts. I felt my desire mount and rip me wide open, stripping me raw. He continued, sending my body, my mind, and my emotions on a convulsive roller-coaster ride of pleasure. In the midst of our dark, erotic, and intense lovemaking, my Witness showed up, the Goddess within, my lifeline to reality. Holding the light, she gave me permission to surrender to the Pleasure Principle as a container for this experience.

Three hours later I emerged exhausted, feeling bewildered and confused. I went about my day in a state of shock like a puppet on a string. Each action felt directed by something or someone outside of me. I couldn't seem to make a decision about anything. In a profound way, it's the most present I'd ever been.

As evening approached, I made the decision to attend a Friday Night Yoga Club event down south. The car drove itself there as I observed this puppet-like experience.
During the class, a wave of nausea and dizziness came over me so strongly that I had to leave. In the lobby, four women sat conversing. When they saw me, their concern touched my heart. They invited me into their circle. I chose to join, lying on the cold, ceramic floor.

While I lay there, cooling down, I listened to them discussing their different sexuality issues. One's 16-year-old son was in the process of giving his baby up for adoption. One was in a polyamorous relationship with her husband and she was pregnant. One shared that she was the third wife of a man who wasn't filling her needs and she wasn't sure what to do. I was able to share some of my experience that day without feeling judged.

In that moment, I realized my purpose as directed by the Divine. I would provide a safe space for women to open up about themselves and their sexuality. A place where they could relate how their life choices had influenced their present circumstances. And last but not least, a place where they learn that in order to give their amazing capacity of unconditional love and acceptance to others, they must first give it to themselves.

As I drove home, deep, self-judgment bubbled forth. There is nothing sacred about what happened this afternoon in your sexual encounter! A deeper Knowing piped in, shocking me. Everything that happened this afternoon is sacred! My inner Goddess trumped my superego and, in that moment, I let go of the judgment and opened to the possibility that my whole day had been a profoundly sacred experience. Maybe every sexual encounter I'd ever had was profoundly sacred.

Once home, I lay on my bed, watching myself in the mirrored closet doors, feeling something but not quite sure what. I saw so many aspects of myself in that mirror. The dark energy that had been with me all day still lingered. It felt right that it should be there. Everything felt right and perfect, unfolding as a Divine expression.

When Tony called to check on me, he voiced his deeply felt apology for allowing the afternoon encounter to get so dark and out-of-control. I heard the concern in his voice, yet didn't share his apprehension. The moment I told him that, I understood what I had been feeling all day. I'd felt fragmented. In that realization, darkness filled the room, but I still wasn't afraid.

The darkness quickly revealed itself as patches of energy I’d denied. The energy had been waiting for the right moment to reveal itself in order for me to move into wholeness. My ability to shift my perception to seeing the sacred in all things provided a safe, non-judgmental place for the dark energies to come forth.
All that I had ever disowned in myself. All that I shunned or denied. All that I judged wrong or bad. Everything I saw as negative, unacceptable, or unlovable about myself showed up as those dark energies. The intensity grew so strong, I could almost make out images in the energy I felt.

At another time, I would have gotten scared and run away, physically and emotionally. This time I stayed present, providing the container for all of them to come forth into the light of love.

As I continued to explore a deeper level of unconditional self-love and self-acceptance, I realized the Divine Feminine was working in my life. An "aha" emerged that the original site where I’d wanted to hold my workshop didn't have the right energy. Most of what the owners had allowed had been presented by men. The revelation of that prejudice allowed me to release it with love and blessings.

Coincidentally, a couple days later, another friend approached to shared her dream of turning her home in the foothills into a retreat center for women. I felt deep gratitude, in awe that the universe had provided so wondrously, that the Divine Feminine had both supported me and shown me the way with poise and purpose.

That purpose, I realized is unfolding because I've invited the Divine Feminine to illuminate my path. This Divine Feminine energy is filled with joy and pleasure. She is the epitome of purpose through pleasure as presented by the Goddess Lakshmi.

Many of my prayers are infused with my connection to the Divine Feminine. Her archetypal expressions are from a variety of spiritual paths. Lakshmi is from the Hindu tradition and represents wealth and beauty, in the material as well as the spiritual realms. She is that which infuses us with life's elixir when we are open and present in the pause between thoughts.

Lakshmi is often depicted sitting on a lotus flower. According to Hindu mythology, each of her four arms represents a different aspect of fulfilling our purpose called our Sankalpa. Dharma, Artha, Kama, and Moksha.

_Dharma_ is our ability to open to that greater expression for which we came. It's the desire that resides deep in the core of our being, waiting for our permission to birth itself through us. It's that craving to make a difference in our own unique way. When we align our _Dharma_ with Pure Awareness and allow our passion to guide our unveiling of this _Dharma_, we experience the fulfillment of our desire and our mark of beauty on the world. This then fills us with abundance, bringing Lakshmi's wealth and beauty into full bloom. Only then are we truly living in authenticity.
We often squelch this process with fear and doubt. Uncertainty about the "how" stops us short in our quest. We know what we're supposed to do but monkeys and dragons jump on our path, giving us every possible reason why it can't be done.

Fortunately, reclaiming the Divine Feminine opens us to resources that allow the "how" to unfold. This is represented through Lakshmi's second arm.

*Artha* is the means necessary to fulfill our Dharma. Whether education, meditation, or cultivation of a particular skill, *Artha* brings all things necessary into our experience so that we may fully realize our Dharma. This requires us to master a balanced life. Once mastered, *Artha* helps lay down a path to Dharma. Physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being are all part of this *Artha*. A spiritual practice that cultivates a deep connection with the Goddess will reveal all that is available as our *Artha*.

We often squelch this process through negative self-talk. I'm not good enough, smart enough, wealthy enough" I'll never be able to accomplish that, it's too big. I haven't a clue how to begin this." Whether any or all of these statements are true doesn't matter. When we are on the path toward our purpose, all things are provided to make it a reality. When the questions come up and things feel too big, too much, too scary, we must return to knowing we are on the right path. Living on that edge, unsure of what's next is when the Goddess shows up with exactly what's needed as our next step.

Our *Artha* is always in tune with our Dharma. It cannot be any other way. A great measuring device is represented by Lakshmi's third arm, that of *Kama*.

*Kama* teaches us that by enjoying the process of living the qualities of the Divine Feminine in service to humanity, we can achieve Wholeness. We see that pleasure is the straight and true avenue to purpose, one that is bordered by hedges of beauty, wealth, sights, sounds, smells, and tastes that tantalize the senses. We smell the honeysuckle and feel our body respond to the lusciousness. We see the grace in the birthing of a child, and our loins call out to the ends of the Universe to raise this child with love, compassion, and acceptance of their Dharma or gift.

We hear a symphony and melt in our hearts at the profound talent created by a collective that harmonizes in such delicious ways. We taste the juiciness of a fresh, ripe mango and as the juice runs down our chin, the taste fills every cell of our body with desire, pleasure, and wholeness. We feel the arms of our beloved cradle us in their love and passion and experience our deepest longing being met in its fullness. All of this is *Kama*. It's how we experience the presence of the Divine Feminine as the
Pleasure Principle. The beauty of who we are, fully expressed. The joy of our existence fully realized. The purpose of our presence fully integrated into the core of who we are. Only then do we experience Moksha, represented by Lakshmi's fourth arm.

Moksha is the ultimate truth, the ultimate freedom, the ultimate understanding of our true nature. It is the revelation of that true nature in every moment we exist. In every thought, there is a connection to the Divine. In every action, we are bringing our luminous presence to the forefront. It is a be-here-now experience rich in sensuality and bursting with all that we have to give, and we give it all. It is the complete surrender of the outcome in service to the present moment.

The deepest understanding of Life is an orgasmic experience with the Universe or Mahamudra. It's the union of pleasure and purpose with emptiness and nothingness. A complete openness to loving everything as it is and surrendering any preconceived ideas about how things should be. It is this moment devoid of anything not of this moment. Complete surrender of our stories, our pathologies, our expectations, our definitions, our reservations. It is an allowing of the sacred to fully express through us.

The four aspects of the Goddess play out in our lives when we are fully present in the moment. The Divine Feminine then takes action, moving through our lives with a calm assurance that we are here on purpose. She requires nothing less than our complete vulnerability. When we say yes, we will feel her stir within us. As we open to her vitality as our lives, our Dharma, or deepest desire begins to unfold with all the Artha, or means by which to attain it made clear. The Kama, or Pleasure Principle shows us how to fully experience Moksha, or our ultimate truth. This is the Divine Feminine in action.

She balances all of who she is with compassion and curiosity, leaving no soul unexplored. She is here to transform lives. We are her conduit! Her presence promises wealth and beauty when we open our hearts and let her shine.
What in your life has bordered on the profane? What in your life has bordered on the sacred? How do you love both aspects of yourself equally?

How do you deal with dark energy when it shows up in your life?

What are you most passionate about? What do you crave the most, more than your next breath?

To what lengths are you willing to go to realize your Dharma or purpose?

How would you describe your spiritual practice? How do you connect with the Divine Feminine?

Moving forward, what must you do to continue to deepen into your Divinity?

What other insights have you garnered from this chapter?

Witness yourself as a Divine Feminine expression complete with everything you judged good about her and everything you judged bad. Spend some time showing her compassion and love. Use the following ritual to activate forgiveness as you nurture her back into your wholeness.
Your Practice:  
Awakening Your Sankalpa

Sankalpa is a Sanskrit word that means the deep calling of your heart. What is it that yearns within you? What is it that birthed you so that it may be fulfilled through you as you?

Sankalpa is not an impulsive, wishful thinking or casual desire. It is discovered by taking time and space to open to its call. It is the Divine motivation within you that you are creating from all the time, every day!

Sit at your altar with the intention to understand your sankalpa at the heart level. Invite your Divine Feminine to guide your heart as you open to receive. Consider exploring Yoga Nidra, a practice that takes one into a deep meditative state from which to subtly explore deeper spiritual realms and sink to your essence, your inner yearning to express all of who you are. Yoga Nidra classes and CDs are often offered at yoga centers. This practice has served me well.

Your Sankalpa may not come right away. Lean into it with patience as you await your guidance. It may come in words, as a symbol, an image, a sensation. Simply notice as you move through your day.
The Wisdom of Menopause

Maiden, Mother, Crone
Seeing the Beauty in a Wise Woman's Body
Celebrating Change, Cultivating Creativity

This past year I celebrated my movement into menopause. It's a mysterious time, this time of change, heralding in a wide range of experiences, internally and externally. This stage of life is about shifting and balancing all that we've learned in the maiden and mother stages of feminine growth.

In the past, these stages were exemplary of how women have been treated. The maiden or virgin represented innocence, beauty, newness. Men revered almost idolized her. Myths tell of wars fought for her, her beauty bringing men to their knees before her. Only the most virile, courageous warrior could claim her as his prize. Most of the fairy tales we grew up with depict this stage of our development.

A healthy maiden stage leads a woman into herself, to discover her individuality and her creativity. It's a time of exploring pleasure without the responsibility of motherhood. When this is fueled with guidance from the Divine Feminine, it opens her to unlimited possibilities of what she will do with the gift of her life. The Divine Feminine guides her through the urges of her sacred sexuality. This, coupled with an emerging intuition, can herald a time of amazing advancement.

The Mother archetype held a place of honor in the tribe, especially if she gave birth to a son. Her wisdom often received credit for the brilliance displayed by a powerful man. Behind every good man is a woman may seem a cliché phrase, but in times of patriarchal domination, this was the most powerful praise a woman could achieve.

The depth of the mother stage is profound, and even if a woman has not given birth to a child, she passes through this phase of development. It is during this time that she learns the value of surrender and responsibility, as well as compassion and unconditional love. When guided by the Divine Feminine, she births not only children
but herself into unconditional self-love. The sacredness of her sexuality unfolds a new expression of creativity. Coupled with the Divine Masculine, her womb grows life and births future generations. Her intuition is honed during this time as she rears her offspring in fulfillment of Life's promise to Itself.

The crone stage has often been surrounded by negative ideas. The old woman or witch is often depicted alone, mean, and void of anything to offer. As her body cycles through the change, she is often seen with a bent frame and crooked nose laden with warts. The prominent idea is that without fertility, a woman shrivels up into nothingness. Menopause has been seen as a disease driven by erratic hormones that send women into a hysterical frenzy. Even the word hysterical comes from the Greek word *hystera*, meaning uterus or womb. The Greeks believed that all hysterical disorders were due to a diseased uterus.

As our society's median age increases, the crone stage is taking on new and more appropriate ideals. At an Ecstatic Dance ceremony just before I entered menopause, I drew the Witch card. All the positive attributes of the Witch sat in detail on the card before me. I sat at the altar, realizing that the journey into menopause had begun. In that moment, I declared myself a Witch. In a flash of brilliance, WITCH became an acronym for Woman In Total Control of Herself.

According to Dr. Christiane Northrup, author of *The Wisdom of Menopause*, approximately 70 percent of older women do not experience menopause as a problem. Accordingly, the medical profession has *never* studied a group of women who didn't suffer from all the maladies attributed to menopause that are supposedly secondary to hormone deficiency. In other words, there is nothing in the medical journals describing the positive attributes of this prolific time in a woman's journey. Historically, gynecologists have been men, so why would they delve any deeper than those who come to them for help because of their dis-ease?

While still in my thirties, I decided that menopause didn't need to be something to fear as I got older. With my medical background, I understood that no physiological reason existed for the whole of womanhood to have a problem with the transition of change. In actuality, it's something that can be revered in its own right. With the right guidance, including either female gynecologists that have weathered the experience or males who have truly sought to understand the whole physiology of the change, this can be a time of profound introspection and juicy deepening.

The wisdom and sexual mastery that accompanies this stage in a woman's life was well known in Goddess tribes. In Tantric traditions, the female masters understood the power of sexuality and its relationship to the Divine. Through this
powerful connection, we unveil our healing power. The sacredness of our sexuality comes full circle when we are no longer birthing children. Instead, we step into cultivating and birthing our dreams for the world. With our well-developed intuition and deep connection to the Divine Feminine, our dreams converge to unfold a holy, new type of wholeness in society.

Reclaiming the Divine Feminine integrates the virtues of the three stages of a woman's expression into our very beings. This allows each stage to play its role in our daily lives. If we've done our work, we come to realize that it is the Divine Feminine reclaiming us in the midst of us reclaiming Her.

One of the struggles many woman face as we age is the change we see in our physical bodies. This, coupled with advertisements that equate a woman's worth with youthfulness, can leave the older woman feeling like her life is over. Thoughts of cosmetic surgery loom with each glance in the mirror and our conversations lead us into discussions about the struggles and difficulties of living in an aging face and body.

There is so much more to a woman's beauty at this stage. Her age adds a dimension to that beauty unavailable to youth. The taut, smooth skin of a young woman with upturned breasts, vibrant eyes, and silky hair is indeed something to admire. Her beauty stands on its own. Each beautiful maiden exemplifies this coming of age. However, in her innocence is a lack of worldly knowledge, understanding, empathy, and intuitive insight. The nurturer has not yet developed. Courage has not been tested. Conviction has not been established. And this is just as true for the Sacred Masculine.

The beauty of a woman's years is filled with wisdom and insight. It's expressed in her face, in her compassion, in her ability to nurture, in her strength and courage to overcome every storm that life offers. Her conviction is strong yet filled with the grace of her years.

Each time I look in the mirror I have a choice. I can see an aging woman moving into the autumn of her years, or I can see the magnificence of a wise WITCH rich with culture, history, and experience, ready to continue her journey through life in a whole new adventurous way. All that I bring to the table is astounding.

Older women cannot hold a candle to the beauty of our young sisters when seen only on the surface. But let us bring out our magic bag of tricks. Our life lessons, our independence, self-sufficiency, inner knowing, community connections, as well as the fullness and depth of our character. Let us reveal the laughter in each wrinkle, the
struggle in each gray hair, the sorrow and pleasure in the eyes that may have dulled a bit yet still hold a twinkle. The genuine authenticity in the smile of one who knows she has mastered life.

This beauty is immeasurable. It will captivate many, but it's only available to those worthy of her presence. Since she is often content being with her own company, she has nothing to lose by being alone. She owns her life and sees herself as a gift to the collective. She's adept at self-awareness and cultivates self-worth on a daily basis. Her life is balanced. When it's not, she doesn't fret. She knows imbalance brings a deepening and that the pendulum will once again swing in her favor. She simply goes along for the ride.

If you are at this stage in your life, choose to celebrate it for the magnificence that it is. There is still so much beauty in our bodies, in our faces, in our figures. If we get caught up in what we've lost with age, we miss the gifts and opportunities this stage offers. Instead of allowing the distractions of what we missed out on in our youth, let us fully stand in our conviction and usher in this time with grace and fortitude. That is part of what we've earned by our years on the planet.

The next time you look in the mirror, really look into your eyes. See the wisdom of your years. See the people whose lives you've touched. See the children you've reared, especially what you've given of yourself to them. See the men or women you've loved and how that has helped you grow. See the connections you've made in community. See the joy you've added to this thing called life.

In each wrinkle, see the struggles you've overcome. See the sorrow you've withstood. See the laughter in each line that frames your mouth. See the maturity of the way you wear your makeup. See the care you give yourself. See how you've shifted from nurturing others to nurturing yourself.

As your neck begins to bear witness to its own necklace, take pride in that necklace of skin. See within that neck the voice that gently guided or sternly set boundaries. See the woman who is able to say "No" for no's sake without any need to justify.

Your breasts may be having a race with each other to see which one can surrender to gravity first. So what! Love your breasts. They've nurtured and nourished and given pleasure to many, especially you. They've worked hard and deserve this time of rest, even if they are a bit low on the front of your torso.

In the beginning of my nursing career, I worked as an oncology nurse and treated
many women with breast cancer. As I studied the cause and cure of various cancers, I came to an educated conclusion based in metaphysical insight. The reason why breast cancer hits in our forties is because that's when women start to have a negative view of their breasts. As they start to succumb to the effects of gravity and living long, women often start to feel bad about their breasts. In their longing for the perky breasts of their youth, they denigrate their breasts as less than.

Even if this only happens on a subconscious level, it's still a negative reaction to our breasts. Imagine how you would feel if you were privy to 20 or more negative jabs a day? Yes, it would be nice to have the body of a 20-year-old throughout our lives, but that's not how nature designed us. For whatever reason, we move through the stages of our development and eventual disintegration. Why not enjoy every stage? Why not let this be our ideal?

Given my hypothesis, I encourage you to love your breasts. Give them loving attention every day. Having a lover worship your breasts may continue to keep them healthy.

As you move your attention down your beautiful body, allow your awareness to rest in your abdomen. The seat of your womb. This stage lets you know that nature is done with its need for you to continue the flow of life. Procreation is no longer your responsibility. Allow yourself to pass the flame with pride and honor as you release your body's ability to give birth in this way. Now is the time for you. What do you want to birth? What creative endeavor has sat on the back burner waiting especially for this time? Claim it as your own. Use every day of your life to charge your new dream with all that's needed to bring it into fruition. Bring every aspect of your life into creating this dream.

You've been on quite a journey, both in your life and through the pages of the documentation of your history. It's time to celebrate the you that you've become. You have all the answers within you. If there's anything else that needs to be healed and released, you have the tools, the know-how, and the ability to do so. Express your creativity in its fullness. Allow that expression to be free of any fear of judgment or condemnation. Be you in your fullness. You've earned it. You are worthy of it. You deserve it. *Bon Appétit!*
What have been your views or fears about menopause?

What do you know of the maiden, mother, crone?

How do you want to celebrate your wisdom years?

How do you want to see your beauty at this stage?

If you're still young, how do you view older women?

What would you birth if you only had you to answer to?

What other insights have you garnered from this discussion?

Witness the power of your WITCH, complete with everything you judged good about her and everything you judged bad. Spend some time showing her compassion and love. Use the following ritual to activate forgiveness as you nurture her back into your wholeness.
This practice is about celebrating all that you have to offer to the collective. You'll need a small mirror that you can prop up on your altar.

Sit at your altar. Call in the magic of the Divine Feminine to guide you through this process. Take a deep breath, allowing it to circle down through each chakra, grounding you to the earth below. As it circles back up your spine, feel the breath move out through your Crown Chakra. Feel it expand into the Universe. Do this several times.

Look into your mirror and see the amazing woman looking back at you. Let your mind wander into all that has been your life. All that has created the YOU that sits at this altar. Move your awareness to the Divine Feminine within you and allow her to speak to the woman in the mirror. Let her tell all the wonderful, loving, magnificent things there are to know about you. . .what you need to hear. Accept Her counsel because she is the best friend you've ever had. Take some time for this.

When you're complete, bring your awareness to your womb. Place both hands over your womb. Feel the shift and changes happening there as you move from creating new life to creating your life anew. Rest in the question, "What's next for me to create?" Allow these answers to come forth without limitation, knowing that all the resources, support, courage, and receptivity are now available for you to manifest this next phase of your life.
The Invitation

Yes
Gifts
Release

We have been on quite a journey. How have you fared? What has been the most enlightening part of this journey? What has been the most difficult?

For me, each chapter brought me face-to-face with a life rich with emotions and a plethora of experiences, some amazing, some not so pretty.

As I wrote each chapter, the emotions of each experience described seemed to play out in my present life. I didn't notice this at first. It felt utterly ridiculous to continue dredging up the past. I wanted to quit many times over, but something within wouldn't let me. I'd said Yes to the Divine Feminine. I invited Her in. She's not about to leave because things get tough.

You've probably had a similar experience. If you truly gave yourself to this process, your story is now on the pages in front of you instead of in your head, keeping you stuck in the past. It doesn't matter whether that past was pleasant or painful, it's over. All there is now is for you to live fully in this moment, responding to your present experience with the fullness of who you are.

The gifts you take forward are plentiful:

- A celebration of the Divine Feminine as a fully realized aspect of youself.

- A fully integrated collaboration of all your experiences bathed in love, compassion, forgiveness, and gratitude.

- A path to your purpose, complete with all that is necessary for you to fully express it and the ability for you to fully enjoy the process.
• A complete set of rituals that you can use at any time to bring you back to center, to self-love, to self-acceptance.

• A beautiful altar at which you can pray or simply be in the presence of a reflection of your Divinity. Feel free to change it as often and in whatever fashion you choose.

• A deep, rich understanding of the Divine Feminine in spiritual practice.

• A template of what you desire in a relationship and the tools to manifest a loving relationship.

• A healing of your traumas and the tools to continue to deepen into your wholeness by releasing more and more.

• The courage to fail, yet continue to move forward.

• Permission to fully engage and explore your truth in sexuality and sensuality.

• A new view of menopause as an enlightened WITCH.

• The luscious ability to experience Mahamudra, an orgasm with the Universe in body, mind, and soul.

• A full expansion of yourself as a woman and a Goddess.

• A light, celebratory essence that lives life to the fullest from this day forward.

As we prepare to move forward, we must be willing to fully release the past. This
journey you have been on is over. A new one awaits you. You may have already noticed a calling to what's next. As I bid you adieu, I leave you with this practice and this thought.

I love you. I love the woman you are. I love the gift you are to the world. I love the essence of your being-ness. I love your courage to stand in your truth. With this deep love I have for you, I am able to celebrate the Divine Feminine in Her fullness.

Continue to develop your daily spiritual practice. Each morning invite the Divine Feminine in again. Each meal, thank the Divine Feminine for nourishing and nurturing you. Each evening, invite the Divine Feminine to help you grant forgiveness to yourself and others for any act, word, or behavior that may have contributed to the illusion of separateness.

Please practice the following mantra, initially in your releasing ceremony and from this moment forth, until you feel that you have truly embodied the Divine Feminine. Until you are standing in service to humanity's wholeness as you unwrap your gifts. Remember, everything about you is a gift.

"I honor the sacredness of being a woman and invite the fullness of the Divine Feminine to express as me. I allow the Divine Feminine to guide my steps in love, life, and self-expression."
Sitting at your altar with the pages of your story, reflect on the journey you've just taken. Notice who you were when you began. Notice how you've grown. Notice who you've become. Embrace it all.

Chant your new mantra three times:

"I honor the sacredness of being a woman and invite the fullness of the Divine Feminine to express as me. I allow the Divine Feminine to guide my steps in love, life, and self-expression."

As you prepare the elements of your releasing ceremony, keep in mind that each of the four elements represent an aspect of the self. Earth represents your physical self, air your intellectual self, fire your emotional self, and water your spiritual self.

**The Element of Water**

Water flows with everything spiritual. Its holy properties allow the mystery and healing power of the Divine to express within us, giving rise to emotional balance. When we allow the energy of Water to flow into every area of our lives, we open a creative channel to the Infinite that bathes us in vibrant energy. Water is sensitive to our every need and is capable of gently tickling us in its flow or gushing forth to move us into greater depths. Either way, its purpose is to uplift and nurture us back into our personal power.

Find a ceremonial container for water. This can be any container that you've blessed. You may choose to add a few drops of essential oil to the water.

Once the water and container have been blessed, place the pages of your story in the water. Place the container either near or on your altar. For the next seven days, offer up your prayers to it, allowing water's spiritual essence to wash you clean of any attachments to your story.

On the seventh day, remove the pages, but save the water. These pages have now been blessed. You may want to put the water in a container that you can cover until a later date.

**The Element of Air**
Air provides insight to our greatest understanding. When we tune into the element of Air, we're able to stand in our power as individuals, original in origin and unconventional in action. Intellectual awareness of this elemental power in our lives allows us to break free from the collective unconscious that drives so many lives into fear and doubt. Conscious awareness counters the fear and doubt by creating balance and ease with the winds of change. Air is not emotionally attached to outcomes, so this sophisticated element has a humanitarian awareness as the detached observer, fostering just and fair behavior.

Lay the pages of your story around your altar. Allow the air to dry your pages. Over the next seven days, continue to offer your prayers to this process, allowing the intelligence of air to blow away any sense of regret, sorrow, guilt, or shame.

On the seventh day, once everything has dried completely, gather your pages. You are now free of any bondage to your past.

The Element of Fire

Fire's emotional component tells us to trust our perceptions, intuition, and sense of Knowing in order to build self-confidence and self-esteem. Fire calls us to set appropriate boundaries through courage, integrity, and personal power in order to open our hearts. When Fire is balanced, it warms the soul and creates from a gentle expansiveness. The energy of Fire is high-spirited, enthusiastic, bold, and passionate.

Use a fire pit or some other container appropriate to burn the pages of your story. Use something that makes it possible to gather the ashes afterwards.

Choose a night when the moon is either full or new. Reflect once again on your journey through this process. Offer up a prayer of gratitude to yourself. Offer up a prayer of gratitude to your life. Offer up a prayer of gratitude to your past, present, and future. Offer up a prayer of gratitude to the Divine Feminine.

Chant your mantra seven times as you begin to burn your story, recognizing the healing properties of fire and seeing the smoke that rises as a gift to the Divine. Promise that you will live your life from this day forward, fully embracing and honoring the Goddess within you.

Once the ashes have cooled, save them for the final step in your releasing ceremony. Place them on your altar for seven days, offering up prayers charged with emotional contentment

The Element of Earth
Earth represents our physical nature, that aspect of us that grounds us in our bodies and in our world. Earth provides the solid base necessary for the physical world to manifest. Earth helps us dig up old, hidden beliefs that no longer serve us. By weeding out unwanted thoughts and actions we create a scenic expression of our true self in magnificent splendor. When we are deeply connected to the Earth, rooted in the security of her womb, we feel grounded in our being and centered in our purpose.

Visit a local garden center and find a plant and container that really speak to you, or use clippings from a favorite plant that are waiting to be potted. Layer a container that you really like with dirt and the ashes of your story. Place your plant in the pot and water it using the holy water in which you soaked your story. Place the plant on or in front of your altar. For the next seven days, nurture your new plant as a representation of the new you, the new seeds planted in your consciousness, burned into your heart and soul, and blessed by your spirit.

Continue to care for and nurture your plant as a symbol of caring for and nurturing your Divine Feminine expression, birthed out of a rich, full past, grounded in the present, and growing into a magnificent expression of sacred beauty.
The Rest is Still Unwritten

The Gift of Grief
Give Yourself to Love
The Love You Seek is Within You

The intensity of my relationship with Tony created the momentum that propelled this book forward. Unfortunately, as the book neared completion, so did our relationship. The ending came with great pain to both of us as we realized that our worlds were too different to sustain the love that had bathed us with so much sexual passion. Although I had reached a depth with him that gave me a spiritual high in the midst of every orgasm, we were unable to figure out how to sustain that type of intimate communion outside of the bedroom. Losing ourselves in each other while in the midst of our sacred sexual experience felt blissful. However, beyond that, what we had didn't feel healthy or sustainable.

While walking through the pain of losing him, I discovered a great gift. My ability to love this man unconditionally took me into an exploration of loving myself with the same unconditional intensity. Although bittersweet, I sucked in the nectar of that experience.

In the final days of our relationship, as we struggled to figure out how to make it work or how to let it go, one of my best friends took her own life. The shock to my system jolted me to a depth of despair I never knew existed. As I walked through the grief, a whole spectrum of emotions rushed through me. At one point, several days after finding out about her death, I sunk into a deep darkness. But I knew it wasn't mine. I felt my friend's hand at work, helping me understand her decision.

As I touched the edge of despair that she had felt, I wanted so desperately to go with her. In that moment, I understood her pain, her anguish, her behavior, her decision. As I stood at that precipice, knowing the same decision she made was available to me at any time, I deeply felt the loss of my friend. The loss of our relationship in physical form. I allowed my love for her to crack me wide open. I invited Love to guide me as I mourned my loss. Not just the loss of my friend, but the
loss of all those I have loved and lost, including the loss of my relationship with Tony.

In that deep mourning, I felt my love come alive, infusing each experience, each thought with grace, comfort, compassion, courage, insight, peace, Knowing. Fear had knocked so loudly, taking many guises in its cunning and crafty ability to lure me in. But I did not take the bait. Instead, I chose love. I turned from fear, from the precipice, from the idea that I had loved and lost. I walked back into life complete with all the vulnerability it has to offer. I gave myself to Love with the fullness of my being.

So much shows up in the most wonderful and delicious ways when we fully accept Love's offering. Even despair becomes a gift when viewed through the eyes of Love. It says we have been blessed to have loved so deeply. With Love as our chaperone, each emotion that shows up is guided into our wholeness. Our Oneness. Our remembering who we really are.

I picked up the pieces, fully aware of my innate ability to heal this deep, deep wound. To heal it for me. For the Ones I love. For those whose anguish runs too deep to heal their own pain. I'm healing myself and in healing myself, I heal the world.

As we continue our journey with the Divine Feminine, she is deepening our understanding of ourselves as love and lover. Come again and again to your altar, sinking deeper into your spiritual practices, seeking the Goddess's wisdom, Her guidance, Her unfolding of your full expression in relationship with your beloved. Know that this blossoms from within for you are your beloved.

Many women on a spiritual path wonder whether or not there is an available man who is at her level of consciousness, who has done his work, who is ready for the type of loving relationship that explores the depths and highs of sacred union. Most do not believe they will find him. As a result, they are right. I do not subscribe to that belief. It would be ridiculous to reclaim the Divine Feminine only to find out that her counterpart, the Sacred Masculine, didn't exist.

The truth is, the love you seek is within you. Bringing our ugly shadow sides to the light allows us to love them back into wholeness. Beneath all the pain, self-loathing, doubt, unworthiness, and any other negative emotion is the Love essence which brought us into this world. Let us love all aspects of ourselves in order to get back to our original Love essence. When we are capable of loving all of who we are, no matter who shows up next as our teacher and lover in relationship, they will reflect that deep inner love that is within us.
Our lives are a rich array of lovers, each at the level we were at while in relationship with them. Through relationships, we have evolved. Our consciousness has expanded and our hearts have opened to a deep love—for self and for others. Each relationship has reflected that part of us that we love. That part of us that we accept. They've also reflected those parts of us that annoy us, scare us, confuse us, and which we find unlovable. Those parts of us that have remained small because we didn't feel worthy to shine.

What a gift each relationship has been, helping us uncover and learn so much about ourselves. The packaging of the gift hasn't always been very pretty. We haven't always wanted to open the gift, to look at those shadow aspects of ourselves that look so ugly and unworthy. But we must if we are to truly express the love that is within our hearts. If we truly want to experience our wholeness.

You've no doubt found this to be true if you've devoted yourself to the processes and rituals I've outlined in this book. In the future, I hope you will look at all your relationships from this new light. Each relationship you've shared has reflected who you were in relationship with yourself. Considering then that all relationships are a reflection of you, why would it be any different once you're in unconditional love with yourself?

As you move forward, embodying the Divine Feminine qualities that are your natural essence, open to Her love for you, to Her guidance, to all that's necessary for you to be fully present, to fully stand in your Goddess energy. When you come from that place of high holiness, you'll be able to love yourself into the wholeness that you already are. From wholeness you can write the next chapter of your life.

The reclaiming of the Divine Feminine that you have accomplished through this journey with me is such a profound gift. I'm sure there have been times when your ego has tried to scare you out of continuing. But here you are, standing in your fullness, ready to come full circle by uniting the Divine Feminine with the Sacred Masculine within you.

Join me in calling in the Sacred Masculine in order that you might fully experience blissful, intimate communion with your beloved. Get ready to lose yourself to a rich, deep love affair with your beloved self.
This final practice is not a ritual to be completed. It's a life changing behavior to be embodied every moment.

Whether or not you are in relationship now, I invite you to lean into the longing and desire you have for a deep, intimate union with your beloved. If you already have this, lean into your desire to go deeper. Allow the quality of Divine desire to guide you to the core of your being, the core of your physical and emotional body. Feel that energy pulsate in your heart and vagina. Allow both to open and accept the Divine as love and lover. You can facilitate this further by doing Kegel exercises, a tightening and releasing of the muscles at your pelvic floor.

Call in the Sacred Masculine. Connect with him at your heart center. Feel the love of your Sacred Masculine, absent of the ego that could harm, control, or weaken you. Lean into the union of your Inner Goddess completely enveloped and taken into the strength and protection of your Sacred Masculine. Feel the love that the intimate union of these two aspects generate.

With each breath, feel the Divine bathing you and every cell in your body in love. Allow yourself to make love to the Divine within you and feel it raise your vibration. See and feel the union of the Divine Feminine and the Sacred Masculine as a continual part of who you are, the essence of your wholeness.
Epilogue

In all my life experiences, I now say Yes to the Divine Feminine as my inner guide, teacher, and guru. I continue to dive into rituals that celebrate the Divine Feminine and the Sacred Masculine. Women's circles, yoga, ecstatic dance and conscious conversations with the opposite sex help to further my understanding of this union between masculine and feminine energy. As a result, my altered state these days comes from prayer, meditation, and a plethora of spiritual practices. Spirit is my drug of choice. My Sacred Sexuality is expressing through *Mahamudra*, having an orgasm with the Universe.

As you move forward in your life, continue to use the rituals you've learned here. Engage in processes with yourself and others that celebrate spiritual connection on all levels. Always remember that you have said Yes. If life circumstances bring chaos, heartache, pain, or discord, remember your Yes. See each life circumstance as an opportunity to further your connection with Spirit. Invite the Divine Feminine over and over again to show you the way out of the darkness. Allow Her to turn your light up to its highest magnitude so that you may bask in the fullness of your being, your Divine Feminine truth.

May your days be filled with all that is holy and may your nights unleash your full passion. May Sacred Sexuality fill you with pleasure and may you always feel and know your Divine magnificence. Blessings on your journey.
Resources

Awakening Women Institute
http://awakeningwomen.com/

Books To Believe In
http://bookstobelievein.com/

Centers for Spiritual Living
http://csl.org/

Designs by Willow
http://www.designsbywillow.com/

Great Life Technologies
http://www.greatlifetechnologies.com/

Mile Hi Church
http://www.milehichurch.org/

National Coalition Against Domestic Violence NCADV
http://www.ncadv.org/

National Domestic Violence Hotline
http://www.thehotline.org/

One Billion Rising
http://onebillionrising.org/

Planned Parenthood
http://www.plannedparenthood.org/

Rape, Abuse, & Incest National Network, RAINN
http://rainn.org/
Rhythm Sanctuary  
http://www.rhythmsanctuary.com/  

Studio Soma  
http://studio-soma.com/
One Billion Rising to End
Violence Against Women

One in Three Women on the Planet will be Raped or Beaten in Her Lifetime

One Billion Women Violated is an Atrocity

One Billion Women Dancing is a Revolution

Join V-Day on 2.14.Every year

Strike, Dance, Rise in Your Community & Demand an End to Violence!

World Health Organization’s
Definition of Sexual Health

Sexual health is a state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being related to sexuality; it is not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction or infirmity.

Sexual health requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual responses, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination, and violence.

For sexual health to be attained and maintained, the sexual rights of all persons must be respected, protected, and fulfilled.

Centers for Disease Control & Prevention Definition of Sexual Health

Sexual health is a state of wellbeing in relation to sexuality across the lifespan that involves physical, emotional, mental, social, and spiritual dimensions.
Sexual health is an inextricable element of human health and is based on a positive, equitable, and respectful approach to sexuality, relationships, and reproduction that is free of coercion, fear, discrimination, stigma, shame, and violence.

It includes the ability to understand the benefits, risks, and responsibilities of sexual behavior; the prevention of disease and other adverse outcomes; and the possibility of fulfilling sexual relationships.

Sexual health is impacted by socioeconomic and cultural contexts—including policies, practices, and services—that support healthy outcomes for individuals and their communities.
Recommended Reading

*The Age of Miracles: Embracing the New Midlife*—Marianne Williamson

**ISBN: 1401917208**

*The Art of Extreme Self-Care: Transform Your Life One Month at a Time*—Cheryl Richardson

**ISBN: 978-1-4019-1828-6**

*The Artist's Way*—Julia Cameron

**ISBN: 1585421464**

*The End of Your World: Uncensored Straight Talk on the Nature of Enlightenment*—Adyashanti

**ISBN: 978-1-59179-779-1**

*The Ethical Slut, A Practical Guide to Polyamory, Open Relationships & Other Adventures*,—Dossie Easton and Janet W. Hardy

**ISBN: 1587613379**

*Intimate Communion: Awakening Your Sexual Essence*—David Deida


*Loving What Is: Four Questions That Can Change Your Life*—Byron Katie

**ISBN: 1400045371**

*Many People, Many Faiths, Women and Men in the World Religions*—Robert S. Ellwood

The Power of How, Simple Techniques to Vaporize Your Ego and Your Pain-body
—Tom Stone

ISBN: 978-1-61539-060-1

The Prophet—Kahil Gibran

ISBN: 1614270627

The Red Tent—Anita Diamant

ISBN: 0-312-19551-6

Tantra: The Supreme Understanding—Osho

ISBN: 1906787379

The Way of the Superior Man, A Spiritual Guide to Mastering the Challenges of Women, Work, and Sexual Desire—David Deida

ISBN: 978-1-59179-259-4

What Will Set You Free—From Pain to Passion in Seven Weeks—Cynthia James

ISBN: 0-9774761-8-9

The Wisdom of Menopause: Creating Physical and Emotional Healing During the Change—Dr. Christiane Northrup

ISBN: 0-553-80121-X

A Woman's Worth—Marianne Williamson

ISBN: 0345386574

Women's Bodies, Women's Wisdom,—Christiane Northrup

ISBN: 0-553-37953-4

You Can Heal Your Life—Louise L. Hay
ISBN: 0-937611-01-8
More From A'ra

Communing with the Infinite,
A Path of Awakening Awareness

Ara Blair

Find A'ra on:

bookstobelievein.com/CommuningwiththeInfinite.php
http://www.facebook.com/CommuningWithTheInfinite

Pure Awareness Pathways

http://pureawarenesspathways.com/
http://pureawarenesspathways.com/blog/
A'ra Blair is a beacon of light in the area of personal transformation. As an accomplished Spiritual Life Coach and Counselor, she has assisted many in overcoming personal and sexual trauma in order to fully embrace their magnificence. In addition to her one-on-one work with clients, she works with couples as a Relationship Enhancement Coach and serves as nurse and teen counselor for the Centers for Spiritual Living summer and winter camps. She also facilitates workshops and speaks at conferences.

Her workshops include:

* Sacred Sexuality, Reclaiming the Divine Feminine,
* Movement as Prayer, Embodying Spiritual Principles
* Goddess Giving Gathering
Sacred Energy, an Experiential Journey

Quantum Healing, Unlocking Your Cellular Energy Potential

In addition, A'ra has assisted in facilitating workshops such as

What Will Set You Free

Sacred Woman, Holy Life

Beyond Limits

Releasing the Inner Magician

She is also one of the founding organizers for Smile Denver, a flash mob and movement experiment.

A'ra's personal journey from self-loathing to self-love and self-expression came about as a commitment to break free from childhood traumas and sexual abuse, and learn the truth of who she is. She has traveled the world participating in yoga and movement retreats. She has been a long time member of women's circles and thrives on ritual and ceremony as demonstrated throughout this book. Her 25 years of study and transformative work in spirituality, meditation, energy work, yoga, trauma resolution, quantum physics, relationship enhancement, and personal growth have prepared A'ra to live the qualities of the Divine Feminine in service to Humanity's Wholeness. By embodying these qualities, her presence, heals, transforms, and gives permission for the radical expression of Sacred Sexuality.

A'ra is a Licensed Spiritual Counselor and Trauma Resolution Specialist. She holds degrees in nursing, communication, and writing. In addition, she holds numerous leadership awards and certificates in non-traditional education. She serves as a practitioner at Mile Hi Church, one of the largest new thought spiritual centers in the world with a congregation of over 10,000 members and friends. In 2007, she retired from the Army Reserve's Medical Corp and presently serves supervising Sexual Health Professionals for the State of Colorado.
Acknowledgements

Cynthia James. Thank you for your friendship, your guidance, and for the beautiful foreword to my book. Thank you for helping me discover my vision and mission, which guided me through the writing of this book.

My incredible son Josh. Thank you for teaching me how to be YOUR mother, truly a gift.

Red Tent Women's Circle. Thank you Kathy, Susan, Jennifer, and Deanne for creating such a safe healing place to begin this journey of healing the self in order to serve the world.

Yogini Circle of Women and the Awakening Women Institute. What a gift to deepen with you, cry with you, laugh with you, celebrate the Divine Feminine with you.

All my incredible women friends who have taught me and walked with me into this Divine Feminine expression. Special acknowledgment to Katie, Tamara, SuZen, and Lisa.

The amazing men in my life who stand in their Sacred Masculine energy and provide a safe place for women to fully express their sensuality and sexuality.

Rhythm Sanctuary. Thank you for holding the space of healing for me to dance into my authenticity.

Studio Soma and Jessica Wolf. Thank you for always being a safe harbor.

Mile Hi Church. My spiritual home for over 20 years.

Mile High Church Practitioners and Ministers. Thank you for your high consciousness, loving support, and abundance of hugs.

Tom Stone and Great Life Technologies and your work with Pure Awareness
techniques to resolve trauma.

    Willow Aleana for her beautiful print of the Goddess for my book cover.

    SuZen Merrell for your beautiful photo of me.

    Capri Brock for her artistic cover design.

    EJ Thornton and Books to Believe In

    Jeannine Belongea—I will always hold you close to my heart. Blessings on your continued journey.
Dedication

_to the awakening of_ every Soul to their full potential as emissaries of light and love

_to the surrender of_ Ego to its rightful place as servant to Spirit

_to the sacred expression of_ our sexuality as a path to enlightenment

_to the union of_ the Divine Feminine with the Sacred Masculine in intimate communion
Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

Dedication

Foreword

Introduction

How To Use This Book

1. What Happened to the Divine Feminine?

2. A Myth is Born

3. Puberty—Friend or Foe?

4. Missing a Friend

5. To Have or Not to Have. . .That is THE Question!

6. Born in the U.S.A.

7. Change Happens

8. Leaving on a Jet Plane

9. Making a Wonderful Life

10. Sacred Sexuality

11. Reclaiming the Divine Feminine

12. The Wisdom of Menopause