

**P**eggy Luhrs' legacy of work as a teacher of Eco-feminism, propagator of lesbian-feminist ideology, and peace activist is impressive. She and the women on the Burlington Women's Council created visionary programs that are still supporting and uplifting women of all classes. I asked her about her Croning ceremony in 2001.

"It was just 10 days after 9/11. It was also just after a particularly challenging period in my life. My friend, Martha Whitney, organized it for me. We arranged people in a spiral by age. Each woman said what they appreciated about me. After years of being misrepresented in the press, I was overwhelmed with the warmth of this ceremony. I really needed that acknowledgment and appreciation.

"Then, I said what words of wisdom that I had to offer in the face of what just happened in NYC. The women I invited were glad to have a place to come together and feel support. We listened to each other discharge feelings about terrorism and the horrible event of 10 days earlier. There was drumming and singing. We invoked some of the goddesses — Artemis, Kali. I especially like Baubo. She made the Goddess laugh by lifting up her skirts. I had naked dancing girls singing "Do your breasts hang low," to me. It was pure fun and also a very moving experience. It said, 'YES I have moved into Cronehood and I have company there.'"

**You do have company, but many women don't.**

"Yes, old women isolate themselves. People like to think old women don't exist."

**What's a contradiction to that?**

"Consciousness raising groups again, this time with a new consciousness. We should have more older women's groups. Women should be in the public sphere more. I'd love to see women in their power. We've got to be at least half of who sits at the decision-making tables. The United Nations passed a resolution that women are supposed to be at the table when there's a peace negotiation process.

"We, the generation that started lesbian feminism, realize we're not finished with the project. There must still be talking about feminism. Even though it's not popular anymore."

**So what is your vision?**

"I'd like to see us being the Grandmother Council and deciding what happens in society. The system that some of the Native Americans have is a good one. The men get to be chief so they can prance around, but they're only the chief at the will of the grandmothers."

**Did you make a commitment at your Croning?**

"In the face of 9/11, my commitment was to peace. I think the antidote to terrorism is expanding human rights for everyone. When I went to Beijing in '95, the theme was 'Women's Rights are Human Rights.' That's what has to happen. It can't be about shutting off anyone anymore."

**I** interviewed Ginny Clark in her home. Though seated in a wheelchair and visibly challenged by Parkinson's Disease, her response to the disability is quite amazing.

**Was your Croning meaningful to you?**

"Oh yes, it was an affirmation and a very happy event. Our culture is very cruel to the elderly. There are places where people often live to 120. They are vital parts of the community. They probably live that long because they are so appreciated. It's considered an honor and a happy thing to be getting old there. They often were doing things that people younger weren't able to do. Some elders were more accomplished horseback riders, or crafts people."

**I was at another woman's Croning with you this past summer. And what you said there touched me very deeply. Didn't you say that life gets better and better? Yet I know you're in pain. I've talked to others who felt the same.**

"Yes, I really do love my life. And it has gotten better in the sense that I learn to live more and more in the present. The past is gone. The future is coming. They're just illusion. I've learned to stay quiet with myself in the present and join with the energy of nature. I can just be. I'm very grateful for my life even with the challenges."

**Were you involved in the politics of the early days?**

"There was so much anger and disharmony in those days. I wasn't that much involved with the politics. Perhaps my involvement was more with personal transformation from the political changes and thinking of the time. I consider myself a recovered Catholic. But in those days I was still looking to others for authority. I hadn't learned from where real authority comes. I read a lot of lesbian/Feminist things, which my husband said would be the break-up of our marriage. It was. My friend Earth described the change as a flipping of the poles. That's what I did. I flipped my poles 180 degrees. My life has been more my own since."

**How do you spend your time now?**

"I started a group recently. I call it the End of Life Consideration Group. Friends and I get together once a month or every three weeks

and talk and share current thinking on what we think of the end of life. I sent out a flyer telling them that I need to share thoughts, what ifs, and considerations about this approaching great adventure, death. Those that need to deal with the fear of death could [do it] in a very supportive way. There are sometimes important questions to ask: like what are my practical options for choosing to end my life? When is it not worth going on? There are writings we could explore together, perhaps Kubler-Ross or others."

**Do you think the death of the body is final?**

"No, I don't think we die. I think we change form. It's interesting to discuss and it's very helpful to share with others."

**T**he last woman I interviewed, Crow Cohen, is raising her grandson and finding time to write. She has many accomplishments. I asked Crow why she decided to have a Croning Ceremony.

"It's scary to get older in our society — especially as a single woman. The Croning ceremony was a welcoming to old age. It was a positive action. I invited and surrounded myself with those who value old age. That's what I needed when I turned 60."

**Did you conceive and design the ceremony yourself?**

"No, a friend planned much of it. But I did want to make sure there were people there from my political community as well as my spiritual. I wanted my 12-Step friends there."

**What are some of the challenges of aging?**

"As my body deteriorates, I become more vulnerable. And in our vulnerability is our power. That's about character building and having compassion. When you become disabled you have more compassion for disempowered people in society and hopefully for yourself."

**Do you have a commitment?**

"I continue to work on making sure that my spiritual practice is my bottom line in everything. My spirituality forms my politics now. It used to be my politics formed my spirituality. Growing older is not despairing now that I have a spiritual practice. Clinging to my spirituality is the way I'm going to save my emotional ass."

**What scares you most about aging?**

"Well, my grandson won't go near his great grandmother. He's usually a very hugging and affectionate kid, but, because she is old, he says, 'I don't like old people.' Repulsion towards old age happens very young in our

society. For my Croning I was trying to counteract those fears and that repulsion that goes on. It worked."

**Have we accomplished a lot?**

"There's still sexism, but I'm done pointing the finger. I want to work on tolerance and inclusivity. We radical women helped the world confront how sexism played out. We were revolutionaries. We hurt each other, but we accomplished a lot. People will study that era."

**What about your political activism?**

"My activism is quiet now because of my responsibilities toward my family. I would no longer put my body on the line for my politics. And I'm not a separatist anymore. It's important for me to work with reforming the system. I love my work as a social worker. I love making people feel good. I've learned that service is the path to peace. You know, being in hospice work I am grateful that I've seen lots of different ways people die. It seems the more bitter the person, the harder the death goes. I don't want to be bitter, even though a lot of stuff pisses me off. I want to make different choices around my anger. I want to meditate on it and use it for my art."

**N**ow the Winter Solstice is ahead as we go into the dark. It is good to honor women's passages. Those ceremonies of human warmth are meaningful images we bring into the dark months of winter. Just like we burn wax candles during so many of these winter holidays as a symbol of returning light, a Croning ceremony can be a figurative candle of honor and intimacy that kindles inner light.

We can imagine what a Crone is together. It is not the legacy given to us by patriarchy. There's still much to do in terms of re-imagining. I'd like to believe there is a new consciousness to raise and bring to our gatherings. When we let Her energies come through us together and celebrate life we're adding to the joy on the planet. Mother Earth Herself is a very wise and wizened old Crone. ▼

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