



# On Humility and Revolution

BY CROW COHEN

Once again, I am puzzling over two seemingly contradictory concepts. Humility is a dangerous notion for women to contemplate. We've spent too many years being humiliated, intimidated, made to feel inferior.

When I took my first steps towards feminism, I was married and had two little girls. I loved the slogan, "Uppity Women Unite" and had a t-shirt made with those words on it. I decided to wear it to a family gathering without a bra. This was a big deal for me. Later in the evening, 17 of us were having supper together. My ex-mother-in-law leaned forward from the other end of the table and said, "Carol (that was my name in those days), are you wearing a bra?"

I was mortified! I can't remember what I answered, but since that incident stuck with me for 23 years, you can imagine how embarrassed I was. I'm sure I was bolstered up by the bold image of my bra-burning sisters shrilly protesting in the streets.

A few years later I divorced, came out as a dyke, and cultivated my fair share of bravado. I screamed, "Castrate rapists!" when we surrounded fraternity houses during those early Take Back the Night marches. I spray-painted "Eat the Rich" on the side of the unemployment

office in downtown Burlington. I wrote bold articles in *Commonwoman* newspaper extolling the virtues of pot.

And then I crashed.

Courage based on bravado was not a firm enough foundation to get me through the pain

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of single parenthood, broken relationships, lost jobs, and ostracism by my community. I kept expecting the Revolution that would overturn patriarchy to happen any minute. Then I wouldn't have to deal with the mundane losses of an ordinary life.

Over the years I have had to redefine courage. To me, courage is based on knowing that all I can do is my small part (even when I'm not in the mood, like writing this article tonight), then let go of results. It means

keeping my mouth shut when one of my sisters is driving me crazy because I've already told her the same thing 20 times and it hasn't worked to change her behavior. It means speaking up in a roomful of dykes, knowing that the next sentence out of my mouth is about to make me mighty unpopular.

There's nothing particularly glamorous about this sort of courage. In fact, most courage is accompanied by fear, which is no fun at all. When I'm being a blowhard, I don't allow myself to feel the fear. My favorite quote from Audre Lorde: "When I am acting in the service of my vision, then it becomes less and less important that I am afraid." Notice she doesn't say that fear disappears. She is just teaching us not to dwell on it. Do you remember the last time you woke up in the morning full of pessimistic thoughts and gently eased your way through the minefield of emotions with a cup of tea and your journal? That's courage.

So I guess you can say my notions of courage are much more humble than they used to be. Can courage based on humility rev up enough energy to spark Revolution? How the hell do I know? (There's another form of courage — admitting I don't have all the answers.) All I know is, without the more modest forms of courage, I probably won't make it into next week, let alone the next millennium.▼



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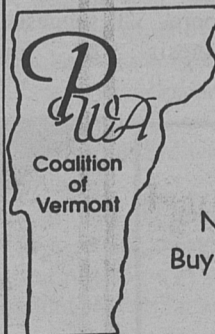
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