

CROW'S



C A W S

Revolution Reconsidered

BY CROW COHEN

Revolution was my favorite word 15 years ago. Our then-new consciousness about the connections among war, rape, pollution — all manifestations of patriarchy's stranglehold on our planet — drew us to the inevitable conclusion that nothing short of a revolution would stop this forward thrust (so to speak) toward doom.

Sometimes I would go off the deep end. I thought that the revolution would happen simultaneously on December 18, 1984, in Jerusalem, Israel and Burlington, Vermont. Why? Because those were two of the places I called home, of course.

I also imagined that there was some mega-computer that controlled the war machine (there probably is), and that one of us (read: lesbian feminists) would sneak into some round room full of maps and lights and quietly sabotage the computer's capability to give the signal to drop the bomb. She would then sneak out and tell a few of us hanging out at the park; we'd get all excited and spread the word, but nobody would believe us. That was OK. There would at least be a handful of deeply relaxed lesbian feminists in the world, and that would be enough of a revolution for me, as long as I was one of the handful who knew "the truth."

As you can tell, my fantasies were a bit desperate, if not slightly narrow in focus.

However it would be accomplished, it would have to happen soon, because the rate of destruction on our planet was (and is) mind-boggling. I did hold out the hope that to effect permanent change, it would have to be non-violent. Violence begets violence, and peace is the point here.

As the years have gone by, I have discovered a hard-to-accept reality. Nothing of lasting value happens overnight — especially not monumental changes in behavior. We Americans are led to believe otherwise. Quick cures, love at

first sight, short-term therapy, fast-acting pills, speed, speed, speed. According to the dictionary, a revolution is "a complete change in something, often one made relatively quickly." How in the world can you have a revolution that happens gradually?

Another truth I've had to face over the years is that pain is the touchstone of growth. Most people don't bother with gigantic

will have fizzled out. (Or will that take an additional 200 years? Now we're looking at 2400.)

Or let's just say a sudden event beyond our imagining does take place, such as the visitation of extra-terrestrial beings who show us an alternative lifestyle to beat the band — living beyond gender roles and associated domination/submis-

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changes in behavior unless they've been suddenly kicked in the butt by life.

And here's one more lesson I've picked up. If pain goes on for a long period of time, you can almost get used to it and deny that it even exists. That's called numbing out, and it's hard to grow when you're frozen up like that. Just like the rest of you, I've spent my fair share in all three states of being — numb, in acute pain, and thrashing about for a quick cure. I wish I could reassure myself that revolution could sweep through a significant portion of the population without the pain, and hence, painstaking revelations that accompany growth and change.

Perhaps one of the keys here is "relatively" quickly, as the dictionary suggests. When measured in the life span of the earth, a couple of hundred years is a tiny blip. When framed in those terms, I can hope by the year 2200 that the patriarchy will have run its course — and not necessarily have been replaced by matriarchy. Perhaps the very concept of domination

sion patterns, for example. My guess is that we may be shown the path as clear as a mountain stream, but that doesn't mean our defenses dissolve suddenly.

What I've learned about inner change is that it's a start and stop, up and down, zig-zag sort of thing. When I was in my 30s and fomenting revolution, it didn't occur to me that 20 years down the road we'd be in the midst of feminist backlash; when I think about it now, it makes perfect emotional and historic sense, as painful as it feels.

So what are our choices when we find ourselves on the downswing? While experiencing pain or fear, the biggest danger is isolation. The antidote is to reach out, admit our frailties, tell our stories, encourage one another, share our hopes. It helps me to conceive of revolution, not so much as a sudden lifting of the shackles into a state of freedom, but as a process of facing inner and outer obstacles day by day, hand in hand. Then I don't delude myself into thinking that human beings are exempt from being human.▼

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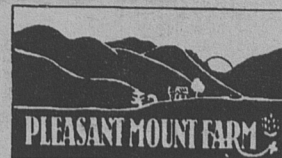
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