



Women, Mother's Day and Rites of Passage

Hollie Bakerboljkovac

Once upon a time, our ancestors celebrated the changing days in a myriad of meaningful ways. Rites of Passage occur at many times throughout our lives; we recognise the most obvious for a woman as those that centralise menarche/menstruation, childbirth, menopause and death. There are many in between — starting school or a job, retirement, marriage or the breakdown of relationships. A Rite of Passage is what happens when an individual internally recognises a shift (sometimes also externally recognised), entering the next phase of life.

Rites of Passage at menarche (first menstruation), is the space for a girl to step from being the daughter to being Woman Unto HerSelf, taking her place alongside the adults, including her parents and grandparents. Here she holds her own wisdom and is acknowledged by her community as a Woman, who is free to create her own life. As a Women's Mysteries educator, I have facilitated ceremonies for young women at their menarche, where they

are welcomed by a community of loving friends, aunties and mentors. More and more modern daughters are experiencing meaningful celebrations in becoming women. It's important work, and the future is promising.

Here's the thing with Mother's Day: Our culture has this arbitrary day for

celebrating mothers, without yet celebrating the woman she first became. In our ancestors' time, a young person went through a formal process from standing amongst the children, advised and directed, to standing alongside the adults, respected for her own point of view. With the acknowledgement of her community, she became Woman.

While modern culture has been busily Photoshopping magazine images and teaching children to twerk, it forgot how to welcome and accept young people into the very important next phase of life.

We call them adolescents, and use



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words like 'hormones' and 'puberty' and worry about them being 'depressed'. Our culture does not welcome the liminal [transitional stage], and our young people, floating in liminal space as their bodies, brains and points of view shift, miss out on learning its wisdom. Instead of growing up to be self-nurturing women, girls often grow up to be mothers who use phrases such as 'incomplete', 'overwhelmed', and 'never have time for myself'.

Young people rebel with a need to 'show them I'm me' while parents do not know how to let go of playing the advisor role. Young people choose risk taking activities as a role-play of breaking away, while parents play the role of too much: too much advice, too much giving, too much 'no time for myself'.

There's a time as a parent to move from being the advisor to the cheer leader.

Without the ancient signals (Rites of Passage) that our species has practiced forever, it's difficult for many parents to know that time.

Many adult women carry a loss and pain that there are no words for, yet is always there. It manifests in various ways that I call 'wounds of woman'. In one woman the wounds are shown in her relationships with other women (competition, aggression). In another it will be health related (PMS, endometriosis etc.) and yet, another will show up in the way she sees herself in the world (body image, eating disorders etc.), or how she creates for the rest of her life (childbirth, projects, career). It will be apparent in her successes and 'failures.' It will be everywhere she goes and the world will simply call it 'normal.'

It's my vision that the 'wounds' that are carried at this time by women in our culture do not get named 'normal.' We must call them out for what they are: traumas that have been holding women in the place of child, (infantilising in body, mind and soul) never allowing her to witness her own wisdom, holding her in judgment, in a space of continued, unnamed liminality.

As adult women, far into our journeys as grown-ups, whether we are mothers or career women or whatever other label we have picked up along the way, we cannot go back in time. There is no way to return to the time of menarche and have some kind aunty take us through the Rites of Passage ceremony we so deserved.

I believe however, that we can heal the loss. I call the work Woman Soul, and it's the work of learning to hold and emerge from the light and the dark within self, equally. It requires reflection and awareness, discipline and common sense, commitment and self love. For many women, it's a long and difficult road. However, it's more worthwhile than all the flat screens and facebook likes you'll ever come across.

This Mother's Day, I invite you to reflect on what it means to BE a mother in our culture, and, look at your relationship with your own mother. Don't make it all about flowers and slippers. Make it meaningful. Women are more than the sum of their breakfasts in bed. Cultural healing begins with you.

Hollie Bakerboljkovac is a counsellor, menstrual educator and wellness advocate. You can find more of her work online, at Institute for Self Crafting.



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