

ANGER

Living With Change: Owning Our Scary Emotions.

" When angry, count ten before you speak; if very angry, an hundred." That was the advice of Thomas Jefferson. Mark Twain said, "When angry, count four; when very angry, swear!" That advice, at least by Twain, was apparently directed toward men, for women, nice women, were not assumed to have the option of swearing, of venting their feelings.

What do we as women do with our anger? If you are like me you were taught that to be angry and to show it is bad-evil. I was to bury it-suppress it deep inside. As a child, I was told that anger was a cardinal sin. That fact must have been deeply embedded in my psyche for, as I have worked on this topic, I have dispaired of having anything at all to say. I have had a problem with anger. I have been conflicted on the one hand by knowing that I have been and am angry and on the other hand by not daring to admit it, to verbalize it. I simply did not own that emotion. It was too scary. I now believe that I have long been a walking bottle of suppressed emotions topped off by a cork of rationality. Working on this paper has helped me to free myself of the association of anger with sinfulness and instead to reach for and grasp an understanding that the power of anger provides the energy to act, to keep relationships alive, to do the work of love.

What a transformation! What a change in how anger can be perceived! I have realized before that anger is a source of energy

and also that, when anger died down, indifference often followed and relationships ceased. I had not made the connection between anger and love that Beverly Harrison does in her paper titled "Anger As A Work Of Love" in Christian Ethics for Women and Other Strangers. I shall quote some statements from that paper: "Anger is a mode of connectedness to others and it is always a vivid form of caring.....anger is a signal that change is called for, that transformation in relation is required.....Anger denied subverts community.....Anger directly expressed is a mode of taking the other seriously, of caring.....where feeling is evaded, where anger is hidden, or goes unattended, masking itself, there the power of love, the power to act, to deepen relation, atropies and dies."

In this series we have been sharing our life stories--our living experiences--our secrets. In my story I shall attempt to pull forth the subordination and oppression that I and other women, in their own way, have unknowingly experienced in a society that at one and the same time produces anger but denies to us the right to express that anger in any form.

My story must of necessity be partial and therefore biased. Many long threads will be missing. My parents, the schools and my communities played a large role in my socialization but the part that I am attempting to tease out and speak about is the role that religion has played in my life, in my perception of reality and in my oppression. At the same time I shall attempt to look at my emotional response to all of that. I do this not only because we are sharing a theological program but also because the perspective from which I am rummaging around in my past is anger.

As I have reflected on the subject of anger I have found that much of my anger is directed toward my early religious training and toward my childhood God and toward His word-the Bible and the mythology that sanctions and legitimates hierarchy-ranking-in the order of creation resulting in the subordination of women to men and thereby to women's oppression.

Before beginning my story I want to say that I shall try to distinguish two selves, one superimposed upon and obscuring the other for more than half a century.

I was born on an Indiana farm where I was a part of the vastness of the earth and the sky. I was a child of the soil who often wandered alone in the woodland, amidst the growing grain, comfortable with solitude. A sense of euphoria comes over me as I see her in my mind's eye and relive her yearning to be entwined in the forces of life.

Her spirit is still mine! It is the root, the essence, of my being despite the swaddling--the wrapping and wrapping--that encased my sense-of-self as I accepted more and more of society's prescriptions for being a girl-child and finally a woman in our culture.

Searching my memory for the root of my spirituality has brought me closer to her than I have been for more than half a century.

A reoccurring childhood dream has come sharply to mind. Night after night, in that same repeated dream, a wraith, a ghost of myself in form only, ran from me-ran out of and ahead of me-as I walked the same spot on the same road. It, my wraith, running lightly, almost drifting, went up the same wooded hill and became more and more nebulous as it approached the crest. Then

it dissolved into vapor.

What a portent! An apparition of myself-my exact likeness-often considered an omen of death. I didn't know what to make of it at the time but I now believe that I was experiencing a form of death. My childhood spirit was being suffocated-stifled by the dark shroud of acculturation.

From early on the culture told me what it meant to be me. That is the way we make "humans" of our children. All of our institutions, the family, schools, church, communities and the media are in collusion to make the basic assumptions of our society become fact as we live out our lives.

I embraced society's definition of reality as if my life depended on it, didn't you? My free-floating childhood self was caught up in midwestern conservatism, both secular and sacred. There was that all knowing male deity, white beard and flowing robes that resided in the clouds somewhere to the northwest but hung out a lot in and near the Baptist church just across the field in front of our house. He was forever peering over my shoulder and always watching when I undressed to be certain that I didn't look at my body in the mirror.

I feared that God and wished he wasn't around so much but I tried to block those feelings and thoughts for God not only knew what I did but he knew what I thought and how I felt as well. I knew that he was an angry God and not very taken with little girls. I would have understood Emily who wrote "Dear God, are boys better than girls? I know you are a boy but try to be fair."

I was supposed to love the God I feared. Dutifully I knelt beside the bed each night and said my prayer;

"Now I lay me down to sleep
 I pray the lord my soul to keep
 If I should die before I wake
 I pray the Lord my soul to take."

for if he didn't the devil might take me to hell.

What I experienced when I prayed was not reverential awe. It was terror. I was alone in that bedroom after the light was blown out and many nights I slept with my head buried under the bed covers.

Later on, in my early teens, I "hit the sawdust trail" as one of those caught up in the Billy Sunday sweep for conversion. What a concept! He-the great father-through this rebirth-would make me better. My uterine birth from my mother, a woman, was inadequate. I, like Eve, must be born of man.

Well, it didn't take. I was the same Lucile the next morning but I didn't tell anybody. When I slipped out of their hands in deep water in New Lake as I was being totally immersed at baptism I decided that I was a total reject. Hoping it wouldn't show, I decided to try to go it on my own. And , again, I didn't tell anybody.

I went off to college and made out very well on my own; honoraries, athletic awards and offices. After college I stored the Keys, medals and awards for I had learned along the way that my real fulfillment would come through marriage and motherhood.

That was 1933-the depth of the depression.

I taught Mathematics for five years and then married a man who had also had an unpleasant encounter with an angry God. We wrote and said our own marriage vows, quaker style, promising "with 'divine assistance' to be faithful and loving as long as we both shall live."

After we were married his professional STAR became ours. When the two of us became one he took the head and continued on his trajectory toward that STAR out there in the real world—the world of economic remuneration and visibility. I, in the invisible world, with the body, sought to get the back-up systems together. I washed on Monday, ironed on Tuesday, worked on the budget and the books, attended to household and personal shopping, gardened and worked on the lawn and did community volunteering on Wednesday and Thursday and on Friday I cleaned. Keep it clean! Keep it clean. KEEP IT CLEAN. Cleanliness is next to Godliness!

There was one thing that I must keep uppermost in my mind. Out there in the real world there were demons that the head must confront day after day. It was essential therefore that I be caring and compassionate when he came home. He must be nurtured for the next day's battles.

What of me, the body? I didn't even know how to ask that question. I was unable to factor myself and my needs into life's situations.

But real fulfillment, they had said, would come not only through marriage but through motherhood. In 1941 I was pregnant and war rumors were in the air. He, the head, was called to join in anti-submarine research. So, while the head produced sonar patents, I, the body, in a strange town, produced progeny, greatly increasing, thereby, the responsibility and details associated with the back-up system.

What now about God? The old dogma is very powerful particularly when faced with the fate of one's children. They were christened (just in case) at the Methodist church in Belmont,

Massachusetts where we were then living.

The Allies won the war. Following the STAR we moved again to the midwest, this time to Minneapolis. By now the children were old enough for Sunday School so we again sought a church, this time one where we would feel comfortable sending our children. We thought the Universalist church down the street was a find for us. There was a loving God. That vindictive God that would consign anyone to hell had been pushed aside. The emotionalism of the revival had disappeared. Before long we were all going to Sunday School; the children in classes and the parents as teachers.

Before long, too, he, the head, wearing gray flannel suits was aimed upward in the corporate ladder and I, the body, wearing my high heels, was adjusting to being a corporate wife giving dinners, parties, teas and pushing from behind as he climbed or slipped downward on the steps of that organizational chart. I was somehow juggling the roles of housemaid, supermom, corporate wife and community volunteer.

I did it all, but a real lethargy plagued me. The gray fog settled. I was caught in the "problem with no name" as it was called by Betty Friedan in "The Feminine Mystique." As I look back, I realize that it was the self-renewing trips to the farm, to the open spaces, that sustained me during this time in my life.

The children grew up, went off to college and then scattered around the country and abroad, taking up their individual lives. We became grandparents. After twenty years of permanence, we became mobile again. The STAR drew us first to the west coast and

then to the east. A heart problem for my husband traveled with us. My widowed mother, in declining health, now came ,too. My being centered on ministering to their needs.

And then, quite suddenly it seems, I was alone. My husband and my mother died within six weeks of one another. No one needed me. Being needed as a daughter, a wife, a mother had been my identity. I had lived vicariously. In a way, a part of me had died with them. I mourned the three of us.

That was nearly eleven years ago. I was sixty-one. The adjustments were endless. After a time I began posting notes to myself; "Keep Pushing", "The Future is Now", "Don't Count the Candles.", "It's a Condition of Mind: If You Think You Can Fly, You Can." and "Keep the Ego on the Move."

And I returned for a time to the farm in Indiana. I had managed it for mother in her later years and , as an only child, it was now mine. There, amidst the growing grain, the thrust for life, I sought a renewed identity.

What did I have to build on? I made lists of personal hopes, strengths, resources. Out of it all came the obvious answer. I am female and growing older. I would focus on those aspects of my reality. That was the conscious part. I am now convinced that I also embraced again that childhood self so long smothered in that cocoon-that dark shroud of socialization.

In retrospect I now see that during the decade before the death of my husband and my mother the whole tenor of my life began moving from comparative stability toward change in many ways.

There was much physical mobility, to be sure, but my basic understanding of my world was changing as well. I was not only living with change, I was also changing with the times. I returned to the University, participated for six years in an experimental continuing education program for women. We called it our retread seminar. I began signing my name Mrs. Lucile Schuck instead of Mrs. O. Hugo Schuck. That was important but I couldn't explain why.

I helped Mary Lou Thompson edit "Voices of the New Feminism" but I wasn't a feminist, whatever that meant.

I was still deep into the closet, but reading...reading.

Read "Our Bodies Ourselves" and put up a full length mirror in the bathroom. I have a great body. My head and my body are connected. I am irritated by that childhood God.

I am reading more books, all written by women--books about Theology.

I begin to click:

History is just that--his story. There is no herstory. Women are motherless.

And the Bible--his Bible--Man's book about his God--Man's glorifier--Man's legitimator.

The church--his church--his sanctuary.

I kneel beside the bed again....and pound the mattress.

I stretch and squirm inside the shroud. For the first time I say, "I won't." I am beginning to understand that I, too, have "wants."

Read "Sexual Politics" by Kate Millett. The clicking speeds up.

The crack in my consciousness widens..It's easier now to see

that we've all been duped, diminished, depersonalized.

Reread sections of the Bible.....I've embraced Eve's guilt, Mary's selflessness, Ruth's self-sacrifice as an expression of love. I identify with the male defined woman. I am a battered woman--beaten down by the divinely ordained cultural assumptions which I have tried to live out. I, like so many other women, am a "self"damaged by Patriarchy.

Served two years on the board of the Unitarian Universalist Women's Federation. We ask the denomination to degenderize the bylaws. I carry that request to our own church in Lexington. Henceforth a pillar of the church proclaims whenever I am present, "Here comes the woman's libber, Ha! Ha! Ha! Woman's Lib is the put-down term for the Woman's Movement. I conjure up a rock, but I don't throw it. It just sits there.

By the time I returned from the farm to Lexington that fall of 1973 I was well along on my journey to awareness---a spiritual journey. The becoming of personhood is sacred.

A consciousness raising group meets at my home.

Reading Mary Daly's "Beyond God the Father."

The closet door flies open.... I tear out..shredding that shroud... that winding sheet of patriarchal perceptions in which my whole understanding and my sense-of-self had become so tightly ensnared. That whole cocoon, the overlay of socialization, including all of the cultural patterns and roles which we live out in our daily lives is legitimated and justified by the stories, the myths of the Bible. Many of the stories reinforce, as divinely ordained, the subordination of women to men. The mythology reinforces the

subordination by declaring it to be divinely ordained.

Man, the only proper revelation of God, becomes prime and sees himself as the norm and woman as defective. The result is that the story is told or written from man's point of view with women- explicitly or by premise, by implication or by assumption-inferior.

It is the global injustice--the global oppression ---the great delusion--the ultimate deception!

My energy seems limitless! It is fueled, I think later, by the bottled up anger in that deep well within and it is fueled by anger resulting from each new revealing click and it is fueled by anger, by rage, by compassionate rage at the oppression of countless women throughout the ages, past, present and into the future who have given and will give all for the myth. My anger is fueled also by the failure of present day theologians and church leadership to make the degrading oppression and injustice so pervasive in our world, this root cause of all oppression, both a major theme of religion and a driving force for action in the world.

What to do? What can women in the pews do about the continuation of this injustice, about the reinforcement of the legitimating mythology weekly from the pulpits of this nation, from the pulpits of the Christian world? And what can women in the pews who want a change do about the Sunday Schools where the bias of ranked relationships is consecrated?

Certainly my own denomination will want to change--oh naive woman-- and the only access to laity for ideological change is the frail

vehicle called the Business Resolution.

I initiate and, with some enthusiastic others including one man, develop a resolution titled "Women and Religion" where the "and" means "as affected by". "Women as Affected by Religion."

Women and men across the continent participate in bringing the resolution to the attention of the General Assembly of the Unitarian Universalist Association in 1977 where it is adopted -- adopted unanimously. Only a few delegates, professional or lay, understand the import of what they are doing.

The resolution promotes the recognition and avoidance in practice, in families and in the institution, of the sexual bias legitimated by the myths of the Bible. "Women and Religion" is applicable to everyone in the denomination, men as well as women.

Those in charge of interpretation and implementation of resolutions are members of the administration--in this case women in the leadership--women who see joining the patriarchy as the route to women's empowerment.

They, the women in charge, interpret and implement the resolution as being primarily a vehicle for increasing the number and status of women in the power structure. That is, they see the resolution as applicable to a very limited and select group for whom three resolutions already exist.

What a distortion! I point out the significant difference between trying to bring about a new perspective for all and trying to raise the status for the few in the on-going hierarchy.

I am refuted by those who interpret resolutions from the perspec-

tive of already being in charge. As in all institutions they have the power to say what is really there and what is important.

I try again and again. I am publicly contradicted, brushed aside and ignored. I am not one of the "real people" but merely an irritating "other".

I scrape paint, paper walls, cut shrubbery, climb mountains.

Read Virginia Woolf's "Three Guineas" and begin looking at the consequences when women start joining men's processions.

I see that patriarchy can and often does run without manpower. Women play the game of ranking as well as men. Eliteism, like sexism, raceism, ageism and nationalism is oppressive.

I title myself "change agent without portfolio".

In following years I initiate two more resolutions pointing up the Biblical legitimation of the oppression of women. They are adopted by the General Assembly but not implemented by those who have long been or have just become the guardians of the super-structure.

Sharon Welch spoke to us at Theological Opportunities Program on "Conflict Resolution." She pointed out the futility of trying to change institutions by the direct approach. When opponents are unequal in power we must nibble away at the edges--nibble everywhere.

My energy for changing existing religious institutions subsides. I am becoming indifferent to religion as expressed by all patriarchal institutions. I want to turn my energy toward bringing about a new age, a new consciousness--to be about creating a

new life-giving vision and not about resuscitating the old death dealing one.

I tear a gigantic rent in the shroud and embrace again my childhood Spirit of Life.

Women's spirit is rising. It is rising around the globe. Sensitive and concerned men are joining us.

We are all on THE JOURNEY.

We'll do fearless thinking, take Connie Buchanan's advice: "stop being nice, dare to be rude, talk back to authorities."

We'll change relationships in families.

We'll refuse to be Gold Star Mothers. We'll stand up against our warring nation--one nation "under God" with divinely legitimated oppression and injustice for so many.

We'll be Liliths in place of Eves. We'll be angry, not selfless Marys. We'll be angry sisters who will speak up to our Popes and will talk back to God. And we'll confront our sisters who use their status to diminish us.

We'll be change agents without permission. We'll bring a new age when all is linked rather than ranked and where none are excluded.

We'll care enough to act--to keep relationships alive.

We'll embrace our scary emotions.

The Power of Our Anger Will Do the Work of Love!