

## HEALING BEGINS WITH ME

by Ann Kreilkamp

*This essay was first published in Crone Chronicles, #32, Autumn 1997.*

There we were, arguing, again, about money. How to allocate money within the Crone Chronicles budget. I saw things one way; he, another. I thought I was being calm and reasonable. To me, he seemed defensive, explosive.

Suddenly he stood up, his face red and mottled, and strode out of the room, yelling, "That's it! I quit! And you'll have a letter of resignation within ten minutes!"

I had just put on my coat. Time for my daily walk. As he was yelling I jerked open the door, shot one last look in the direction he had disappeared, and yelled, sarcastic: "Thanks a lot. That's *all* I need."

This was not the first time. This was one in a long line of explosions or near explosions from him, or me...mostly him, I thought. Many times he had threatened to quit. Several times he actually did quit--for a few minutes, or hours. But never before had he mentioned a "letter of resignation." This was ominous.

I walk down the street fast, head down, jaw clenched, heading for the hill which I usually climb when I'm stuck in Jackson for the day. Walking fast, furious, thoughts colliding like bullets, my body weak, shaking. Trying to stay centered. Trying not to go into shock, notice my body shutting down, going rigid, numb, cold.... This is so discouraging.... How many thousands of times in my life have I fought with men? Beginning with my father, continuing with my horrific first marriage.... Suddenly there it is, that image again--it slips in, unbidden, at times like this--of my first-born son as a three-year-old, so acutely sensitive, sitting rigid in the corner, sucking his thumb raw, while his parents lacerate each other with words.

And now my husband Jeff, with whom I have already lived for seven years--longer than any previous adult relationship! We are fighting

*again!* These fights are so intense, so disturbing, they leave me gasping for air, for sanity. Why? Why? What is wrong? How can we transform this pattern?

I start up the hill. Footsteps slow to accommodate the rise. Thoughts slow, drop down into a pit of possibilities. What if he really does quit? What if he just drops everything--all the business, legal, and circulation aspects of *Crone Chronicles*, not to mention his tech support for all the equipment--in *my* lap! The thought is staggering. As is the idea of doing this magazine without him. Not just the actual work he does, but the whole idea of being in full partnership with a man, both personally and professionally. I've always dreamed of such a partnership, and with Jeff I finally thought I had achieved it. Oh yes, we do fight. And we are ruthless with each other in other ways, too; neither of us gets away with a thing!

Yet this is the first man in my life who doesn't think I'm "too much," "too intense." No need to keep that secret diary anymore. I can be completely myself with him. And the longer it goes on the better it gets. We are exactly matched--two gigantic, thundering, selfish, pompous egos, two sensitive, vulnerable, defended, loving hearts....two souls, struggling to peel away the layers....

Okay, so he quits. He just quits. My racing mind pauses to contemplate this as a real possibility, the cold fact of it penetrating my body. Instantly, I am swamped by a great deadening wave of exhaustion.

Then, immediately, a cold, sure knowing: *if Jeff quits, I quit*. It's just not worth it to me to do the magazine without him. Even with the others who are working with *Crone*, none of them have his expertise, his patient, constant attention to the thousands of technical details involved--not to mention his willingness, all these years to work without pay for a magazine which most women think is only for women! (I never have; to me the questions about "Who is Crone?" nothing to do with gender and everything to do with opening to that ancient feminine aspect within the self, both women and men).

As I say this to myself, "I quit!" I experience that old, familiar, horrible thud in the solar plexus signaling that an emotional cord is being yanked out, by the roots. My eyes squint. The world around me dims, fuzzes.... I'm deep down inside myself now. Keep walking,

still going uphill. Still struggling to get to the bottom of this thing, whatever it is....

Aha, a new thought, following that thud like its answering call. This time I am imagining what it's like to be with Jeff, having decided to quit the *Crone Chronicles*. "What? Impossible! Why would I want to do that? He forced me to quit by quitting, and now I would stay with him, martyr myself to him?" In one sweep of the mind, *I let Jeff go, too.*

Uuhhh. There it is again, another thud, as that emotional cord to Jeff, so deeply rooted into me that its tendrils wind around every capillary, is yanked out. Uuhh. Like being kicked in the solar plexus with a boot.

With each one, I double over in pain, and then straighten up part way, mentally pulling whatever that belief was that had so embedded itself within my belly out, by the root--which leaves a vacuum--into which another insight floods. Each time I pull out another belief by the root, I free myself up to think yet another unthinkable thought.

Each of these thoughts is something that normally would take me days or weeks or months to dare to think, and then still more time, much more time to process emotionally. Here I am thinking them, feeling them, letting them go, one after another after another.

Okay. I've let *Crone Chronicles* go. I've let Jeff go. Now I'm back to me. I realize that what's most important is me. And I have been taking his verbal abuse when we fight, "for the sake of Crone." What bullshit! No magazine, no movement, no archetype, is more important to me than *me*, the quality of my life. First, my humanity, then, everything else.

Wow! Now something new is happening. No more thuds. I seem to have hit rock bottom.

I've also reached the top of the hill and am beginning to go down. The effort of going up, which required great focus, respiratory capacity and strength in my buttocks and thighs, yields to a new motion. Gravity takes me, pulls me downhill like water, it's easy now, one thing naturally flows into another.

Yes, yes. I am the most important person in my life. I must be. My own well-being must take precedence over everything and everyone else. Otherwise what good am I to either myself or anyone, any partner, any project, any magazine, any movement?

I spend time there, in that honoring place, breathing in and out the circling fullness of air, rhythmically pulsing through my body, walking downhill.

Changes continue, become more subtle. I feel myself softening, moving with more grace, more awareness of what is around me. Of the play of feelings within me. Now Jeff swims into view, his great being rocking me ever so gently. I find myself inside his psyche: I am Jeff, experiencing Ann, experiencing Jeff's role in the *Crone Chronicles*.... I (Jeff) am cringing, feel constricted, pissed, explosive.

Suddenly, something I (Ann) said to Jeff several years ago whispers in my ear.... Once, during one of our arguments, I had said to him, sotto voce, but threatening nonetheless, "Don't ask me to choose between you (and *Crone Chronicles*)...." I had actually said that to him, *don't ask me to choose between you and Crone Chronicles!*"

I am back inside him again, feeling that remark rip through my bodymind. Lodge in my heart. "So," I hear him notice unconsciously: "*Crone Chronicles*, a mere thing, a project, is more valuable to her than me, a person, a human being, her lover and partner!"

I have allowed him in. I have become him. All of a sudden, I (Ann) *get* it. My perspective shifts completely. I have entered another reality altogether. I understand his long-running ambivalence. I realize why he has both been with *Crone Chronicles* almost since the day he moved here to be with me seven years ago and why he simultaneously doesn't feel comfortable in his role with the magazine. He entered my life when the magazine was only a year old. He has almost the same his/herstory with it as I do! Because of his expertise, we have dared to go forward from its inception as a small newsletter into a full-fledged magazine with national and international distribution! Were it not for his presence, *Crone Chronicles* might not still exist.

And I'm always calling him "my partner"! But do I believe it? Have I really acted on it? No. Not really. It appears that I have, but I have

not. Why? Because I have never answered that nagging question of which comes first, the work, or the man?

Or rather, I did answer it, 20 years ago, when I left my second husband whom I loved very much because I could not do my work and be his partner too. At the time I did not know what my work was; all I knew was it would conflict with that husband's public role in society, and I didn't want my work to be an issue between us.

So, having made that sacrifice, for the past 20 years, I have believed and acted on the assumption that my work comes first.

Seven years ago, Jeffrey entered a relationship with me which was essentially impossible for him, though neither of us realized it. For if my work came first, then my real partner was not him, but my work. The only thing he could do to become more central in my life, was join with me in doing the work!

This, of course, is the position of many wives with their husbands. In our case the genders are reversed, but the roles are not. As long as one person's work comes first, then the person who is "helping" the other will never feel like an equal.

I was operating on two assumptions, which contradicted one another: the first, that my work came first, and the second, that I wanted an equal partner. And walking down the hill that day was the first time I recognized this situation, the position that my unconscious, hidden ambivalence had put Jeff in. Why he had been so frustrated, so obviously ambivalent, so explosive.

Walking down that hill, I tried another thought experiment, this one of being with Jeff, working through our issues with anger, and together, consciously choosing to be in relationship without *Crone Chronicles*--either terminating it or turning it over to someone else. This felt like a possibility that could actually become real, and it felt like I could live with that reality, even though it made me sad, since I love working with the magazine, and I love working with him in the magazine, too.

But I want him to be my partner, not just in name, but in fact. Not "my" magazine, but ours. Just the thought of this, of actually letting a man in as a person who has equal decision-making power, terrifies me--at that primal level of my own female wounding, exposing that

ancient, hideous, shameful hole in my being.... And no doubt it will bring up terror--or at least more or less anxiety--in many readers, as well. But I must choose this route. Anything less, at this point, lacks faith, and would not be truthful to my own next evolutionary step.

I am a person first, with human needs. Beyond the survival needs of water, food and shelter, for me personally, my next most important need is to honor and follow true partnership with this man, wherever it may take me.

I came back to the office and Jeff's resignation letter was on my desk. One hour later, he returned, and I told him the process I had gone through, and I could feel him soften too, as he heard me acknowledge both how difficult it has been for him and my understanding of the deep roots of that difficulty.

We discussed letting the *Crone Chronicles* go out of our life. We let that be a real possibility. The magazine flowed back in, within minutes. Then I told him that it seemed to me that we had to formalize his decision-making power within the structure of the magazine in order to announce the way this magazine would be fun from now on, as a true partnership. And that to do this we would need to have the two of us be co-publishers.

At first, he refused the idea, as has been his habit with anything having to do with the magazine. Then, as he began to feel more deeply into the root causes of his own ambivalence, and how, if we could transform those, he could feel more comfortable, he agreed to the change.

When I talked with one of our editors, like me, she too felt afraid. "But what if the two of you disagree on something?" she asked. "Well," I said, "we'll get more input from you, and the other editors and other advisors, and eventually, we'll just work it out!"

It has now been two months since that last fight. We have not had another. Even money hasn't been the issue that it used to be. Our talk with each other is softer, less defensive, more collaborative, creative. We're actually learning how to brainstorm, rather than just storm! I no longer make decisions and then tell him about them (or don't tell him--either forget to tell him, or not want to deal with him--which sometimes used to happen, and some of those decisions would affect what he was doing, and it would leave him feeling hamstrung....). He

no longer yells at me the way he did. Neither of us feels abused or abusive.

Stay tuned. And hear this: the healing of the female and the male must begin within me.