



Sophia

Journal of Women & Religion

Sophia: Mother goddess of all, she is the female form of the Holy Spirit. As mother of the soul and mind, she is responsible for the formation and control of wisdom.

Volume 9 Issue 3

Summer 2001



THEMES for UPCOMING ISSUES of *Sophia*:

Fall 2001: Water woman...flow! The experience of being an emotional being and menstruating being. Tears, sweat, and the watering of our souls.

DEADLINE for SUBMISSIONS: August 1, 2001

Winter 2001-2: Healing from Addiction and the impact of the addictions of others in our lives. How we overcome, cope and recover. Stories of healing and hope.

Spring 2002: Badger medicine. Exploring our life underground. Discussion about the roots of our lives and what it means to be rooted.

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The Mammogram

by Maggie Streib

I went to the doctor the other day,
He checked my breasts in a thorough way.
He said, "I think....yes, maybe a bump,
I want a picture of the lump."

So off I went to the picture place.
She took the history of my case...
And my clothes! And she said,
"Please feel free
to have some coffee or some tea."

I sat around in this funny shirt.
And said, "I hope this doesn't hurt."
It squashed and squeezed and I said, when
Will they regain their shape again?
My sarcasm fell on her tired ear.
The nurse just said, "We'll call you dear."

I waited for a call to say,
"You're doing fine. They're both OK."
They said, "There's been a little change.
But nothing that looks really strange."

So I'll be back.
"I'll call you, Dear,
to set up our date
this time, next year"

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SOPHIA: A FORUM FOR YOUR CREATIVITY

Sophia is a publication of the Women and Religion Committee of the Central Midwest District of the Unitarian Universalist Association.

All submissions of original artwork, photographs, articles, poems, short stories, book reviews and essays are welcome. Please submit all text in typewritten form, preferably Windows compatible file format, by e-mail or disk to:

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Proofreading and review by Jen Bartlett

MANY THANKS to Jen for being Assistant Editor this issue! — LM

Letter from the Editor

Life is a journey. This we can all agree. As I look back on my life, I see a clear path that has brought me to this point. (Not that there weren't a few detours along the way.) I wouldn't say the path was paved with gold or porcelain or even brick. My path has been more like a rocky, muddy, messy, thrill ride. I've strayed off the path in places, fell in quicksand, almost drowned in the stagnant waters of my own misguided urges, but in the end I found my way back to forward momentum, a little bit up but wiser for the wear.



That's what this issue is about. The Journey. Whether it be a road trip back home, vacation overseas, or an inner excursion of the soul, this issue speaks to the pioneer in us.

Every day is a little road trip, isn't it? Putting one foot in front of the other, doing the next right thing, taking risks. Perhaps getting to know yourself, and the world around you, a little more intimately every day. Recently I took a trip to the fabric store at the local mall. From the outside I am sure it looked like an ordinary every-day errand. On the inside, it was a carefully navigated foray into strange waters, just a portion of the grander cruise to "knowing-who-I-am-and-am-not-land."

Having shoved away from a sewing machine in a fit of impatient rage when I was 16, announcing to my mother "I will never sew again," I lived this self-proclaimed prophecy for the next 23 years. Now in my 39th year I found myself drawn again to the "Notions" department. I began to see possibilities in the bolts of raw fabric stacked like library books. I carefully choose an easy pattern, best to insure success, and ventured out to my mother-in-law's house to borrow her sewing machine. Fortified with her advice, and knowledge of how to work the bobbin threader, I set out on my high adventure to re-claim a part of me that had been long rejected. As I write this I am wearing the pistachio green skirt I crafted while rediscovering a lost part of myself. That's one kind of journey.

Then there is the outward journey. My 18-year-old son and I are driving to the Grand Canyon later on this month. This road trip may be the last time I will be able to travel with my son alone, who knows, what with him growing up and getting a life and all. So much could happen, the car could break, it may be too hot, maybe we will argue. But the anticipation of venturing out into new territory makes me giddy with excitement.

This is the point; The trip is worth taking, even considering the risks. Getting up in the morning, suiting up, showing up and participating in life. That is what makes a life.

So, there you go. Inside this issue are a few takes on that theme. Perhaps you will reflect on your own journey. Maybe you will identify or see how you are unique.

Sincere thanks to those who contributed to this issue. Without the input of these women *Sophia* would not exist. Keep those cards and letters comin'. As usual, I encourage you to offer something that you have written. Whether it be poetry, artwork, a song, a ritual you have created, a story, book review or commentary, I look forward to receiving these bits of your creativity. Thanks again.

In Humble service,
Lynn Marie

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR:

Dear Lynn Marie;
The Spring 2001 edition of *Sophia* arrived today -- I have just re-emerged into the day after being wonderfully lost amidst the words and poetry, spontaneous laughter and tears. Really enjoyed the prose of your letter. Thank you, thank you!
Jan Snedigar
Rapid City, South Dakota

Dear Lynn Marie:
While reading the spring 2001 issue of *Sophia*, I resonated with Joanne Fought's repulsion to the word "widow," as noted in the enclosed. (Poem on p. 6)
Thanks much for another great issue.
Love,
Emily Meter
Deerfield, IL



Chair, Sally Gonzalez sallyque@hotmail.com
Past Chair, Carol Hosmer schosmer@earthlink.net
Secretary and Ronora 2001, Susan Zuern
Treasurer and webweaver, Gretchen Ohmann
WS2002 Liaison, Jean Pierce
WS2002 Site and Food, Misty Sheehan
Mickey Callahan, Gayla Elliott, Elly Wynia
www.womenandreligion.org

The Women and Religion Committee members are making time available to present woman-centered Sunday services at district churches. Please contact Sally if your church or fellowship is interested in a W&R Sunday.



WomanSpirit Summer Gathering
At CAMP RONORA
Watervliet, Michigan

August 3-5, 2001

Deadline to Register:
July 16th!

More info on the web at:
www.womenandreligion.org/Ronora.htm

WomanSpirit Winter Conference
***** **January 25, 26 and 27, 2002** *****

Hickory Ridge Conference Center, Lisle, Illinois

"Nourishing the Spirit Within"

Keynote Speaker:
Vicki Noble
Creator of the Motherpeace Tarot cards

More info at: www.womenandreligion.org/WS2002.htm

The Ronora Poems

Camp Ronora near Watervliet, Michigan is a magical place where beauty soothes the senses. These three poems and "The Four Sacred Plant Mothers Came" all come out of my experiences there.



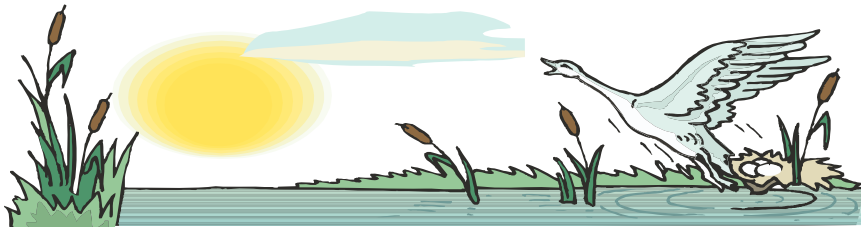
Awakening Sky

Mist rises from the meadow grasses in the early morning.
Birds sit on wires in prayerful stillness awaiting the sun.
A graceful dance of silent women greets the dawn
in moving meditation
Under the ever changing colors of the awakening sky.



Blue Heron

A rainbow spray blows over the water
As iridescent dragonflies flit among the cattails
and water lilies.
Across the lake a Blue Heron is not afraid to
stick its neck out
To take a step forward.



Seven Swans at Sunset

Rippling waves like tiny mirrors reflect the golden light.
Bare, black tree branches stand in bas-relief against the bright.
Overhead seven swans circle the water in flight.
Two land in the lake as the sun says, "goodnight".

New Story: Journey of a Caterpillar

All Hallows Eve: out of an egg case is born a caterpillar.

It is cold! "I have been born too late!"

She took nourishment from the dying flowers and herbs. They offered her strength and endurance. It soon became so cold and she was desperate to seek shelter, so she found a pile of wood and crawled deep within. She wove a warm blanket around herself and slept. Her dreams were full of questions.

There was a kind farmer who went to gather his wood for the fire on the hearth. Unknowingly he uncovered the cocoon, which fell open with a rude awakening! Slowly, slowly out of a deep dream she pokes her head out of her blanket when she emerges. She looks at herself and finds her color is black.

"Now...where am I and what should I do?"

The plants had told of the promise of a spring and of beautiful colors and plenty of warmth and food! She grieved for her black, cold and desperate state of being. She had to move! Her wings unfolded and carried her North toward the lights and to find the North Mother and there she was in the garden of ice!

Black Beauty shared her dreams and posed her questions to the Mother:
Why am I here now? What is my purpose?

The North Mother tells her "You are the Dark Descent. Metamorphose!
Out of this darkness will come light!"

North Mother then changes her into a snow-white butterfly! The warmth of compassion protects her until... the first day of spring.

This is the day she has been born for!

A new Mother carries her upon warmer winds of hope and renewal. Mother East of Dawn has come for her... to set her free!

She is given the task of Spring Messenger and released to find her way back to the Center of the Circle to bring the white light of hope, renewed life...

Transformation.

Zoamore'

Poem for Emily

Don't call me a widow
I am a window
that death blew open.

Sitting at the threshold
where lately he walked through,
Love builds bridges to the beyond –
spans the space-
where you see only the wall.

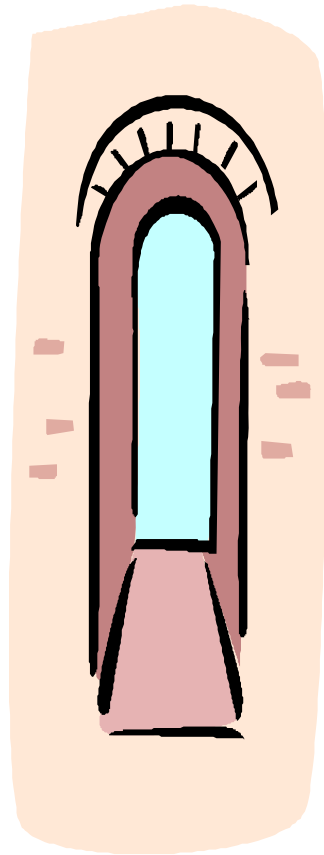
To say that death is only loss
is only half a truth –
Like saying desert is only empty space,
the night sky only darkness.

Death draws the soul wide open,
even the heart melts down
making hot rivers that cut
through commonplace talk.
Sit with me in this liminal place
and learn.

Rebecca Armstrong, Feb 12 '92

Rebecca wrote this in reply to my initial rejection of being identified as a widow soon after Don's death in October 1991. I thought I was much too young to be a widow. Later I learned 56, my age at the time, is the average age of widows in the United States.

— Emily Meter



Mounds.” Over 65 women showed up in the winter dark to form a circle in the headlights of cars amidst the gently falling January snow. The day dawned gray, but the connection to the EarthMother was powerful. There was no turning back!

We shared a vision of taking WomanSpirit to the land. We wanted a place where mothers and children could get away together. We also wanted to keep the cost low in order to attract as many as possible. At the time Judy Holman was past chair and Fran Reynolds was chair. We had been researching sites. Helen Hughes was the one who found Ronora. She had studied with Ed McGaa there and knew DJ [DJ Leggitt, owner of Camp Ronora].

Helen and I co-chaired the first WomanSpirit Summer Gathering at Camp Ronora in 1994. We scheduled it to be as close as possible to Midsummer/Lammas/August first. We had 97 paid registrants plus children, teachers, committee members and volunteers. Phaedra Oorbeck was featured speaker and led a Dark of the Moon ceremony. Althea Northgate Orr led an herbal class. There were workshops offering rattle making, Maiden-Mother-WiseWoman, drumming, and yoga. Activities included an early morning ceremony entitled “Seven Directional Movement Meditation”, Talking Circles, the Dances of Universal Peace, swimming in the lake, Medicine Wheel, give-away blanket and a Corn Mother Blessing. Best of all, the Sacred Fire was returned to the land. And the beat goes on!



Camp Ronora © 2001 Gretchen Ohmann

Taking the Sacred Fire Back to the Land

by Melinda Perrin

As we approach the Seventh Annual WomanSpirit Summer Gathering at Camp Ronora, Brenda Mayo from this year's committee asked for some Her-Story on Ronora and how it got started. This is my recollection, bolstered by my large notebook with all the minutes, which I didn't realize I still had!

For years Judy Holman, who served on the WomanSpirit committee, had wanted to have a Summer Conference, much like the UUWF's each June at Allerton, Illinois. Like many great ideas, it evolved slowly, as ideas and minds changed to prepare us for what came to be the Ronora experience.

The first WomanSpirit I attended was the first Evanston conference about 10 years ago. The theme was "Comparative Religions." For the Saturday morning opening we had a Native American ceremony where I started drumming to raise the energy. This was the first time there was drumming at the conferences and the first time there was a Native ceremony. (There had been some resistance, due to the perception that Native American spirituality was patriarchal. Not in my Seneca tradition!) Phaedra Oorbeck had opened the night before by calling the directions and leading a Wiccan ceremony in the Cornfield Tradition. I'm not sure the conference had ever been opened by calling the directions before then, but I could be wrong.

1993 was my first year on the Women and Religion committee. That was the year a big heartbeat drum was introduced at the Madison Conference. Helen Hughes, Marilla Missbach and I were beating on the big drum, which lent its power to the drama of the evening ceremony. It was magical. The heartbeat of the Mother had been introduced! But still, there was no Sacred Fire and the cold of winter did not seem conducive to feeling Her beneath our feet. I longed for a connection to the earth at the Winter Conference. I wondered; how could you celebrate women without touching Mother Earth?

The following year, at the 1994 conference in St. Louis, the theme was "Women of Whirling Rainbow." It was to launch the much-touted sequel to "Cakes for the Queen of Heaven"--- "Rise Up and Call Her Name." Goddesses of various ethnicities were introduced. We went offsite for the first time during "Dawn Ceremony at the

Book Review:

Tales of a Female Nomad: Living at Large in the World
by Rita Golden Gelman

Reviewed by Lori Ernst

Looking for some summer reading to transport you far away from the same old routine — and along the way maybe even challenge and inspire you? Rita Golden Gelman's true story, *Tales of a Female Nomad*, might be just the ticket.



Gelman, author of several successful children's books, tells the story of her journey of self-discovery as she travels and lives in several exotic places — among them Thailand, Bali, New Guinea, Central America, and the Galapagos Islands..

Her life as a "nomad" begins as she is in her late 40's. Her husband busy with a successful career in Los Angeles, her two children grown, she decides to spend a month in Mexico, where she has a harrowing experience with an illness that literally burns off her old skin — a metaphor that is not lost on her, for it turns out to be the beginning of a radical transformation in her lifestyle, and ultimately, her own identity. A divorce follows a few months later, and she decides to continue her travels, honoring an inner urge to explore new horizons. Fifteen years later, she is still a nomad, without a permanent home. But in another sense, she is deeply at home in herself!

Gelman is a lively, engaging storyteller, and her book is full of fascinating details that put you right by her side as she travels the world alone, knowing few of the local languages, and relying on her intuition to help her out of tough spots. You will marvel at the wealth of her experiences, and learn much about how women connect with each other and weave the web of spirit and culture.

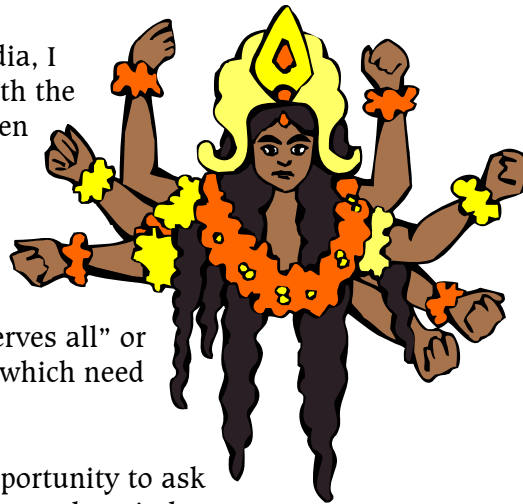
Lori Ernst considers herself a daughter of Sophia. She lives in Elkhart and the world of the imagination.

Impressions on the Goddesses of India

By: Misty Sheehan

Ohn, Sarasvati namah!

When riding the train in India, I would discuss Hinduism with the other passengers, mostly men traveling from one place to another. I would ask them which of the deities was most important to them and they would inevitably answer, "Vishnu, who preserves all" or "Siva, who destroys things which need to be destroyed".



Later on, when I had the opportunity to ask the same question to a woman, alone in her home, she would inevitably answer, "Durga, a Goddess who protects all". The textbooks tell us Hinduism has three major gods: Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva, but my oral conversations were telling me a different story.

I went to India to learn about the Goddesses, in particular, Sarasvati, Goddess of wisdom. Why are there so many Goddesses in India? What is their function? And what does this do for women? Do they see Goddesses as role models, as petitionary agents, and images to thank for the glories of the world? Or as soul mates, with whom to share sorrows?

Durga, I found everywhere. High in the Himalayas, in Himachel Pradesh. In the spring I walked through a vale of irises, purple in the spring sun, under tall, thick pine trees, to a small wooden chapel. Inside the chapel, was a chthonic stone, sacred to these people. Above the stone was Durga.

In Mysore, in the south, I took the pilgrim's walk up a small mountain to the temple at the top, bothered by monkeys along the



Ooh-Wah

©2001 Lynn Marie Helvey

CHORUS: I sing Oo - oo-wa - ah, oo - oo-wa - ah, watch my spir - it
fly, I said, oo - oo-wa - ah, oo - oo-wa - ah, way up in the
sky, I said, oo - oo-wa - ah, oo - oo-wa - ah, watch my spir - it
fly, Back to my - self, back to my life.

1. I have wan - dered wil - der-ness, saved my-self from
lon - li - ness, sit - ting at the wat - er - fall's edge.
I've been left for a cast - a - way, now I'm
back to stay, here to sing my song one more day.

way who wanted my food. This temple is a large magnificent structure for which the city was famous -- to Durga.

I watched my friend, Rajni, setting up her daily altar in her home to Durga, using flowers, incense and rice. Durga is shown riding on a lion or tiger, her many arms each with a weapon, as her spear is rammed into the head of the buffalo demon, whom she has come to destroy.

The Devi Mahatmya tells the story of Durga's birth to protect the world from the buffalo demon: "Blazing like a mountain, filling the firmament with flames. That peerless, unified brilliance, born of the bodies of all the gods, became a woman, pervading the three worlds with her splendor." (Coburn:159)

Does Indian history have women who fight? Yes, indeed. In the Ramayana, Kaikeyi is charioteer for her husband, Dasaratha, who is mortally wounded in battle. She maneuvers him out of battle and nurses him tenderly until he recovers. The Mahabharata also tells of women who are renowned for their abilities as charioteers. Draupadi fights with her words and understanding of truth. Called into an assembly to be made a slave, each of the men present literally wilts after her piteous monologue to them about the rights of women. The Rani of Jhansi is a favorite folklore heroine who took to the battlefield as a general to protect her people.

Also interesting is an underlying philosophical content in Hinduism, which is the idea of prakriti/purusa. This suggests that male and female are the underlying components of the universe. Prakriti is the feminine energy which charges up the characteristics of the male purusa.

Does this help women today? I don't know. India was one of the first modern nations to have a female prime minister, yet for some Indian women there is still no way out of oppression.

I left India with the following question; Can the Goddesses now come forth and do for society and cultures what they do for individuals?

Makin' It: A Lighthearted Exploration of Elemental Energy

Midsummer, we may honor
senses and spirits of the air
our own breath to create these
site phenomena known as
soap bubbles!
some childlike people of
age, and buy or stir up
own bubble mix. Here's a
simple recipe:

4 1/2 cups water
1/2 cup dish detergent
Some experts recommend Joy,
the best, some say Dawn.
1/2 cup clear corn syrup or
erlenmeyer, for stronger (giant)
bubbles (optional)

Stir well but gently, do
not shake or make suds. Be
allowed to sit for a day or two
settling. Besides using the tradi-
tional wand, get adventurous
making huge bubbles by bench-
marking into a big wand, or
of tiny bubbles by dipping
under and swinging it
through the air. The
possibilities are endless!

NOTE: Playing with bubbles
is definitely an outdoor activity.
Best on grass or a beach. But
a deck or patio can make
surfaces, so watch your step!

I wish you had been there. I wish you had seen them.

The night was enchanted, the women the same.

Corn Mother, Bean Mother, Squash Mother, Strawberry,

The Four Sacred Plant Mothers, all of them came.

Strawberry's face glowed pink in the darkness

She spoke of the magic of each woman's blood

And how like the moon, each of us cleanses

The importance of keeping ourselves pure in spring's mud.

Corn Mother's kernels were many in color.

Golden tassels of Truth streamed from her face.

Corn gives us humor, our strength in Earth changes.

Corn brings fertility to each human race.

Beans sometimes test one's sense of one's dignity.

But Bean Mother always nurtures her own.

Beans and their magic call Grandfather West Winds,

Beans bring the rains that make all green things grow.

The coppery visage of Squash Mother smiled sweetly.

Her fruit looks like women, and sometimes like men.

She spoke of the magic when two fit so neatly.

She spoke of the Mystery as one born again.

I wish you had been there. I wish you had seen them.

The night was enchanted, the women the same.

Corn Mother, Bean Mother, Squash Mother, Strawberry,

The Four Sacred Plant Mothers, all of them came.



---Melinda M. Perrin, © April 1996

The Four Sacred Plant Mothers Came

(Recited to a heartbeat drum)

Around a fire a circle of women

Stood in the meadow, bathed in the light.

Their voices were chanting; their drums beat a heartbeat.

At their feet candles glowed in the night.

Slowly, majestically, masked beings entered

Each one a spirit of a sacred plant.

Corn Mother, Bean Mother, Squash Mother entered,

Carrying their bounty in baskets in hand.

These three are Sisters sent to sustain us.

Both fresh and dried, they ease winter's pain.

Starflower-Strawberry, blood red and juicy,

Strawberry, Queen of the Plants also came.

Overhead stars shone. Rainclouds had parted.

Overhead moonlight lit their way.

Out of the woodlands, the spirits came walking.

To talk to the women, to each have her say.

Strawberry speaks in the East, facing westward.

Opposite her, the Bean Mother talks.

Integrity, dignity, each one possessing,

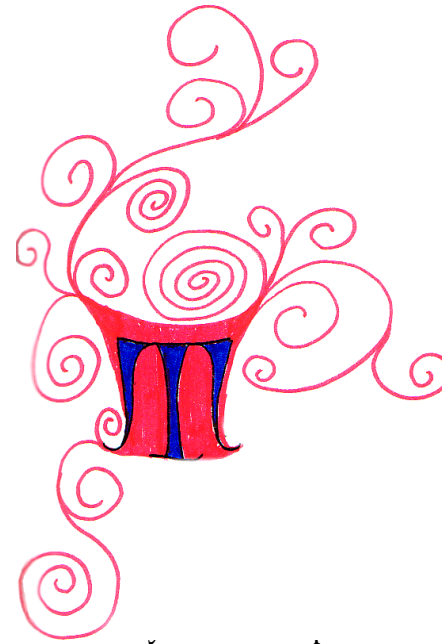
A map for the Earth Path, each of us walks.

Corn is our roots, in the South our stability.

Her Truth travels northward where wisdom resides

In Squash Mother, who shares her ability

To learn of survival in uncertain tides.



A Cameo Appearance

by Cameo Victor

The Journey of the FOOL

to be involved in the study and of symbols. I've studied symbolism y search to understand art, artists, The Tarot, in particular, fascinated and deep psychological significance. to write about the journey of the

Fool, and to illustrate it with contemporary graphics from magazines in order to update and restate the images. In the Tarot, the Fool represents the essential self taking a journey through 21 stages of growth. Each image, from the Magician to the World, represents a particular problem or stage of development that the Fool/Self must undergo until she emerges as a happy, mature, "enlightened" human being.

A symbol system (such as the Tarot) is not a dogmatic assertion of a truth, but merely hints or alludes to it, allowing complete freedom for our own unique and personal interpretation. My mission [in writing this book] is to dispel ignorance about this ancient teaching tool, to de-mystify the Tarot and to make it available to more people as a guide to health, happiness, and self-understanding. The result is my book, published in 1999, *A Self-Guided Tour to the State of Happiness*.

Editor's note: Cameo's book has also been reviewed by Susan Wittig Albert, who was the keynote speaker at the WomanSpirit 2001 Conference this past January. Dr. Albert's review is on her Story Circle website at www.storycircle.org/bookreviews/

Book Review

A Self-Guided Tour to the State of Happiness: Cameo TAROT Collages

*Written and Illustrated by Cameo Victor
(self-published, available from the author.
Contact her at cam4jim@GTE.net)*

Reviewed by Jen Bartlett

When I heard the title, “A Self-Guided Tour to the State of Happiness” my first reaction was, Where do I sign up? Actually, it’s very easy to take this tour, and once you begin you will find it a deep and enriching journey into your own psychic depths. The “Tour” (for short) is a book, the creation of Cameo Victor, an active member of the Elkhart, Indiana UU Fellowship. It is a visual and poetic exploration of the Tarot cards, and truly a feast for the eyes and the soul.

Those readers who attended the WomanSpirit 2001 Conference at Notre Dame may have met Cameo or seen her booth, where she offered Tarot readings. One of our wise women, Cameo has explored many paths of human consciousness and spirituality, including the Arica Institute of Oscar Ichazo. She has used the Tarot cards as a personal-growth tool for many years, and has a deep relationship with them. She also presents her work in workshops. An accomplished visual artist, she has created an amazingly beautiful set of photo-collage Tarot “cards,” although they are not card-sized, but stunning full-sized color pages in this book.

The pages are complex collages, layered with images of everything wondrous, witty and wild: witches and lions, clowns and butterflies, angels and monsters. Each page draws you in and invites you to dream, to remember, to imagine, and to meditate.

Her helpful introduction tells us that through years of study and intuitive work, Cameo discovered that the tarot deck is NOT a collection of unrelated images, but is instead, “an elegant purposeful design that reveals the structure of a step-by-step teaching system. It’s not a random pattern! It’s a map!” The map, Cameo explains, is to guide the Self, symbolized by the Fool, through the stages of life, progressing and evolving till she reaches “enlightenment.”



She offers some interesting suggestions for using this map, and gives us an overview of the cards. The majority of the book is devoted to the card-collages themselves. The text which she wrote to accompany each page has a poetic quality which perfectly complements the pictures. It presents information about the cards and asks probing questions to help stir our heart and soul energy and deepen our journey to the “state of happiness”.

Anyone who is familiar with the Tarot will find this book fascinating. However, I think anyone exploring dreamwork, Jungian psychology, and visual poetry will also find soul food within these pages. I was not very familiar with the cards — I’ve had only two Tarot readings. But once I saw this book, I knew I had to have it, and that I would return to it again and again as a tool for self-exploration. That is exactly its purpose, as Cameo states; not to “predict” the future, but to inspire and assist us in living more deeply, more creatively.

The book is large-format, spiral bound, and superbly printed on glossy paper. The high-quality printing makes the cost a bit higher than mass-market books, but the vibrant, saturated color of the images makes me glad the author did not skimp on the printing. This is a treasure — a very special work from a very special woman.

Jen Bartlett attends First Unitarian Church, South Bend, Indiana. She is an artist, writer, and yoga teacher.