

Crete Reflection: Coming of Age
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Nearly six years ago, I went on a “Goddess Pilgrimage to Crete” with Carol Christ. There are moments when it feels like only yesterday. I can vividly recall the warmth of the sun, the coolness of the caves, the taste of delicious Greek food, and the closeness within our group. In my mind, I can hear Susie’s laughter as we celebrated her birthday, Karolina’s wise guidance that kept us well and safe, and Diana’s tears as she shared her struggles. I can see Nicole’s confident stride and Lisa’s beautiful smile, and touch Persephone’s (our canine sister) fur. I remember the strength and power of our rituals, and the depth of our caring for each other.

But no matter how immediate may feel, time has moved on. We’re all six years older, and even Persephone is no longer the gangly puppy she once was. Despite the passage of time, my pilgrimage to Crete has echoed through my life since then, and my memories have served as touchstones as I move in the direction of my dreams. Crete is with me every day. Occasionally, songs and chants from the trip will pop into my head unbidden, but always welcome. The soap by my kitchen sink rests in a dish filled with colorful stones from the beaches of Crete. I wear my tiny snake ring, a gift from group member Darlene. These things feel quite ordinary now, but they are rich with the energy of that time, and it is that energy that continues to give me its strength.

Recently, the passage of time and the fullness of the Crete experience came together for me. While in Crete, I had casually bought a beautifully glazed red ceramic bowl to be used for my daughter’s coming of age ceremony. At the time I bought it, she was a little girl, and the ceremony seemed impossibly far in the future. I bought the bowl, not knowing how I’d use it, but certain that I’d figure out something when the time came. Earlier this year, the time arrived to dust off the bowl and celebrate with my daughter and my local women’s circle. I was flooded with memories from Crete, and decided to make the bowl the centerpiece of her ritual.

The bowl occupied the center of the altar, surrounded by a set of Russian nesting dolls. Although no one at Julia’s coming of age was present with me in Crete, nevertheless I felt the energy of our group in the room. In spirit, all my Ariadne sisters were there with me. We crowned Julia with roses, and offered her our blessings and wisdom as we offered our symbolic gifts into the bowl. Snippets of pilgrimage ritual memory found new life that night. We celebrated the Goddess and our sisterhood as we welcomed a new woman to the world. Blessed Be.

“The Vessel and the Gift”
Julia’s Coming of Age Ceremony
The Sisters of the Spiral Path
February 27, 2009

Toni: We have come together tonight to welcome a new woman to our circle. I call on the ancient grandmothers from the deep past to bless our gathering. I call on earth, air, fire and water to bless our gathering. I call on the Spirit of Life, the Great Mystery to bless our gathering. Julia, come and join us, and bless our gathering with your presence.

Julia enters and sits.

Rebecca (aka Mom): I want to tell you a story. It is the story of all of us here, and today it becomes your story as well. We are all like the nesting dolls that you see on the altar. This one represents you. This one represents me. Before your birth, I carried you within me, just as Grandma carried me, and her mother carried her. Before her came a long line of women, all the way back to the beginning, when humans were emerging distinct from the rest of life on earth. The very biggest “doll,” of course, is Mother Earth. These smaller ones represent possibilities, and hint at generations of women yet to be born, your daughters and their daughters.

All these past women since time immemorial carried within them the spark that would become you. Each one is a sacred vessel, who carried the next generation of daughters into being, and carefully shepherded them to womanhood. Your existence is a testimony to their labors. Within you, in every cell of your body, there exists a genetic link, unbroken, to these women. It is literally the same as that of the most ancient woman in your line. It is her gift to you.

Now you join this long line of women. It’s time for you to take your place. You have bled. You have come into full womanhood. Your body now has the potential to be a vessel to carry the next generation into being. But regardless of any future generations, you are a vessel for your own soul. You are a vessel for your creativity, your thoughts, wishes, hopes and dreams.

When I was in Crete, you were six years old, just a little girl. While I was there, I bought this bowl, this vessel, thinking I would save it for your coming of age ceremony. At that time, I could barely imagine this day, but now here it is! The bowl symbolizes many things. It symbolizes all the women who came before you. Its color symbolizes women's blood and reclaims that blood as sacred and holy. It symbolizes all the women here with you today. But most of all, it symbolizes you. As we each pour an offering into your bowl, we offer you a gift.

(Each of us now pours a small amount of our offering into the bowl, then reads the blessing that follows.)

(Kimberly offers olive oil.)

Kimberly: This oil symbolizes richness. I wish for you a life rich in love. May you grow in this richness every day of your life.

(Allison offers wine.)

Allison: In ancient times, wine was used as medicine. This wine symbolizes health. I wish for you a long and healthy life.

(Cindy offers water.)

Cindy: This water symbolizes clarity. I wish for you the ability to see situations clearly, and to discern the truth. May you always see your truth clearly.

(Katherine offers milk.)

Katherine: This milk symbolizes nurturing and comfort. May you always find what you need to sustain you. May you find comfort and sustenance when you need it.

(Mom offers honey.)

Mom: This honey symbolizes the sweetness of life, joy and happiness. I wish for you a life filled with happiness and joy. May you be blessed with life's sweetness.

(Lee Ann offers salt.)

Lee Ann: This pinch of salt represents the salt of your tears. With it, we recognize that life is not always easy. Like everyone, you will have times of sadness, difficulty, pain and grief. May you always have women friends to hold you and help you through the tough times. May

the joy of your life far outweigh the sadness. But no matter what the future has in store for you, may you always grow in inner strength and courage as you walk through life's journey.

(Toni offers sage.)

Toni: This sage represents wisdom. I wish for you a life of ever-growing wisdom. May you be wise beyond your years when you are young, and may your wisdom grow with you even into your elder years.

Mom: We have offered you our gifts. In giving them to you, we in return have received a blessing from the experience. But, you too must give of yourself, and give back to the world some of what you receive. To symbolize this, take the bowl and pour out its contents on the ground as an offering to the earth.

Julia pours the contents of the bowl onto the ground from the porch. She places the empty bowl back onto the altar. Afterwards, she says...

Julia: I have been blessed. I offer my blessing in return.

Now, we relax. We pass around a celebratory sweet, and share some of our own wisdom with Julia. We'll go around the circle. Everyone share something you wish you had known when you were her age. If you're not comfortable sharing, just pass. It's ok. Then, if Julia wants to, she can share her thoughts with us.

Group hug!!!

Lee Ann: Welcome, Julia, to our circle!! Our circle is open, yet unbroken. Blessed Be!!!