

# Croneology

by Karen Ballinger

*Ce texte est une ode aux femmes;  
aux liens puissants qui les unissent  
les unes aux autres et à la façon  
qu'elles ont de bâtir le futur.*

*I am writing my oral history.  
This is who I am.  
This is who I come from.*

This is for Demeter and Persephone, Cerridwen, Boadicea, Europa, Freya, Baba Yaga, Omatsu, Maeve and Nammu. This is for Ayamayama

Oshune. This is for Mary, Gail, Maidie, Violet, Laura, Kim, Cindy, Athena, Nettie and Jennifer. This is for Marsha and Brienne. This is for Shelly who lies dying in bed as we speak. This is for us, those that go before us and those that come behind.

This is for the Sisterhood that stands before me and that stands behind me, the Sisterhood that gathers around my bed every night, the Sisterhood that holds me in the Altar of life. This is for the 14 sisters. This is for the 700 women who have been murdered by their partners in the three years in Canada since December 6, 1989. This is for all those other women that we never hear about. Anonymous. This is the web that carries us across the waters, the network that gives me life.

Momma: One day when you get older, you'll get less radical. You'll settle down.

Me: Not likely. I'll become a Crone. And my Croning will be like sweet sugar on the tongue—a melting and melding, a shaping and creating. Crone, Wise Woman, Healer, Peacemaker, Memory Bank.

We are sitting in circle. Healing. In silence. Thirty women gathered, in sacred space, healing in silence.

I cry, I sob. I feel as if I will never stop crying. I cry women's tears as I sit in the centre of the room. Women surround me. They hum, they are a room full of bees. Bees, *melissae*, servants of Demeter. I tell the bees of Shelly's death. Of Shelly's life. Of Shelly's daughter, Jasmine. I cry.

I cry for all the blighting, all the snapping off of the tendrils of creativity, I cry for all the women who are never permitted to cry.

When I have truly finished crying, I sit back. The women touch me. They touch me on the head, on the shoulders, on the back, all over. They hold their hands on me and hum. They hum and they hum. I leave the centre of the circle, sad but whole. Now I know who I am. Again.

Granddaughter of Daisy and of Emma  
Daughter of Margaret  
Sister of Sandra  
Mother of Marsha

I am writing my oral history. My grandmother Emma walked all the way from London to Wales in three days. Carrying her shoes. Because she knew she would never be able to buy another pair. My mother gave birth to my sister at home with a midwife. After WWII, when she emigrated to Canada, she weighed only

98 lbs. In Montreal they rented a converted garage until they could afford a better place to live. There was one cupboard to store their food in. This is who I am. This is who I come from.

Inside the forest, Snow White and Rose Red built a lean-to out of dead logs from the forest floor. Then they lined the spaces between the logs with moss. A fire was started and a pot put onto boil. You must be careful, said their wise mother. Don't start a fire too close to the roof. They boiled up blackberry leaves and ate honey from combs in the hive near the edge of the forest. They put small pine boughs on the floor and made beds for the night. They slept looking at the stars they knew shone beyond the roof.

Sandra lives in a 16th-century pub on the Thames near Oxfordshire. She serves up delicious meals and organizes fishing expeditions for Japanese tourists. Foxes are seldom seen. The resident ghost doesn't like anyone sitting in his place at the bar, especially if they are playing shove ha'penny. The swans swim up and down on the river Thames near the old stone bridge.

I dream of pumpkins and squashes too wet on the vine. I dream of crystals and amber rocks that split open to show brown flowers inside. I dream of you, my sweet, tender on the vine. We couple and play among the zucchini and the watermelon, the earth gives up her moisture and we fall inside her gentle arms. Two with two and two among two. Two that are one and one that is two. Your brown hair matches mine. Lizzie and Laura, Snow White and Rose Red.

Marsha writes poetry instead of doing her homework. She feeds Freya, her gerbil, recycled toilet rolls. Marsha of Mars, virgin birth of Juno. A gift from the Goddess, born under the Northern Lights in August. Aurora Borealis. Aurora, goddess of the Dawn. She sleeps in a room covered in stars. Just before midnight, she comes alive.

Snow White and Rose Red live on in the forest. On sunny days they swim in the creek and sun themselves on rocks full of fool's gold. They comb out their hair in waves and twist it into knots. Their lean-to has been replaced by a log cabin, hewn from Douglas Fir and cedar. The roof peaks at the corners to invite the

Spirit of the Forest to reside within. They garden heal-all, motherwort, mugwort and parsley at the edge of the clearing. Apples are gathered and eaten with a blessing. Every morning they circle three times around the house as the earth moves around the sun. They remember the labyrinth that brought them to the forest. They celebrate the sacred times and the bloody times. The Two that is One.

Shelly loved to live up the Inlet in the lonely log house on the hill. In the land of the Sleil-waututh. The stairs from the dock went up for thirty steps. She hauled water from a spring alongside the mountain. Every evening she watched the lights from Deep Cove.

The circle of O is almost complete. The Ooze and the wells spring to their feet. We carry our weapons inside in this war. We can never forget the Creatrix who gave birth to us all—a maedenheap. We spiral, we weave, we circle, then defeat. The father has fallen, the (M)Other returns.

*Karen Ballinger recently graduated from the University of Victoria with a double major in Women's Studies and Creative Writing. She has been published in Herspectives, Kinesis, Fireweed, Other Voices, and Contemporary Verse 2. She is currently working on a novel.*

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## KAREN CONNELLY

### The Lesser Amazon

Last night I dreamt  
I was the salamander who does not burn in fire:  
    my lips welcomed saffron tongues of flame.  
I scurried pliant through desert grass,  
my amphibian memory algae-moist,  
hot with dragonflies.

In South America, tree frogs live  
in the pooled water of bell-shaped leaves.  
They never touch earth but make their choir  
in a ripe canopy, serenading higher  
than the skulls of hunters.

Those very frogs leap from my rhododendron  
into the kitchen sink.  
Shreds of jungle dazzle this old house.  
Where are all these vines growing from?  
This morning a parrot torpedoed over the table.  
Yesterday afternoon in the bathtub,  
after a surge of curious hissing,  
I found a nest of baby snakes beneath  
the bathmat, living red leather,  
tongues flicking an ancient orange.  
They covered my feet in an exotic reptile weave,  
wound up my shins and looped themselves  
around my waist and neck and slid anxiously  
through my slick hair.  
It took me an hour to comb them out  
and send them slithering to the garden.

It can't go on like this.  
The neighbours gossip:  
    *Has she kidnapped orangutans?*  
    *Has she given birth to panthers?*  
Birds of paradise have chased away  
the sparrows and magpies and the problem  
with peacocks is the potency of their screams.

Roses of dusk bloom to darkness.  
Mesmerizing creatures watch from the trees  
of these turquoise nights, listening  
to me rush through the rainforest of my body,  
searching for you.

Deep into cardinal soil I plunge my hands,  
probing for the roots of the source,  
hoping to plant you in this jungle  
though I know you're not native to it.

Love, my throat is the lesser Amazon.  
I want you to slide in.

Find a slim-ribbed canoe.  
Learn how to swim.

*Karen Connelly is currently Writer-In-Residence at the University of New Brunswick. Her published works include: The Small Words in My Body, and This Brighter Prison, A Book of Journeys.*