

The Wonder of Woman
Shirley Kinney
October 8, 2006

We are here today to celebrate Woman. Her many facets, her many gifts, her wonderfulness.

We are not here to man bash, although that's always fun. We are here to bask in the glory, the mystical ness, the occasional zaniness of Woman.

You may ask,--what makes Woman so special? Silly question. Let me put it simply:

A man is a Pillar of Strength
Woman is a Goddess.

Man is a Jolly Good Fellow.
Woman is Venus.

Woman is alluring, seductive, mysterious.
Man is a Hunk.

Are you feeling the difference?

Woman gives birth to new life.
Man brings home the bacon.

Man is terrific and important and we need him—don't get the impression I am undervaluing Man. But, consider the icons of our myths.

Mother Nature—a woman—surrounds us, protects us, nurtures us.

On the other hand—Father Time and Santa Claus—both men. And yet, no matter how much we honor and love them, we come to realize they arrive only once a year, do their thing, then we don't see them again for 12 months.

Woman, the Goddess, and Man, the Hunk, both play vital roles in our society and each brings a strength to bear on their mutual relationship. Let's listen in on an encounter between a representative of Man and Woman which will better illustrate the peculiar strength of each.

Let's say a guy named Roger is attracted to a woman named Brenda. He asks her out to a movie; she accepts; they have a pretty good time. A few nights later he asks her out to dinner, and again they enjoy themselves. They continue to see each other regularly, and after a while neither one of them is seeing anybody else.

And then, one evening when they're driving home, a thought occurs to Brenda, and, without really thinking, she says it aloud:

Brenda: Do you realize that, as of tonight, we've been seeing each other for exactly six months?

And then there is a silence in the car. To Brenda, it seems like a very loud silence. She thinks to herself:

Brenda: Geez, I wonder if it bothers him that I said that. Maybe he's been feeling confined by our relationship. Maybe he thinks I'm trying to push him into some kind of obligation that he doesn't want, or isn't sure of.

And Roger is thinking:

Roger: Gosh. Six months.

And Brenda is thinking:

Brenda: But, hey, I'm not so sure I want this kind of relationship, either. Sometimes I wish I had a little more space, so I'd have time to think about whether I really want us to keep going the way we are, moving steadily toward...I mean, where are we going? Are we just going to keep seeing each other at this level of intimacy? Are we heading for marriage? Toward children? Toward a lifetime together? Am I ready for that level of commitment? Do I really even know this person?

And Roger is thinking:

Roger:...so that means it was...let's see...February when we started going out, which was right after I had the car at the dealer's, which means...lemme check the odometer...Whoa! I am way overdue for an oil change here.

And Brenda is thinking:

Brenda: He's upset. I can see it on his face. Maybe I'm reading this completely wrong. Maybe he wants more from our relationship—more intimacy, more commitment; maybe he has senses—even before I sensed it—that I was feeling some reservations. Yes, I bet that's it. That's why he's so reluctant to say anything about his own feelings. He's afraid of being rejected.

And Roger is thinking:

Roger: And I'm gonna have them look at the transmission again. I don't care what those morons say—it's still not shifting right. And they better not try to blame it on the cold weather this time. What cold weather? It's 87 degrees out, and this thing is shifting like a goddamn garbage truck, and I paid those incompetent thieves \$600.

And Brenda is thinking:

Brenda: Maybe I'm just too idealistic—waiting for a knight to come riding up on his white horse, when I'm sitting right next to a perfectly good person, a person I enjoy being with, a person I truly do care about, a person who

seems to truly care about me. A person who is in pain because of my self-centered, schoolgirl romantic fantasy.

And Roger is thinking:

Roger: Warranty? They want a warranty? I'll give them a goddamn warranty. I'll take their warranty and stick it right up their...

Brenda turns to look at Roger.

Brenda: Roger.

Roger: What?

Brenda: Please don't torture yourself like this. Maybe I should never have... Oh, God, I feel so...

Brenda covers her face with her hands.

Roger: What?

Brenda: I'm such a fool. I mean, I know there's no knight. I really know that. It's silly. There's no knight, and there's no horse.

Roger: There's no horse?

Brenda: You think I'm a fool, don't you?

Roger: No!

Brenda: It's just that...It's just that I...I need some time.

There is a 15 second pause while Roger, thinking as fast as he can, tries to come up with a safe response. Finally he comes up with one that he thinks might work.

Roger: Yes.

Brenda reaches over and touches Roger's hand.

Brenda: Oh, Roger, do you really feel that way?

Roger: What way?

Brenda: That way about time.

Roger: Oh

Brenda: Thank you, Roger.

Roger: Thank you.

Then he takes her home, and she lies on her bed, a conflicted, tortured soul, and weeps until dawn, whereas when Roger gets back to his place, he opens a bag of Doritos, turns on the TV, and immediately becomes deeply involved in a rerun of a tennis match between two Czechoslovakians he never heard of. A tiny voice in the far recesses of his mind tells him that something major was going on back there in the car, but he is pretty sure there is no way he would ever understand what, and so he figures it's better if he doesn't think about it.

The next day, Brenda will call her closest friend, or perhaps two of them, and they will talk about this situation for six straight hours. In painstaking detail, they will analyze everything she said and everything he said, going over it time and time again, exploring every word, expression, and gesture for nuances of meaning, considering every possible ramification. They will continue to discuss this subject, off and on, for weeks, maybe months, never reaching any definite conclusions, but never getting bored with it, either.

Meanwhile, Roger, while playing racquetball one day with a mutual friend of his and Brenda's, will pause just before serving, frown, and say. "Norm, did Elaine ever own a horse?"

I hope this sketch helped to illustrate why it is that Woman is Goddess. She is perceptive, she has deep emotions. She is caring. She sees far beyond what a mere Man can see in any situation.

Being a Goddess is not easy. Woman earns this title after a lot of hard work. She struggle begins when she is a young girl. All her life to that point she has been sheltered by her family. If she follows the rules, she will come safely to the point where she first needs to face the world on her own.

The transition from girl to woman, leaving the protection of her family to venture out into the world, is a momentous step. The girl must go into the dark woods in order to emerge as a woman. She faces the unknown, experiencing independence, the excitement and the dangers of sexual attraction. She must be strong, yet gentle; daring yet wise.

The story of this transition from girl to woman is illustrated in the stories of Cinderella—a young girl who believes all her problems will be solved if only she can find her Prince Charming; Snow White—a girl coming of age, leaving her family home for the excitement and dangers of Womanhood; and

Red Riding Hood—a young girl away from her father’s protection, looking for adventure and excitement.

Once upon a time, there was a girl.
A very beautiful girl.

And all she wished for was...

Cinderella: I wish I could go to the ball ...and dance with the prince.

Red: *I wish I could get to Grandmother’s house, and maybe something exciting will happen to me along the way...finally.*

Snow: I wish I could be happy, ...and maybe find my prince.

And there was a man.

Cinderella: He was Charming.

Red: *He was a Wolf.*

Snow: He was a dwarf. Actually, there were seven.

Everything would have been lovely. Except for

Cinderella: except for my wicked stepsisters.

Snow: Except for my jealous stepmother.

Red: *He was such an attractive wolf.*

Cinderella: My stepsisters hated me. They were jealous of my curly hair.

Snow: My stepmother hated me. She was jealous of my father's love.

Red: The wolf had such large eyes!

Eventually, all the women got into trouble, of one sort or another.

Cinderella: I dropped my shoe at the ball. It was a wonderful ball.

Snow: I was Snow White, but I drifted.

Red: I went to the wolf's bed. He had such large teeth!

But, since these are once upon a time stories, the beautiful girl is rescued.

Cinderella: He found my shoe...and it fit!

Snow: He kissed me and I woke up.

Red: He saved me from the wolf.

And so, they learned that what they wished for is important.

Snow: Reaching for that apple may teach you more than you hoped for.

Red: Finding an exciting handsome wolf won't answer all my prayers.

Cinderella: My father's wife was a nightmare. The palace was a dream. Maybe I need something in between.

And they all lived happily ever after.

And, after happily ever after comes, for most women, Motherhood. Through a process as mysterious as anything man can dream of, Woman gives birth to new life.

She protects this tiny blob of life, ready to sacrifice her own existence to save her baby. The baby grows, needing constant care and nurturing to prepare it for facing the world.

The baby becomes a teenager. This is a period where the Mother knows the answers to nothing and everything. She knows absolutely nothing that's cool. She rushes madly and frantically 24 hours a day; she worries; she chauffeurs; she advises; she scolds. Until finally, her house is empty, and it's time to take a good long look at herself.

Once again, the woman is leaving the safety of her identity as "Mom" and is venturing out in to the woods. But that struggle to find herself isn't an easy one. Who is she now? What is her role?

This is how Judith Viorst put it:

"1. Can a person who used to wear a Ban the Bomb button
And a Free Angela Davis button
And an Uppity Women Unite button

And a Get Out of Viet Nam button
Find happiness being a person with a
Set of fondue forks, a fish poacher, and a wok?

2. Is there an economic rule that says
No matter how much we earn and how little we spend,
There's no such thing as getting out of debt?

3. How do I know if the time has come to
Accept my limitations,
Or whether I still ought to try to
Fulfill my promise?

4. How come I'm reading articles
With names like "A Woman's Guide to Cosmetic Surgery"
More than I'm reading the poems of Dylan Thomas?

5. If I had an either/or choice
Would I prefer to be deservedly respected,
Or would I prefer to be mindlessly adored?

6. When, instead of vice versa
Did I start to pick investments over adventure,
And clean over scenic, and comfortable over intense?

7. Are some human beings
Intellectually and emotionally incapable
Of ever reading a road map
Or could I still learn to?

8. If six days a week I'm responsible
And self-sufficient and competent and mature,
On the seventh could I go find a womb to return to?

9. How can I learn to relate to marijuana
And bisexuality
When I'm more at home with The Anniversary Waltz?

10. How come I've got these incredible insights
Into all of my faults,

And I've still got my faults?

11. How will I ever be able to tell
If what I achieve in life
Ought to be called serenity—not surrender?

The Woman who struggled as a girl with leaving the safety of her home, the protection of her parents and daring to venture out into the world to face dangers and uncertainties, is now facing the same struggles once again.

She thought she had it all figured out. Her role was carved in stone. Her lines were written. All she had to do was to say them.

But, with the departure of the children, with the clock ticking, Woman is suddenly confused and lost. Who am I? What do I do with the rest of my life? I'm a Goddess, for heavens sake! I'm not being properly adored!

Man, for obvious reasons, never wrestles with these issues. He's a Jolly Good Fellow, a Hunk, a bringing-home-the-bacon kind of guy. His role is clear. His path is set.

The Goddess, confused and floundering for identity, throws herself into rejoining her career or going back to college, or re-decorating the house—over and over and over.

It is often during this time that Man stands in total bewilderment, wondering what the heck ever happened to his Goddess. Who is this crazed woman?

For most women, this is a time to once again re-renter that primeval forest—into the woods—this time it's not to find a prince but to find herself.

Not to worry. At last, Woman settles back down. She's spent this time searching for herself, and, eventually, she finds where she is standing. She's older now. And, usually wiser for her journey into the woods.

"I'm facing the fact that
I'll never write Dante's Inferno
Or paint a Picasso

Or transplant a kidney or build
An empire, nor will I ever
Run Israel or Harvard,

Appear on the cover of Time,
Star on Broadway, be killed
By a firing squad for some noble ideal,

Find the answer

To racial injustice or whether God's dead
Or the source
Of human unhappiness,

Alter the theories of Drs.
S. Freud, C.G. Jung, or A. Einstein,
Or maybe the course
Of history.

In addition to which
I am facing the fact that
I'll never compose Bach cantatas,
Design Saint Laurents,

Advise presidents, head U.S. Steel,
Resolve the Mideast,

Be the hostess of some major talk show,
Or cure the cold,

And although future years may reveal
Some hidden potential,
Some truly magnificent act that
I've yet to perform,

Or some glorious song to be sung,
For which I'll win prizes and praise,

I must still face the fact that
They'll never be able to say,

“And she did it so young.”

And so, Woman—our Goddess—grows older, more sure of herself, more
content with life and her place in it.

But, just as she gets it all together, something major happens. Her life is thrown into turmoil—nothing is ordered and calm. Her husband has retired.

[Pirkko]

Eventually, the crisis is resolved. A happy compromise is reached and life is once again serene.

Woman has now entered the very best time of her life. She is once again the Goddess. She is calm, content, glorious. She has the time to explore her world completely. She can spend her time doing what gives her bliss. She is rarely beleaguered anymore by petty irritations and bothers.

And a mysterious “something” is happening to those who love her.

Her children who couldn't wait to leave her rules and constraints now find themselves calling to ask for advice. She, who never had time to get close to anyone because she was busy raising children and pursuing a career, now finds that somewhere along the way, she's made some very close dear friends that share her laughter and her fears. And, most magically of all, if

she's been very lucky, she discovers that she has a husband who, when he looks at her—at her wrinkles and her grey hair—sees the beautiful loving goddess he fell in love with.