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Women of the Long View

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Unfolding: Women's Spiritual Paths

by

**Spotted Earth Woman / Gloria Brooks, Yvonne Rand,
Victoria Rue**

(Part One)

While some of us maintain a strictly secular mindset, many of us follow a spiritual path, or are interested in the experiences and viewpoints of women committed to spirituality and/or religion. We may have studied with or read the books of one or another woman teacher over the years, or been part of her congregation. Now we see that the spiritual leaders and teachers in our lives are growing older along with us. If we have been lucky enough to find a woman to guide us in the spiritual quest, we may wonder what changes have come about in her relationship to spiritual path as she ages.

We decided to ask women from various traditions to tell us about their experience and insight in this respect. The responses from these women spiritual teachers are divided into two installments. In this Fall 2010 issue, we hear from three women: **Spotted Earth Woman/Gloria Brooks**, a Native American medicine woman from Washington state, is guided by dreams and visions and the community of medicine people. She tells of her early struggles and addictions, how she overcame them by following her omens and the

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spiritual guidance of her people, and what her life of service is now. **Yvonne Rand** is a Zen priest who began as a student of the great Zen master Suzuki Roshi and later established her own Bodaiji (Buddha Mind Temple) Zen center. She tells of her observations of decay and death in the animal world and how that informs her understanding of this life of constant change that we all share. **Victoria Rue** is one of those very few Catholic women who have defied the church prohibition on women priests and have been ordained. She reflects on her earlier impatience with the slowness of change in the Catholic Church and recounts her coming to peace with that as she adopts “the long view,” in her life now as a priest, college instructor, theatre artist and hospice counselor.

In the Winter 2010 issue, we will publish the second installment of this section, with reflections of a woman Sufi teacher, a rabbi, and a Unitarian minister who runs a center for homeless people.

— *Introduction by Sandy Boucher, Associate Editor*

Women of the Long View

by Victoria Rue



Most of my adult life I have been an activist and theatre artist: in the Roman Catholic Church, in my university teaching, and in the theatre. As I embrace the graces of getting older, I've begun to understand the term "women of the long view." I first heard it in women's groups advocating for Catholic women's ordination. I always laughed and pushed on past it, feeling the urgency of immediate change. Now, at sixty-three, ordained in 2005 illegally as a Roman Catholic priest and thus automatically excommunicated (according to the Vatican), I begin to understand the phrase "women of the long view."

On a boat on the St. Lawrence Seaway that warm July day in 2005, women bishops, along with hundreds of amazed lay people, laid hands of consecration on the four of us ordained as women priests. From that moment, I fully expected our Spirit-filled movement to erupt into thousands of other women becoming ordained the following year. Damn. Somehow the Sacred was not

operating on my timetable.

What has occurred, in fact, is a slow discernment by women. Some are afraid and know that they will lose their jobs if they work in parish ministries. Others question whether the priesthood is a model women should be interested in at all. Still others want to wait until the official door of the Vatican opens to women priests. As of 2010, we have just seventy women priests in the U.S. (For more information see <http://www.romancatholicwomenpriests.org>.)

I have learned as I've aged that deep change occurs slowly. Institutions like the Catholic Church change incrementally, in fits and starts, as the human beings, mostly men who shore them up, work very hard to hold on to their power. Yet the seeds we plant now will indeed bear fruit. The other day I was talking with a woman who is part of the Sophia in Trinity community that I worship with in San Francisco (www.sophiaintrinity.org). I was waxing enthusiastic about my moving closer to San Francisco in order to better serve the community. She said, "Victoria, go slow. What we are doing here is not starting yet another parish—because all of us who gather, in fact, already belong to parishes. What we are doing is seeding change. When we celebrate Eucharist together, we experience worship that is inclusive and creative, with everyone sharing leadership around the Eucharist table. We are experiencing something new, and we take that back to our parishes and become like sand in the oyster." The woman's insight spoke deeply to me.

I understand I am part of seeding a future in the present. I am also aware that change comes through generations (another perspective of being a "woman of the long view"). Many of the young women who are members of Generation Y, born after 1980, and Generation X, see past a need for women priests. Many don't see a need for priests at all. And in fact, most of the women who have been ordained are over 55. So perhaps that reality, too, is part of what being a woman priest is today, a transition to a discipleship of equals in which the priesthood will no longer exist.

Just as institutional change is often about relinquishing power and control, interior change can often be about letting go. In addition to teaching about comparative religions, I am also a hospice spiritual care counselor. Whether people have thought about their death prior to entering the last months of their lives or are only now facing their passing away, it seems valuable to take the

time—call it prayer, call it meditation, call it stillness—to soften, become vulnerable. When we experience our own fragility and impermanence, when we are able to place ourselves in the midst of something larger than ourselves, when we see our lives in their minutiae and largess, we can breathe deeply, relax, and let go into mystery.

Part of seeing the long view is being resilient, realizing a kind of staying power from understanding I am not alone but part of movements that work for transformation over time. And thus my resilience is nurtured by seeing the long view. So, whether I am teaching young people at the university, or telling stories through theatre, or creating worship with a community, or silently accompanying a person who is dying, or conversing with those who are re-collecting the shards and colors of life as they ready themselves to let go of it, I feel myself as a “woman of the long view.” Perhaps that long view is where the Spirit, the Mystery, lives.

Spotted Earth Woman/Gloria Brooks lives in the Pacific Northwest. She says of her life: "As the Great Grandmother walking the Red Road, life has been an incredible experience. Learning of the miracles of healing and doctoring; observing the elders; experiencing wonders of the Creator taking care of all the needs of life; watching the people come together as one; traveling to new and wondrous teachings of other lands. Life has been a joy (most of the time)."

Yvonne Rand is a meditation teacher and lay householder priest in the Soto Zen Buddhist tradition. She was associated with the San Francisco Zen Center and Green Gulch Farm for many years, and has taught in recent years from her Bodaiji (Buddha Mind Temple) located at Goat-in-the-Road in Philo, CA. She incorporates insights from the psychotherapy traditions in her teaching; and also investigates the relevance of the arts and gardening for training the mind.

Victoria Rue is a Roman Catholic woman priest, a theatre writer/director, a university lecturer, and a hospice chaplain. She lectures in Women's Studies and Comparative Religious Studies at San Jose State University, and also teaches in the Women's Spirituality Program at California Institute of Integral Studies in San Francisco. Her book, *Acting Religious: Theatre as Pedagogy in Religious Studies*, was published in 2005 (Pilgrim Press). Victoria and her partner of 20 years, Kathryn Poethig, were married in September '08. For more information on Victoria's ministries, see:

<http://www.victoriarue.com>.

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