



transformed

story
LILITH THREE FEATHERS
artwork
JOANNA BARNUM

*Exhausted and overwhelmed, I believed I had failed at everything.
But the Goddess had other ideas.*

To some, the Warrior Goddess may be a carefree maiden, blithely tripping through the forest on a perfect spring morning — but not to me. When I see Her, She stands tall and strong. Muscles etch Her body and Her hair swirls in the breeze, moving the air, creating the storm, taming the wind. She is virginal in the oldest sense of the word — that is, absolutely complete, an incomprehensible and acknowledged totality.

The year I met the Warrior Goddess was the kind of year that others — those who did not have to experience it — would describe as “challenging” and “transitional.” Such intellectualized words did not match the reality of my days. Exhausted from illness and overwhelmed by the ending of my marriage, I believed I had failed at

everything. Because I was unable to continue performing my job, I was struggling to raise my children alone on a small disability. Then, due to my illness, I had been told I would fail at motherhood. The confident high-priced specialists agreed: at best, I would live another three years.

Medicine had run out of answers, but I was not ready to give up — and I wanted to survive. I needed to raise my children, to see them grow into adulthood. Not knowing where to turn, I raised my voice to the stars and to the moon shining in the night. At that moment, I was bowed under the weight of my soul’s sorrow, and regardless of the cost, I called for something — anything — to change my life.

At first I did not recognize the answer. Night after night, I awoke to mists drifting through the closed window into my bedroom. On the night of the Dark Moon, I heard tapping on the glass. I dragged myself from bed to investigate. There, on my windowsill, stood an owl.

The next night came a vision: *The Warrior Goddess walked into my room. Her long hair stirred and then stilled as it partially concealed a stiff leather jerkin. Soft white cloth floated around her legs, melting and reforming as if dancing. At Her side hung a sword.*

Decisively, She acted. In an instant, I found myself running in the midst of a flaming wood. As the owl flew silently overhead, She led me down a dim path. While the forest crackled behind me, strange sounds erupted from the trees to either side. And still I dashed behind Her.

In the morning, I awoke tangled in drenched sheets. The following night, She appeared again. And again, the next. Finally, I asked, "Who are you?"

"Lilith," was the response. I had no idea who Lilith was, but was determined to find out. I discovered contradictory stories and struggled to explain the dichotomy between my experiences and the traditional myths about Her. In quiet times, while my children slept, I set out offerings and prayed for understanding. In meditations, dreams, and shamanic journeys, She revealed Herself to me. Slowly, through trial and error, I learned how to work with Her.

The balance of my life had shifted. The Warrior Goddess does not sit at home in misery, and neither, it seemed, would I. She brought possibilities, serendipitous meetings, seeming coincidences. I began to take small risks. Though I could barely breathe, I staggered into a dojo — and walked out a student of Tai Chi. I participated in woman's circles, signed up for classes, attended public rituals, and traveled to a Pagan festival. Her love supported me, yet She continually drove me onward.

Many who knew me shook their heads — and their fingers. "You're doing what? Tai Chi? Shamanism?" "Why don't you just find a nice man?" "You really just need to settle down." While they gossiped, I discovered that their judgments and their misunderstandings could no longer touch me. For Her blood heated mine and Her breath invigorated my days. Through Her, I discovered new sensations and strange ideas that brought a subtle calmness. No longer did I passively feel the sun's rays; now, I basked in them, feeling the furnace as it settled into my heart. No longer did the moon feel cold and distant, because moonbeams now lodged in my head. Once again, I felt passion and direction.

Yet still She was not done with me. My physical healing was not enough. Forcing me to face the loss of what was dearest to me, She required me to reach once more past my limitations.

One day, my 12-year-old son and his uncle walked to the nearby river to go fishing. A bit of time passed and then the uncle appeared frantically pounding at my door. When I opened the door, he gasped, "He didn't listen to me. He fell. I can't reach him. I think he's hurt."

Two years earlier, I couldn't have walked a block without stopping to catch my breath, but now I began to run. I don't remember much about that dash down the hill to the river, but as I stood on the riverbank, desperately reaching to pluck my child to safety and carry him up the rocks away from the water. In that instinctive moment, I saved not only my son but myself.

And there I stood, at the top of the riverbank — panting and tired, yes — my son safe in my arms. Turning back towards the river, still holding him tightly, I looked down the steep rocky slope. And then, I realized what I had done — what She had accomplished.

Through all of those months of physical and spiritual work, pushing and pulling, She had propelled me towards the future. Perhaps from Her place in the universe, Her actions were simple logic; maybe She knew She was prodding me to this very moment when I would yank my son away from the stony river. True awareness grew: She had resuscitated me. Not only had She brought me back from illness and returned my life, She had given me the power to reach my son and carry him to safety. Persistently, lovingly, She had rocked my world, and nothing could ever be the same. Standing there, silently clutching my son, I gave thanks to Her.

Almost twenty years have passed since that day, and my son is grown and married. Even now, Lilith shines in my life like a star emerging in the night sky. Tonight, I catch a glimpse of Her sword gleaming from behind a moving wisp of cloudbank. Again She comes, striding into the room on mist and moonbeams.

Look, She stands just over there, on that hill. Do you see Her? Listening for your call, She waits for you. ☺

— LILLITH THREEFEATHERS is a writer, ceremonial healer, and elder of Living Spirit Circle. For four decades, she has walked both an initiatory path and a shamanic path. As part of that journey, she has been initiated in Regla de Ocha, which is commonly called Santeria.

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