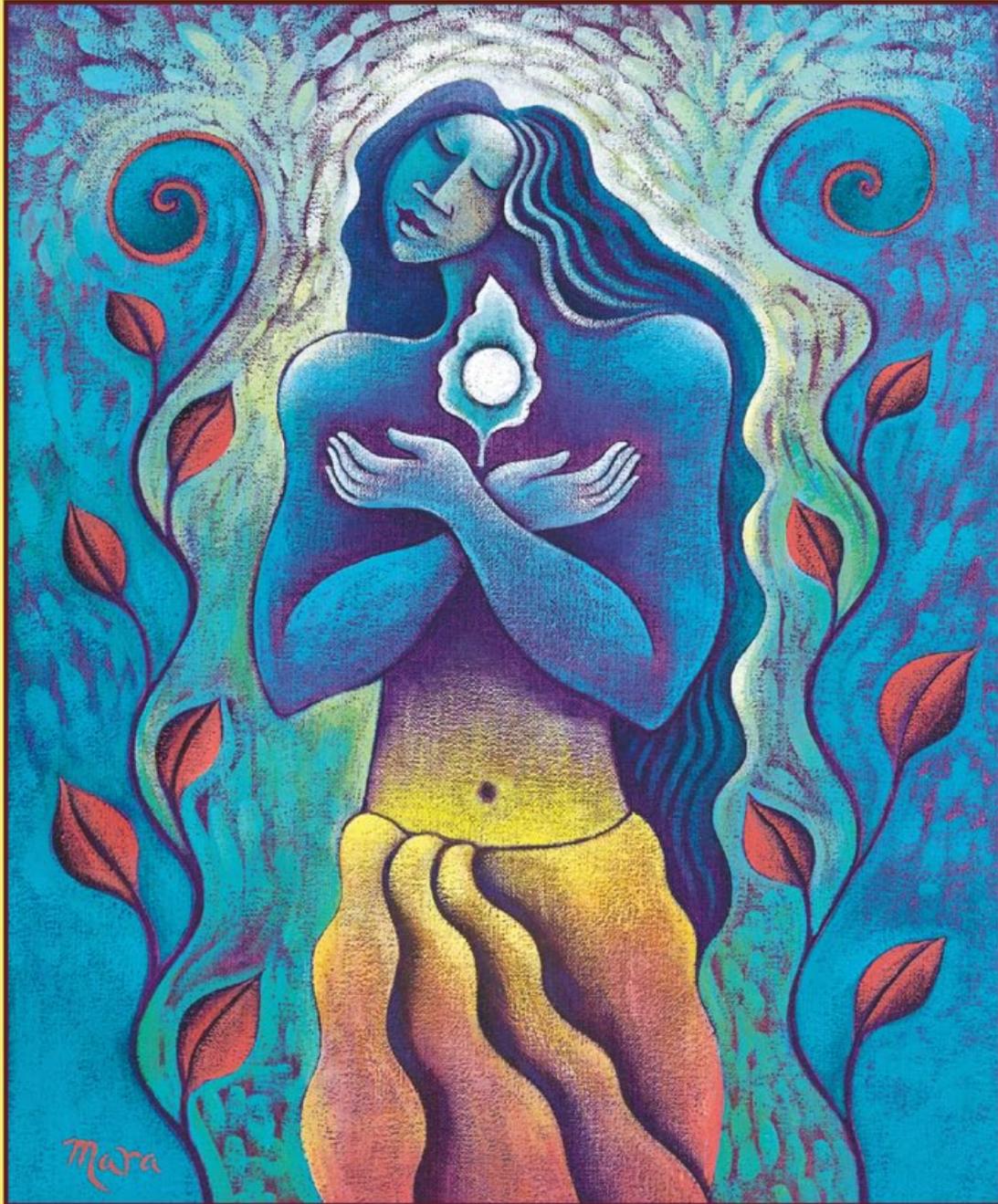


SageWoman

Celebrating the Goddess in Every Woman



HEALING OURSELVES

Keep Walking: My Journey with Cancer
Seeking the Well of Life • Crow Medicine • There are Crossroads
Hygeia and Her Sisters • Radiant Shakti: the Light of Healing

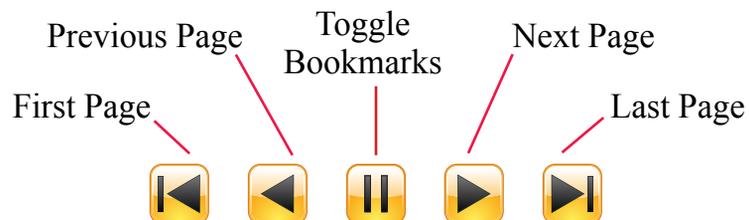


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THE HEALING POWER OF BEAUTY

I remember exactly when I decided that my mother was the most beautiful woman in the world. I was about four years old, dreamily trying on her jewelry and shoes as she got ready for an evening out. Her stylish new dress was lime green polyester sprinkled with kelly green polka dots. It just capped her knee. She wore horn-rimmed glasses. In my eyes, she was a vision.

I have always associated the Mother Goddess with the beautiful: the prairie landscape of my childhood home, the call of the meadowlarks, Grandma's quilt that covered my bed, my mother's gentle singing.

As an adult I still surround myself with beauty, which nurtures and sustains me. I tend my perennial garden while kneeling in the damp earth, the penetrating warmth of the sun rewarding my efforts. The sights and smells of pungent lily-of-the-valley, sprightly buttercups, voluminous peonies, and vigorous, blazing trumpet vines fill me with joy.

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After my mother died a few years ago, I became very ill. Unremitting nerve and muscle pain and overwhelming fatigue kept me from working the soil, so I had to turn to other sources of beauty for their restorative powers. Always a devoted fan of the Impressionists, I surrounded myself with poster-size Monet prints, three in my bedroom and three more in around my home.

I studied the paintings' shimmering pools of water, created with merging, muted pastels and accented by bright splashes of pinks, whites, yellows and greens. I was buoyed up by the water lilies and contemplated the rich depths in my other prints. The rich, thick sections of dark hues — purples and plums, forest greens and midnight blues — coaxed me on journeys ever deeper into myself.

Beauty also found me in other ways that I had not anticipated. During the early stages of my illness, I was so debilitated that I was forced to spend a great part of my day in bed. I listened to two CDs over and over while drifting in and out of sleep. The ethereal harmonies of the Tallis Scholars Renaissance choral music lifted me to higher realms while the drums and throaty women's voices of Joanne Shenandoah's *Orenda: Native American Songs Of Life* grounded me. The two styles balanced in my soul; unconsciously I needed them both.

Over time, I came to realize that my illness was intimately linked with both my grief over my mother's death and to the searing (and unresolved) wounds that I had experienced at the hands of my abusive father, but I had no idea how to heal these wounds myself. Fortunately, the Mother Goddess found a way.

When I first heard David Roth's song "Seconds and Thirds" (on his recording *Irreconcilable Similarities*), I wept uncontrollably. The song is told from the perspective of a therapist working with three young siblings. The title reflects the first two stanzas of the song and a repeating metaphor throughout:

*We were playing one day, the middle child and me
A little girl of five years, she was serving tea
She had lined up the dolls and then she told me these words
"You gotta make sure my children get seconds and thirds."*

*Seconds and thirds, that's what they should get
Not the back of a hand or a life of regret
And now a five-year old woman says these little words
"You gotta make sure my children get seconds and thirds."*

As I listened to that song for the first time, I revisited searing memories from my childhood. The idyllic moments I had with my mother had been juxtaposed with terrifying encounters with my father; the song brought both types of memories to the surface.

In subsequent listenings of *Irreconcilable Similarities* I had often skipped past "Seconds and Thirds" so as not to dissolve into tears. But now, in my debilitated state, I often couldn't find the remote control fast enough to push "skip" and the song would fill my bedroom as my eyes welled with tears.

Each time, once I started listening, I just couldn't stop. Roth writes with such tenderness, and he carefully wraps this visceral issue in a gentle kind of musical beauty. Alone in my room with the song, I felt as though I were being held in a protective

embrace. The song ends with a hopeful conclusion, and somehow I intuited that if I could sing "Seconds and Thirds" — better yet, if I could perform it — I could integrate that hopefulness and healing into my own life. So I set out to do just that.

I began to listen to the recording more closely so that I could discern more about the arrangement and accompaniment. I sat down with my piano and started to pick out the chords. I could only work in short spurts, as each time I would be overcome by my emotions or by simple fatigue. Sometimes I set the song aside for weeks at a time, but the graceful melody and the understanding tone of the lyrics always called me back.

I always begin by hearing the song's rocking cadence in the back of my mind. Then, a nuance or embellishment in the accompaniment I had passed over before would suddenly become crystal clear, and I'd hurry to the piano to try it out. Just like that, I'd be back on track.

SOMEHOW I KNEW THAT IF I COULD PERFORM THIS SONG, I COULD INTEGRATE ITS HEALING INTO MY OWN LIFE.

Gradually, my rendition of the song emerged, and the racking grief of my sorrow lessened. Eventually, my tears faded and all that remained was beauty: the song's, and, to my surprise, my own.

Long ago, my inner beauty had gone into retreat, hiding from abuse and shame. But through listening to the Mother within, my soul began to unexpectedly reveal itself.

My health has now improved enough that I'm back in my garden, weeding, watering, and urging on each sprouting bud. Comforting music continues to float gently in the soundtrack of my life, and I am now

performing music, not just listening to it. I've added another Monet to my collection, and, although my mother is gone, her polka dot dress has pride of place in my closet.

And now, thanks to my healing journey, there's another place I look to find the radiant beauty of the Goddess — in my

own face as I look in the mirror. ☺

ELISE FISCHER grew up on the Plains of southwestern Minnesota, where one learns to be industrious and self-sufficient. Like her fore-mothers, she gardens, cans, and quilts. Inspired by the prairie meadowlarks, she expresses her inner beauty through her music and writing.

