



Queen of My Self

Wisdom from the Third Age of Womanhood

by Donna Henes

Why I am a Queen — and Not (Yet) a Crone

I am not a Crone. I was not a Crone on my fiftieth birthday; I was not a Crone when my periods were officially declared “over” after thirteen months of no shows. I was not a Crone at my second Saturn return at the age of fifty-six; nor am I a Crone today in my mere sixties. (Remember, seventy is the new fifty!) I have another decade or two before I retire my throne for a rocking chair, theater tickets or bingo chips. It is way too early for me to rest on my laurels — I haven’t even planted them all yet!

When I deny my Cronedom, it is not because I am afraid of aging. Trust me, I want to be the oldest woman who ever lived and savor every last minute of life. I want to live to be 100 — and I want to *know* that I am 100 — and that’s not so farfetched. One in fifty people are living to one hundred these days and the odds get better every year.

At the turn of the 20th Century, the average age of menopause was forty-eight and the average life expectancy was fifty-two. Today, according to Dr. Christiane Northrup, if a woman reaches her fifties without any chronic disease, she has every right to expect to live into her nineties.

But I am not old yet; and I am certainly not as wise as I hope to be when I do grow up to be a Crone.

Don’t get me wrong: I am smart as hell. But true wisdom is different; it comes from experiencing life consciously and deeply over time, with enough time elapsed for reflection, overview, and perspective. I am still punching in my hours of learning, earning every minute of my experience. After decades of service in my Mother years, now it is my turn to be active, in charge of my own life, and influential in the world. This is my Queen stage: I rule!

Someday I will be an awesome Crone. But I am not yet ready, not capable, not worthy.

Some-day I will be an awesome Crone. But I am not yet ready, not capable, not worthy. Nor are the sixty million plus

other women in the United States who are somewhere in the midst of their midlife changes ready for Cronthood. We occupy a truly unique position, poised on the brink of uncharted waters. This extended and vigorous midlife period which we are now beginning to experience is largely unaccounted for in myth and archetype for the simple reason that such longevity has never before occurred for the great masses of women as a whole. We desperately need new role models, examples, and teachers to encourage us as we explore this unfamiliar terrain.

WHAT ABOUT THE TRIPLE GODDESS?

This leaves open the question: where do we midlife women fit in the Triple Goddess paradigm? We haven’t been Maidens in ages. We are no longer Mother material, and we are not yet ready to be Croness. So who are we supposed to be right now? The Triple Goddess archetype doesn’t include a description of my life nor of women like us. It does not address our issues and needs, nor does it embrace our unprecedented position in society. In fact, the myth of the Triple Goddess *does not even recognize our existence*. This myth — as cherished as it is — is simply an old stereotypes that does not apply to us.

Archetype refers to the universal description of a type. The Triple Goddess myth leaves out the biggest single population group in modern developed countries, making it decidedly *not* universal. Clearly it is time for a change of paradigm; which is as it should be, since life is about nothing if not change. This is the greatest teaching of the Goddess: Her power and inspiration lies in Her cyclical nature, Her infinite flexibility, Her adept adaptability, Her unbounded ability to always and forever *change*. The Great Goddess, Supreme Mistress of Change, transformation artist extraordinaire, will surely respond to the changes in our lives and times by enlarging the vision of Her Self to include Her fourth dimension — and ours.

TIME FOR THE QUEEN!

When I hit fifty, I felt the need to invent a new mythic example that I could relate and aspire to, one that would spur me on and sustain me through my midlife changes. So I formulated a fourth stage of development that would place me after the Mother and before the Crone in a newly defined continuum of womanhood: the Queen. Thus the Triple Goddess grew to become The Four-Fold Goddess: The Maiden, the Mother, The *Queen*, and the Crone.

This construction — four stages of a woman's life, instead of three — is a much more accurate description of the lives of contemporary women. Plus, the four periods of growth and change are in complete metaphoric alignment with the pervasive way that peoples have always ordered existence into Four Parts: The Four Quarters of the Moon, the Four Seasons of the Year, the Four Solstices and Equinoxes, the Four Elements, the Four Cardinal Directions of the Earth, the Four Periods of the Day. The Four-Fold Goddess honors the entire inclusive range of existence.

Is this hubris? Who am I to deconstruct an archetype that has been so meaningful for so many for so long? I say: who am I *not* to do so? I am a proud member of the pioneering Sixties generation, and consequently, have a wealth of experience in rebelling against the status quo of old, outdated archetypes and striving to replace them with new, more relevant ones. Our generation has demonstrated that it is not only possible but necessary to compose our own scripts. Bereft of affirming depictions of our lives, today's women-of-a-certain-age are perfectly able to invent our own. We are our own best role models.

The Queen paradigm promotes a new understanding of what it means to be a middle-aged woman who accepts complete responsibility for and to herself, and it celebrates the rewards of doing so. The Queen model of maturity that I envision is recognizably like me, like us. Not yet old, yet no longer young, She stands in Her proper place — after the Mother and before the Crone — in No Woman's Land. She plants Her feet and Her flag, and claims Her space in this previously uncharted midlife territory. Still active and sexy, vital with the enthusiasm and energy of youth, She is tempered with the hard-learned experience and leavening attitudes of age.

Like a phoenix rising from the ashes of Her own past, She has been forced to face and overcome difficult lessons and obstacles including Her own shadow, and in so doing, has outgrown the boundaries of Her old Self. The Queen bursts forth to become a proficient player in the game plan of Her own choosing. The Queen does not invite trouble but She chooses to use it well. Actualized, organized, efficient, self-sufficient, competent, ethical, and fair, the Queen has struggled for and earned Her authority and respect.

Agitated by the unessential and restless for authenticity, She sheds all attachment to the opinions of others and accepts complete responsibility and control of Her own care and fulfillment. Firmly centered on Her own two feet, She dares to climb into the heady realm of Her own highest majesty. She is the Queen of Her Self, the mature monarch, the sole sovereign of Her own life. Here, finally, is an archetype that fits!

Once crowned and on Her throne, the Queen glows golden with confidence, competence, and grace. She is fully engaged and takes pleasure in the feelings of freedom and wellbeing that come

from personal empowerment. Shining from the inside out, Her attraction is rooted deeply in Her self-actualization and inner strength. This thrilling post-menopausal period of vitality, renewed energy, enhanced self-esteem, optimism, and enthusiasm comes to us in direct proportion to the intensity of our own conscious, conscientious engagement in the struggle for self-enfranchisement.

It was through my own complicated process of coming of age that I conceived of the Queen as the “missing link” in the incomplete Triple Goddess. I reinvented my Self in the image of the woman who I had always hoped someday to be. Through striving to acknowledge, mourn, and then release what was irrevocably lost, I was ultimately able to recover my own misplaced vitality, interest, and energy after the painful years of my disconcerting midlife changes and all of terrible truths that I had to face in the fiery process.

All of my interior work eventually paid off; by the time I was fifty-three and my periods were over for good, I knew myself to be the uncontested mistress of my own fate. Finally, I was ready — and for the first time in my life, I was actually *willing* — to accept the responsibility for the truth and complete consequences of my own dreams, decisions, and actions. A maturing monarch — prepared to regulate and rule all of the inner and outer realms of my own domain — surely I was a Queen, and not a Crone. I was, and am, and intend forevermore to be the Queen of me. ☺

MAMA DONNA HENES *is the author of* The Queen of My Self: Stepping Into Sovereignty in Midlife. *She publishes a monthly e-zine, The Queen's Chronicles. For your free subscription go to* www.thequeenofmyself.com.