



Woman's Encyclopedia 'quietly revolutionary'

by Mary Keith

*Was there a female Pope?
Why was Jesus' tomb attended only by women?
Why were Cinderella's glass slippers so important to the Prince?
How did the middle finger become a phallic symbol?*

The *Women's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets*; a fascinating and monumental effort by Barbara A. Walker, is a compulsively readable A-to-Z arrangement of thousands of popular fantasies, word origins and superstitions. Twenty-five years in the making, this unique resource book focuses on mythology, anthropology, religion and sexuality, revealing what other encyclopedias have either left out or misrepresented.

Women's Encyclopedia is an extensively researched volume of more than 1100 pages. What saves the reader from being intimidated by the length and subject matter is the arrangement of the material: alphabetically organized in bold type with short informative explanations. This work is thus both an invaluable resource and a browser's delight.

This book is refreshing, disturbing and quietly revolutionary in that it provides the rare opportunity for both women and men to see their culture and heritage in a fresh light. Walker has made a complete study of the many-faceted process of transition from female oriented to male oriented religions in western civilization.

Modern Christians take for granted that the figures of the Father and Son are revered and "man" not woman is created in the image of God when in fact, Walker reveals, Christianity was an offshoot of Middle Eastern Goddess worship.

The whole idea of Christian salvation has based its scheme of redemption on the premise

of female wickedness. The need for salvation was the fault of Eve, the archetypal Woman, who occasioned the Fall.

In this way, a history of early clergymen advocating the abuse and suppression of women as just punishment for the crime that brought death and damnation to man, is detailed. Adam, representing all men, is less guilty than Eve, representing all women.

Translating the myth to reality, it is God's will for women to be subservient; the weaker sex. In this way women were prevented from acting independently of men: from owning property to earning money.

Biologically, these premises have had an effect by denying women the natural rights of other mammals; the right to choose her mate, control the circumstances of mating, govern her own nest and to refuse males while raising her young.

In the end, it produced a society where one sex invariably oppressed members of the other, and both came to regard this inequity as a natural state of affairs ordained by a male "Creator." Walker reveals that a woman's feelings of unworthiness and insecurity may often find root in her training in a male oriented religion, in conflict with her own nature.

The interesting and disconcerting idea to emerge from this work is, that if women's religion had continued, today's world would be less fraught with violence and alienation, where cooperation rather than exploitation was the rule.

And that society would be less inhibited by what Goddess worship frankly accepts as the natural cycles of sexuality, birth and death.

Walker's book is a most readable, thought provoking effort. It is well documented and of a style that makes reference easy. For the refreshing outlook it provides and the startling revelations it provokes it is most enlightening and rewarding reading.

I Never Told Anyone tells all

by Susan Fullerton

I Never Told Anyone is a deeply moving anthology of first person accounts of child sexual abuse, varying in degree from subtle overtures to repeated abuse. These pieces reflect a wide diversity of experiences and emotional responses and offer a powerful testament to the survivors of this type of abuse.

Reading this book reminded me of just how vulnerable children really are. Dependent upon their parents for love, support and trust, when these needs are denied or unfulfilled, the child

having an anti-abuser message, male or female. In cases of paternal abuse and incest, the children were often as disturbed by their mothers' tacit acceptance as by the actual physical abuse.

Society does not recognise the dangers of sexual abuse of children. One woman writes, "I told adults of the horror I was enduring but **no one** listened." By expressing these women's honest feelings about their abuse, this book gives society a needed push towards a viable solution of some kind. These women have taken the first step towards prevention of further abuse of vulnerable children.

I Never Told Anyone

Edited by Ellen Bass and Louise Thornton
Harper Colophon Books, 1983, 278 pages.

suffers pain, anger, and rejection. Coupled with sexual abuse, the effect is devastating, often causing a lifetime of emotional disturbance and scarring.

The women in this book have dealt with their experiences as best as they can. For most, writing and sharing their story is a catharsis but not a solution. The memory never goes away. For society, these events can not be truly understood until the abuse has been realistically and graphically described. Until you read about a brutal rape and near death of a five year old, the facts about prepubescent sexual abuse remain just that, **FACTS**. This collection, written in narrative style, has a tremendous impact upon its readers.

As children, naive and unaware of the world, most of the women write that they felt somehow responsible for the situation where the abuse took place; that they could have prevented it. The fact that many mothers refused to believe in or support their daughters only reinforced the notion that the children were to blame, they had encouraged the abuse.

How can society expect these women to grow up to be emotionally and sexually healthy adults when their trust levels are destroyed? Fathers, relatives and strangers are the abusers, yet these women are expected to be able to enter and maintain a relationship with a man. In one account, a woman writes that as a result of a series of incidents, she remained asexual until she was nineteen. The sad thing is that she is lucky in that she can now look back and realise that she was used and believe in her own innocence. Others cannot absolve themselves of guilt.

To some readers, this book may seem to have an anti-male focus; however I see it as

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