



Venus of Lespugue, France.
Carved in mammoth ivory.
24,000 B.C. reconstructed version

In the beginning...

In the beginning was a very female sea. For two-and-a-half billion years on earth, all life-forms floated in the womb-like environment of the planetary ocean - nourished and protected by its fluid chemical, rocked by the lunar-tidal rhythms. Before more complex life forms could develop and move onto land, it was necessary to miniaturize the oceanic environment, to reproduce it on a small and mobile scale. In the course of evolution, the ocean - the protective and nourishing space, the amniotic fluids, even the lunar-tidal rhythm - was transferred into the individual female body. And the penis, a mechanical device for land reproduction evolved.
The Great Cosmic Mother - Rediscovering the Religion of the Earth by Monica Sjoo and Barbara Mor, 1987.

Witchcraft in the 90's

Fredericton - In a quiet neighborhood in Fredericton, a coven of witches gathers each week to worship the Goddess.

Skywater, her coven name, is 24. She calls herself a witch in memory of the hundreds of thousands of women who were burned during the Inquisition in the 15, 16, 17 and 18th centuries. But, she points out that "witch" and "witchcraft" really have very little to do with the Goddess religion. These are names the Christian church made up she says, and it's the images associated with these names that have led to misunderstandings about the Goddess religion.

"I came to the Goddess religion through nature and my love of the earth . . . and my concern for what we are doing to our earth," says Skywater. "The Goddess religion is about peace and harmony with nature. It's a long road back to the Goddess because so much has been destroyed and twisted, but it's one that's wonderful and filled with beautiful scenery."

The roots of witchcraft or wicca actually date back to the beginnings of time. Witchcraft comes from Goddess religion - the original religion of the earth and based on the beauty and mystery of childbirth and nature.

Historical evidence shows it flourished around the world during the Palaeolithic and Neolithic times. By 10,000 B.C., social change and upheaval was slowly eroding the Goddess religion. New single-male god religions were taking over. Many of the celebrations and symbols in the current single-male god religions like Christian, Islam and Judaism were taken from the Goddess religion.

During the "enlightenment" and "Age of Reason," the church launched its final devastating attack on the pagan religions throughout Europe

and North America. It is from the Inquisition that we have our modern-day images of witches.

Today, some feminists scholars call the Inquisitions the women's holocaust. Eighty percent of those burned as witches were female. Estimates of the numbers of women killed range from the hundreds of thousands to the millions. In some areas of France and Germany, all the women in the

towns were wiped

out.

At first, the women who were burned were midwives, healers, old women who had outlived their usefulness according to men and economically independent women. By the end of the centuries of burnings, any woman could be a witch - from young girls to wives of government officials.

Despite the persecution, the Goddess religion did not die. She just went underground. Today, the Goddess religion is resurfacing and is one of the fastest growing religions worldwide. There are Wicca churches across the United States and here in Canada in Toronto and Vancouver.

"I think people are finally realizing we can't go on living and destroying the planet," says Skywater. "Because of the beliefs of the Goddess religion, it is very appealing to environmentalists, feminists, peace activists and people who are disillusioned with the single male god religions."

"I think the fear of witchcraft stems from ignorance and it is this ignorance and hysteria

that forces so many of us to maintain secrecy," she says. "And then of course there's Satanism, which does represent a danger, but has nothing to do with the Goddess religion. If people actually studied the history of religion, they would see that Satan was created around the same time the idea of a single male god was and the goddess was around much, much longer than both those ideas."

The women in Skywater's coven come from a variety of walks of life and range in age from their early twenties to their sixties. They work in both professional and non-professional jobs. Some are married with and without children and some are single. Some are very open about their beliefs and others prefer their privacy. But they all share a common belief in Mother Earth and the beauty of womanhood.

"If people would forget what they see in the movies and stuff like that about witches then they would be able to see us as people. They would actually be quite surprised that we are quite normal," says Skywater.

At their coven meetings, the women share a talking circle. They may also sing, hum, dance, do ancient crafts like mask-making and pray to the Goddess.

Skywater's coven is a women-only circle, but there are also male witches and co-ed groups in Fredericton and across the province.

"You can't sum up the craft in a nice tidy way because it can mean so many different things to different people. It's as personal as it is a sharing," says Skywater. "But it is also a common belief in Mother Earth."

Blessed Be.

A day in the life of... Ted, the hypothetical man

By Greta Bauer

Imagine along with me a hypothetical society with some pretty bizarre ideas. Let's follow a hypothetical man named Ted through a hypothetical day.

When Ted wakes up each morning, he carefully shaves his facial, chest, leg, and underarm hair. He knows that women prefer men who are soft and smooth. He reminds himself that tomorrow he will have to wax his bikini line hair before going to the beach. Always conscientious when it comes to masculine hygiene, he sprays his genitalia with the new Masculine Deodorant Spray; he doesn't want to risk unpleasant odors. He remembers to take his medication. Over seventy percent of all medication is prescribed for men, especially psychotropic drugs; you know how moody men are!

Reading his morning newspaper, Ted becomes concerned. It seems there may be a problem with the silicone pectoral implants he and thousands of other Canadian men have had implanted in order to look more muscular. Ted thinks how awful it would be to return to his former small-chested look. After all, the American Society of Plastic Reconstructive Surgeons has stated that "there is a substantial and enlarging body of medical opinion that these deformities (small pectorals) are really a disease."

Scanning the "self help" section of his local bookstore, Ted notices an abundance of books on dealing with TIS, Testosterone Irregularity Syndrome. It is commonly understood that men's failure to have monthly hormonal cycles results in a variety of symptoms including aggressiveness, moodiness, impotence, and premature ejaculation. Fully one-third of Canadian men are thought to suffer from this. When Ted later raises a concern with his wife she dismisses it, saying, "Relax Ted, you've probably just got TIS."

Playing with his children, Ted recalls the days when he was attempting to father them. As soon as he had mentioned that he was

considering father-hood, unsolicited advice began to flood in from every direction. His father, brothers, friends, and neighbors all felt free to tell him exactly what he should and should not be doing, what to eat, what not to drink. Everyone knows that fathering children is hard on the body, and fathering normal children requires vigilance on everyone's part. And then there was the medical tests — ultrasounds, needle sampling, genetic analysis! Yee gads, no wonder he'd had to think carefully before attempting to father a second child.

In the hospital his doctor had surgically enlarged the opening in his penis. This is standard procedure when procreation is attempted. Everyone knows that this helps the semen to flow more easily and that men used to die often before this useful operation. "Don't worry, you'll be having comfortable sex again in no time!" the doctor had said later, using forty stitches to close the incision.

Ted's thoughts returned to the present. He has been seeing his doctor again. The pain during sex hasn't stopped, and he's noticed a greater discharge of semen than usual. His doctor is leaning toward removing the head of his penis. They've also discussed the possibility of castrating him as long as he's going to be under anesthesia anyway. You see, Ted's family has a history of testicular cancer, and as his doctor pointed out, "You've had your children: what do you need your testes for anyway?" Half of all men undergo a head-of-penis-ectomy by age sixty-five, and a third are castrated. Ted's doctor assures him that with Testosterone Replacement Therapy (TRT) he'll be a new man. Besides, TRT will keep him "masculine forever;" It is commonly prescribed to men undergoing mid-life crises and suffering from depression or failure to maintain an erection. It is used frequently despite knowledge that it increases a man's risk of cancer by four to thirteen times.

Ted tries not to think of this. Popping a Vallium, he is finally able to drift off to sleep.

Ridiculous, isn't it, this little hypothetical society? Now reverse the sexes — male to female, head-of-penis-ectomy to hysterectomy, etc.; you get the idea. You end up with an accurate picture. So why does this scenario seem so ridiculous when it is applied to men?

We live in a society that regards the male as the norm. Male

bodies and bodily processes and hormones with relatively small fluctuations are viewed as normal. When men do experience mid-life depression or moodiness, it is attributed to causes outside of their bodies.

We women, on the other hand, are always at the mercy of our bodies, in the grip of some disease or another. We've been compared to the male "norm" and found different and these differences have been labeled abnormal. If we're moody then it must be hormonal; if we're depressed it must be hormonal. From PMS to pregnancy to childbirth to postpartum and breastfeeding to menopause we are sick. We even discuss the "symptoms" of pregnancy and menopause. (Try this with other bodily functions, "the symptoms of sexual intercourse" for example.) No, this concept of sickness seems limited to those bodily functions unique to women.

This pathological view of women's bodies is evident in the medical system as well as popular culture. It is true that about half of us will be hysterectomized and about one third castrated (the medical term for removal of ovaries). In fact, twelve of the twenty most commonly performed surgeries are performed exclusively on women. Women also receive over seventy percent of prescription medications, including numerous forms of hormonal treatment. Are we really this ill?

We can take one of two views. We can go along with the idea that our bodies are unreliable and subject to a variety of difficulties, or we can challenge it. We can accept that women's cycles and body changes are natural and normal; they've been tested over thousand of years and found to work well for our species. We can trust our bodies. We can question medical advice, seek a second opinion, find a doctor who will answer our questions thoroughly. We can talk with women who have had positive experiences with menstruation, childbirth, breastfeeding, and menopause. We can celebrate our bodies and teach our daughters to do the same. We can stubbornly refuse to fall into the trap of attributing our problems to the stage of our menstrual cycles. We can begin to view ourselves as healthy.

Unfortunately, these pathological views our society holds on our bodies are less than hypothetical. They are, however, every bit as ridiculous.