

# Guide to Crone Rituals

18-page Sneak Preview of the  
Facilitators Source Manual

Celebrating Women  
of Age, Wisdom,  
and Power

Compiled by Meg Bowman

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These Crone Rituals reflect my own response to insecurities about aging, and the realization that most women must come to terms with their own aging in an ageist and sexist culture that denigrates the reality of age.

Many thanks to Joyce Sogg and Mary Heath for their editing suggestions, and to Jean Shiota for her magical computer skills.

*Meg Bowman*

*Dedication:* To all the feisty older women I have known. To name just a few: Bev Allen, Charlotte Baker, BJ Bryan, Shirley Clyde, Mary Ann Dahle, Muriel Dickinson, Jean Embree, Caroline Finch, Mary Heath, Jean Johnson, Eileen Malova, Rosemary Matson, Marilyn Nutter, Betty Ortez, Marie MacKay, Marilyn Rodin, Dorothy Satir, Joyce Sogg, Charlotte Suskind, Florance Thompson, Barby Ulmer, Jean Von Kaenel, Alice Wallace, Elise Willson, and Skyle Winer.

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## **Designing a Ritual to Honor Women**

The creative is the place where no one else has ever been.

You have to leave the city of your comfort and go into the wilderness of your intuition.

You can't get there by bus, only by hard work and risk, and by not quite knowing what you're doing.

What you'll discover will be wonderful.

What you'll discover will be yourself!

Hopefully, this Facilitators Source Manual will help you.

### **Women Gathering**

Women need to be with each other  
in order to affirm ourselves.

It gives us a chance to heal the wounds  
that patriarchy has inflicted upon us.

As we heal, we discover new ways of looking at ourselves.

We find that there is power in being women.

We bring health into our lives  
and wholeness into our worlds.

*--Kathleen Weinschenk*

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Start where you are.

Use what you have.

Do what you can.

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*“When the Grandmothers speak, the Earth will be healed.”*  
*Hopi Prophecy*

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I would like to grow very old as slowly as possible  
*Irene Mayer Selznick (1907-1990)*

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One must never turn one's back on life. There is so much  
to do, so many engrossing challenges, so many  
heartbreaking and pressing needs.

-- *Eleanor Roosevelt*

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Asked "Why is it good to be old?" author May Sarton replied,  
"Because I am more myself than I have ever been."

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## Star People

Yes, we are star beings, and we are part of all life.

And we are beings of light.

(light a candle)

We have kindled a light that our daughters

and granddaughters can carry

to light and enlighten

the future.

## Getting Started

This **Guide to Crone Rituals** is a **Facilitators Source Manual** for those who wish to design a ritual to honor a woman's life. Perhaps you wish to honor her contributions to an organization, such as OWL, NOW, UUWF, UUWR, WILPF, AAUW\*, Gray Panthers...

Or perhaps you will wish to focus on her friendships, or on her dedication to her values, family, career, community, world peace, the environment, the women's movement, animal rights, the rights of children, universal health care, or education.

More than one woman can be "croned" during your ritual. More than one facilitator can plan and guide the croning celebration. Wherever the words "crone" and "facilitator" are used, please know that both words can be plural.

Read the ideas presented in **Guide to Crone Rituals** and then feel free to design your own unique celebration that reflects the life of the woman to be honored as Crone. To expand your Crone Ritual, add an essay, reading, poem, and/or song.

Feel free to photocopy any of these materials. Enjoy!

*Meg Bowman, San Jose, CA 2003*

\* Older Women's League, National Organization For Women, Unitarian Universalist Women's Federation, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, American Association of University Women.



## Crone Rituals

### Examples of Openings:

**Facilitator:** Welcome to our Crone Ritual. Today, we will honor a woman of Wisdom, Power and Age.

But first, tum to a woman on your right; get her attention, and say the following: *“My, what a beautiful smile you have!”*

*(allow time)*

**Facilitator:** Today, we will recognize and pay tribute to an older woman who has made many contributions to society.

We will crown her as Crone, a Wise Foremother. But first, tum to a woman on your left; get her attention and say the following:

*“Why, you’re the cutest thing I’ve seen all day!”*

*(allow time)*

**Facilitator:** (Model the following with “brushing off” gestures on both shoulders while saying the following:)

Welcome to our Crone Celebration. We want you to relax and enjoy yourselves... so just do as I’m doing... dust off the cares and woes from your shoulders.

That’s right, dust off all your concerns... from both shoulders. Relax and enjoy as we celebrate women of age, wisdom and power.

### Enjoy Yourself

Enjoy yourself – Your income is secure,

Your glands have settled down, you don’t have to worry:

About what occupation you should follow;  
or whether you will click with that certain person.

Enjoy yourself.

## A Croning Ritual

Crone: A Wise Old Woman\*

This is a rite of passage, an acknowledgement of a woman becoming a Wise Old Woman.

This ritual honors the achievement of age.

Traditionally, it is celebrated when a woman is post-menopausal. However, Cronehood can be celebrated at age 56, or 66, or 76, or 86, or at any time a woman acknowledges that she is now a Crone, A Wise Older Woman.

It is a joyous, life-affirming ritual. It is a celebration.

Enjoy!

\* Crone: Probably from Rhea Kronia, Mother of Time, or Coronis, the carrion crow, which, in mythology, was sacred to the Death Goddess.

The Crone represents the post-menopausal phase of women's lives.

For thousands of years, in cultures throughout the world, it was believed that a post-menopausal woman became very wise, a Goddess of Wisdom, such as Minerva, Athena, Sophia, and Hecate.

To be a Crone is to be a survivor and a repository of the collective wisdom. Crones have great power and profound wisdom.

Design **your Crone Ritual** to fit the allotted time. Some of the suggested rituals in **Guide to Crone Rituals** take about one hour. Feel free to expand or shorten any of them, remembering that there are four basic elements of a Crone Ritual:

- 1) **Theme:** The focus of a Crone Ritual is to honor one woman (or more) as a Wise Woman.
- 2) **Opening:** Make the space special and safe by doing one or more of the following:
  - a) light a candle while you welcome everyone.
  - b) place the Crone to be honored on a "special" chair.
  - c) place on the honoree a fancy scarf, robe, necklace, crown, tiara, mask, or hat.
  - d) spend a moment of quiet time.

- e) ask the group to enter the room lined up by age (eldest first) and give them a chant or a song to sing as they enter.
  - f) welcome everyone and inform them what to expect.
  - g) be aware that some of the participants may not be able to stand, line-up, dance, etc.
- 3) **Ritual Itself:** Be sure that you have all the props, materials, gifts:
- a) focus on defining a ritual, defining the word crone, and explaining why we gather to honor the Wise Older Woman.
  - b) include singing, poetry, games, personal stories, etc.
  - c) honor the Crone.
  - d) share experiences.
- 4) **Closing:** It is important that you have a definite ending to your Crone Ritual:
- a) extinguish the candle(s) and thank everyone for participating.
  - b) invite a group hug or a group closing song.
  - c) provide a closing reading, affirmation, self-blessing, poem.
  - d) ask participants to end the Crone Ritual by personally extending their best wishes to the newly crowned Crone as they leave.
  - e) invite everyone to partake in a toast to the new Crone, or share a lunch, a cake, or some other food item.

You grow up the day you have your first real laugh at yourself.

*Ethel Barrymore (1879-1959)*

### **Celebrate Life**

Life is meant to be a celebration! It shouldn't be necessary to set aside special times to remind us of this fact. Wise is the person who finds a reason to make every day a special one.

*--Leo Buscaglia*

## **Example of a Facilitator’s Introduction to a Crone Ritual:**

This is a ritual. The word “ritual” comes from the Latin *ritus* and the Greek *rheo*, meaning to flow, run, rush, or stream.

A ritual is a ceremony that puts us in touch with the stream or flow of life’s energies, life’s patterns, life’s cycles.

Of course, there are many different types of rituals, some meaningless patterns, some totally useless, some quite psychotic, some used to control people, and some are just plain fun. Today, ours is just for fun.

Today, we will get in touch with our sense of play.

We will have fun together and, hopefully, some laughs.

I think humans are very much alike, and we enjoy ritual – knowing what to expect and doing it over and over again. All societies have rituals – weddings, funerals, age rituals (e.g., *bas mitzvahs*, *quinceañeras*, and coming-out parties). I like the ritual of lighting candles.

In our culture, we **lack** ways of experiencing positively the transition to old age. Older women are often made to feel useless. Words for older women, such as Old Bag, Old Crone, Old Hag, Old Witch... are used to evoke images of older women as ugly, evil, irrelevant – to be denigrated and ignored. Older Women are seldom referred to as “elders” – to be respected and revered.

This Wise Woman Croning Ceremony transforms the negative into a positive.

It is a rite of passage **honoring** age. We are Maiden, then Mother, and now Crone. We connect the word crone with time (*cronus*) and with the wisdom of long life and experience.

We gather to honor a woman of age, wisdom and power...  
a resource of wisdom to us all. So, let us support, empower  
and celebrate women aging consciously and creatively!

As we honor age, we create new rituals or observances.  
Because they are new, they are out of the ordinary.  
As humans, we have many feelings and, as women,  
we are (*generally*) kind, charming, and warm-hearted.

Some women are also angry and resentful.  
Yes, older women, too, for older women have been  
denigrated and made to feel invisible much too often.  
No longer will we be submissive or be cast aside.

It is time to speak up and speak out.  
We empower one another – our numbers are legion.  
We will be heard!

Sometimes the only way to reach freedom is to let go  
and fortify ourselves with affirmations and visual images  
which will sustain us...

We need to reach for choices which will enhance our well-being.  
We need to grow and heal ourselves.  
We need to love ourselves and others.  
We need to forgive.  
Get started!  
No one is in your way except you.

See: Women's Rituals: A Source Book, Barbara G. Walker, p. 27

“To become a Crone is to become one of the Wise Old Women  
who have gathered their long experiences into profound  
understanding and have emerged as women of age, wisdom and  
power ... and who serve as resources of wisdom to us all.”

*Carolyn Harrison*

I asked of life,  
"What have you to offer?"  
And the answer came,  
"What have you to give?"

## Let Us Now Praise Famous Women

Let us now praise famous women  
Our foremothers who paved the way –

THOSE WHO INITIATED CHANGE  
THOSE WHO LOVED JUSTICE  
THOSE WHO MADE THE WORLD GO.

Let us now praise famous women  
Those wise and eloquent teachers  
Who steadfastly passed on their culture –

THEIR NURTURING  
THEIR HEALING  
THEIR COUNSEL  
THEIR WISDOM.

Let us now praise famous women  
Few were honored in their generation –

BUT THEY LEFT THEIR NAMES BEHIND THEM  
FOR US TO SING THEIR PRAISES.

Let us now sing praises to –

SUSAN B. ANTHONY, MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT, LUCRETIA  
MOTT, DOROTHEA DIX, HARRIET TUBMAN.

But most of our foremothers are forgotten –

THEY HAVE NO MEMORIAL  
NO REMEMBERED NAME –  
THEY HAVE PERISHED  
AS THOUGH THEY HAD NEVER BEEN.

All those life-giving women –

STRONG UPPITY ANGRY BEAUTIFUL ABUSED RIGHTEOUS  
DEPENDENT ASSERTIVE COWED AND USED.

With their bodies, most gave birth –

AND WE ARE THEIR CHILDREN  
WE SHARE THEIR LEGACIES

FOR WE ARE THE HEIRS  
OF ALL THE AGES.

Their bodies are buried –

BUT THEY ARE NOT FORGOTTEN  
THEIR LIVES SHALL NOT BE BLOTTED OUT.

For we know their wisdom –

THEIR FEARS  
THEIR DREAMS  
THEIR SONGS  
THEIR LOVE.

We sing praises to famous women –

WE SING THEIR PRAISES  
WE SING THEIR PRAISES.

Blessed Be.

– Meg Bowman



## **Older Women's Bill of Rights**

As an older woman, I have the right to expect quality as well as quantity of life in order to add years to my life and life to my years.

I have the right –

to self-esteem in an ageist and sexist society.

to have adequate economic support to cover my needs for food, shelter, clothes and health care.

to have adequate health care, to be treated with respect by sensitive health care providers as an individual whose life is valuable.

to have access to honest, legal and financial advice and consumer protection.  
to have a positive representation in the media.

to freedom from fear of crime, isolation, poverty and abandonment.

to be seen as a unique individual who is productive, attractive, intelligent and interesting.

to express my sexuality in whatever manner I choose.

to freedom from society's stigma of incompleteness if I am a woman alone.

to have employment opportunities if I choose or need to work, and receive fair wages. to have worthwhile volunteer opportunities available to me if I choose to contribute my time.

to choose alternate life styles and living arrangements.

to maintain optimum control over my own life and possession.

to be given the opportunity to continue to grow intellectually, spiritually and socially. to rid myself of dependence on others, to speak for myself, and to learn to serve myself.

Resolution of delegates to the State of Rhode Island's Older Women's Conference, 1980.

Passed unanimously by Committee of Older Women's Concerns, White House Conference on Aging, 1981.

Older Women's League



## The Battle Hymn of Aging

*(To the tune of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic")*

We've reached the age of sixty-five, our golden years are here.  
They tell us that the age begins a happy new career.  
For now our Uncle Sam becomes our permanent cashier  
As we go marching on.

(CHORUS)

Glory, glory hallelujah!  
Glory, glory hallelujah!  
Glory, glory hallelujah!  
As we go bravely on.

Our Social Security from Baltimore is sent.  
We buy a little bit of food and maybe pay the rent.  
And after that we're stony broke and left without a cent  
But we go bravely on!

(REPEAT CHORUS)

And as for checks from Medicare, will someone tell us how  
They always find some doctor bills they sadly disallow?  
And dental costs, as well we know, they wholly disallow  
But we go bravely on!

(REPEAT CHORUS)

We don't know how we make it, as we live from day-to-day  
With income fixed and prices up, there's always more to pay.  
So minding our arthritis, let's march and sing and say  
That we'll go bravely on!

(REPEAT CHORUS)

And let's all be very thankful that we are still alive.  
The dreams we have may still come true when we are ninety-five.  
So get together, friends, to have the strength to survive  
As we go bravely on!

(REPEAT CHORUS)

# Guide <sup>to</sup> Crone Rituals

## *Facilitators Source Manual*

Positive and creative ways  
to celebrate and acknowledge  
Wise Older Women.



Meg Bowman, retired professor of Sociology, was a veteran peace, civil rights and feminist activist. Author of ten books, she also published numerous poems, essays, travel pieces, book reviews and collections of humorous flyers. A world traveler, Meg collected scholarship funds for bright, impoverished students in western Kenya. Born in North Dakota in 1929, Meg lived in San Jose, California until her passing in 2020.

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