

## *Sacred Sensuality; A Global Perspective*

I believe that life crafts a quilt of circumstances mapping out our destinies. Looking back we see threads of the past stitching it all together. This is how I identified my calling; to re-unite women and *sacred sensuality*, locally and globally. What I discovered through my journey is that women's struggles in the developed world are different, yet related, to the struggles of women in developing countries. I also understood that the work we do here to nurture ourselves is of tremendous value to our sisters far away.

My life quilt looks something like this. By age 16 I had lost the lottery on fertility learning then that I couldn't have children. As for body image, I resented my shape and size, even dabbled in bulimia and would have gladly become anorexic if I could have resisted my love of food. And while I did confront my insecurities in the corporate world I never felt at home there. My work as a healer left many material needs unfulfilled, so it seemed I was a washout financially too. All this left me feeling far less than the beautiful and successful woman I longed to be.

Motherhood, body and career; I didn't measure up in any of these departments. Yet I knew, in theory, that success is determined by what's on the inside, not how we look or what we are able to accomplish. Sounds good, but how could I achieve this in my own life, I wondered, when all my apparent shortcomings weighed on me so relentlessly? And what truly determines the beauty of a woman? What is it that fulfills her, resulting in a self realized radiant glow allowing her to look back, one day, on a life well lived? What is the essence of a woman and how can we train ourselves and our culture to support *that*, rather than have to conform to a superficial, miss-fitting rendition of womanhood? And finally, how can I indulge in this chronic self criticism when so many women in the world struggle to feed their families, to be treated as if their opinions mattered, to choose when to have sex, how to spend their money, and the right to education?

My longing to make sense of these two radically different experiences of womanhood, the privilege of self doubt and the lack of essential rights and freedoms, consumed me..... Little did I know this would soon become a creative force in my life.

As a bodyworker and teacher of yoga and dance, my approach was from a somato/psycho-spiritual orientation. I studied mind/body, expressive arts, energy modalities and therapies. I spent a lot of time in shamanic communities praying and learning. I guided my students and clients to connect with themselves and source through their bodies and movement to reach states of radiant self acceptance and self love, work I was intimately engaged in myself. The feedback that others gave me, men and women alike, was that I embodied a sensual feminine goddess-ness. Having sacrificed sensuality in their busy, success driven lives, I gave women permission to enjoy their femininity. Lack of time, lack of affirmation from their immediate environments and wanting to be treated as an equal in a man's world were at the roots of their sacrifice. How odd, I thought, considering all of my apparent shortcomings, that I should inspire women's sensuality. I

certainly hadn't formally studied this and sensuality was not something that was consciously part of my repertoire. I'd had the blessed experience, from a young age, of spending time and living close to nature. I wondered if it was that connection to a world that mirrored and inspired my *inner* beauty that determined what I, unintentionally, seemed to impart in my teaching.

Despite fulfilling work, late in my 30's I went through a major depression that changed my life. I didn't feel like dancing, being creative or relating to the world. Sensually I was all dried up. I had lived in a city for 6 years at that time. I was step mom to three teenage boys and partner to their dad. For the first time teaching became a chore. Being surrounded mostly by concrete, plastic, TV and young male angst, is it any wonder that I lost the sense of my sacred sensual self? Then while vacationing in Central America, hiking by a river in a lush tropical jungle, I discovered a sense of home and belonging inhabiting me. I felt embraced and cradled there. I wore little clothes and slept in a house with no walls. The contact of my skin with the elements and the immersion of all my senses within the natural world even as I slept rekindled my sensual aliveness. I began a deeper inquiry into my feminine sensibilities and their connection to nature, discovering how essential it was for me to be lovingly reflected by my environment. It was clear to me that *this* quality of connection was a non-negotiable requirement for my survival. I knew I had to spend more time in a setting where the marriage of sensuality, spirituality and creativity were nourished. These changes cost me my partner and his kids. Though I know it was a necessary step in my sensual evolution, the losses were still excruciating.

Shortly afterwards, I came across Women for Women International, a non-profit organization that brings aid to women survivors of war. I learned that women were being raped, systematically and repeatedly, as a weapon of genocide, ethnic cleansing and to instill fear in the masses. I understood that these women were being stripped of a vital aspect of their being, the sacredness of their sensuality. What became clear to me was that women everywhere, seem to have to fight to retain our feminine essence, the precious and sacred sensuality that is unique to each one of us and is independent of all the external trappings of career, children, physique and culture. Sacred sensuality is our intimate relationship to self and other as expressions of nature. It is essential not only for *our* survival, but for the survival of all beings and our planet..

I knew then that women joining together is a natural step towards rehabilitating our own and our sisters' sensual dignity. Collectively offering aid to our sisters in the 3<sup>rd</sup> world creates feminine empowerment on two fronts. Locally, we risk stepping into our own feminine power while also supporting our sisters internationally to salvage theirs after horrific circumstances. At first glance restoring sacred sensuality might seem unessential for women who have been victims of violence and have lost everything. Actually it is exactly what has been violently assaulted in them and so is one of the vital aspects of their healing and renewal. It is what *we* have willingly given away in the interest of equality, and it is what *we are all* on the road towards restoring on behalf of ourselves and the planet. Honouring the sacredness of our sensuality *is* an essential quality for encouraging healthy societies, natural environments and for the paradigm shift at large.

Born of this awareness, I founded *Vividly Woman; Body, Self and Soul* as a vehicle to marry these two causes. Today Vividly Woman is a global community of women's circles devoted to the peace, prosperity and freedom of all beings through the re-union of women's spirituality, sensuality and creativity. A growing community of 30 women's circles involving 180 women across North America, Vividly Woman is helping to re-create the lives of 23 women survivors of war in places like The Congo, Nigeria, Iraq, Bosnia, etc. Weekend circles, retreats and on line courses join 1<sup>st</sup> world women in groups to discover their sacred sensuality through nature, yoga, and expressive arts while collectively sponsoring sister survivors of war in the 3<sup>rd</sup> world, helping them to recreate their lives after devastating circumstances. Alexandra Stockwell, a Vividly Woman circle member writes "When I read the story of our sponsored sister, a woman in Rwanda named Valentine, I felt so deeply how important the Vividly Woman journey is. I had thought the journey a bit indulgent and self-oriented, compared to what refugees and women suffering in current or recent war zones experience. But after having done a few weeks of the online curriculum, I experienced how the progress I make for myself in opening into my sensual awareness is progress I make for Valentine too".

My life's calling is a passionate expression of my life journey thus far. The circling community of *Vividly Woman; Body Self and Soul*, is a testament to that journey. Dancing onward we re-awaken a global paradigm embracing *women's sacred sensuality*, essential to wholeness, peace and prosperity for all.

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