

Emerging Women
BIRTHING A BOOK
(IT'S ALL IN THE CARDS)

By Sophia

Today my bundle of joy arrived! New and colorful, the fruit of my long and difficult labor. No, not a real baby, not the kind that you raise. My baby of creativity, my book, is sitting in almost-final-form on my lap. What I have is the galley which is finished, the first book. That gets checked over by me for one last look before I send it back to my publisher and have them send it to the printer and then off into the world it goes! It is more like a baby than a young adult, where will my book try its wings?! Will it falter or will it soar into the ether? Will others accept it? Will it be loved and used by all those who buy it? Or will it just be another cut-out in a pile somewhere. I've never had these feelings before, it is a unique situation, but one that makes me think about the growth of myself and the responsibility I have been given to maybe add something small to the world.

It really is not fair to call it my book, it belongs to my ancestors, I'm just writing it down. My grandmother is the one who taught me to read the cards. It is her system and others in turn before her passed this wisdom on. She learned in the 1920s, I learned in the 1960s and 1970s. Hours and hours I was taught this system by my grandmother. I had to memorize what every card meant. I was not allowed to write anything down. Did my grandmother know what I would do eventually? Or was she just making sure that the oral tradition survived, much as her mother and grandmother did before her. I feel she is pleased that so many more will have access to this very powerful system through me, and that is the key phrase; Through me.

The psychic use of the cards survived long before I was born by oral tradition and this is where it was frustrating. It upset but fascinated me to learn what every card meant on and on and how the meaning was changed after a different card was laid next to it and the subtle differences of interpretation. That could influence or even change a reading. It was also important to understand other divination as well. I was also taught how to do spells with the cards which with a little practice can result in many interesting changes. Yes you can ask for anything in a card spell, but it may come about in a way that you never expected. So when I was asked to write this book (Fortune Telling with Playing Cards) by my publisher Llewellyn Worldwide, I really had to think about it. What would my grandmother think about me breaking with tradition and writing it down for others to use? Then you think of it in more global terms, if it is not written down it will be lost. It is really that simple. I have taught writing courses for over ten years and when I discuss what I learned from my grandparents, how to give all kinds of psychic readings and so on, it is the one thing that others always told me; "You should write a book, nobody would believe what your life is really like." So, I guess that is how I ended up with this manuscript on my lap. Or is it?

I always wanted to be a writer, though I never thought I would. I tell my students all the same thing. If you do not write it, then who will write it? If you don't want anything to be lost or the stories change and you want to remember something important, then write it down. I had to write down my grandmother's tradition, even though I really didn't want to. I was, basically, told to! Nobody in my family is interested in learning the way I did. Neither are my esoteric students, after all, who has the time to memorize, to learn everything the hard way? It is much easier with a book. And so the feeling grew; write it down....write it down....it will get lost if you don't write it down!

So my child is here, my book is being offered to the world. And, unbelievably, it is not being offered alone. when Llewellyn asked me to write the book. I mentioned how special the cards are,

how clearly I saw in my mind what a real reading deck would look like and so I asked them what they thought about having a deck of cards to go with the book. They thought it was a good idea!! So I had to find someone after my book was nearly completed who could put the visions into reality. I started to look around , and as these things so often happen, she simply appeared in my life. I met a very gifted artist, Beth Wright, who has done some really beautiful children's' books. Over time she agreed to the project and so we were set when Llewellyn gave us the thumbs up.

Working together on a project of this scope with another is hard, I think that is why so many of us like to be self-employed. It is the working of things out that is difficult. Beth really has done a beautiful job on the deck so far, and that too is almost done! It reflects the folk art of the traditional deck but it reveals many deeper levels of power and meaning. This is the look I desired since it is a family tradition so it needs to look like it embodies an ancient tradition, a craft. Truly they are beautiful and, more importantly, they convey the wisdom flowing through the system, through the book.

In the card-reading tradition people normally secretly guarded their magickal system, it was not easily revealed to outsiders, I know my grandparents kept it in the family. We liked having a deck with no colors, that way others were more focused on your psychic readings. It is not just the readers who convey the wisdom, actually it is the cards that are magic. Readers like myself just interpret them. I don't think I would have thought so deeply on all of this if it hadn't been for several chance encounters with fellow card-psychics. These people, from very different walks of life, all shared something with me; they saw the light within the cards. Let me tell you about a few of them:

One person who I use to see who read my cards was an old Gypsy women who was very gifted as a psychic and card reader. She also used the master spread like my grandmother. She taught me what to expect from a good reading. The first time I saw her it was a total earth-shaking experience for me since she was able to

go into great details about my life, both in my past and in the present. The future was the most shocking part though, she gave me details about what my husband would look like and how we would meet. So far all that she told me has unfolded. All from playing cards! This was twenty years ago and it never ceases to amaze me how accurate she was. This was how I decided to really go for it and to develop my ability to be as good as her.

A different cartomancer I met, very different, was a Chippawa Indian. I use to spend a lot of time with him and his family, we would drink coffee and eat Indian fry bread together. Most of our entertainment revolved around reading each other's playing cards. We both used the wheel of life spread and interpreted the cards the same way. He was originally from the Dakotas and learned on the reservation. Another oral tradition that is hopefully still alive.

This last 'card psychic' was one I have mentioned before, yet I feel I should tell the story briefly again, just to show how universal the cards are.

My husband, our small son and I, took a trip to New Orleans and stayed with an old friend of my husband's. He is a priest in a temple there and asked us if we wanted to come to a practice drumming service at the Voodoo Spiritual Temple. We went along to watch him drum and to meet some of his friends. The temple was amazing, with the various altars and when the music started the whole room changed. I am a ritual photographer, the Hougan (High Priest) Oswan was asking me to take photographs of various altars and telling me not to forget anything. My husband presented him with a book he had written (Global Ritualism). The Hougan loved it and looked it over and talked with my husband. They discussed initiation and his life in Belize and how he found his way to America.

My husband later mentioned to the Hougan that I knew how to read playing cards (They were talking about divination.) He asked to see me in his kitchen alone because he, too, read cards! We discussed the variations of how we both read playing cards and the

similarities and where we learned. He was taught in Belize, also by oral tradition. We also discussed differences in the way we read the cards. It is interesting to note how, for us, the cards pretty much meant the same things. In his system, though, he used every card in a reading. Both of us used astrology in our card readings, an amazing similarity! We both agreed that playing cards were more interesting to us than tarot.

When I asked him why he was so interested in them, he told me it was because he found them so mysterious. He said that I knew the value of the cards and that, I should stir it up. He started to wave his hands into the air as if smoke from a cauldron was rising and disappearing. Stir it up, he said, stir it up, his hands rising higher and higher. After that he orally gave me an intense transmission on Cartomancy.

Later that night we got a telephone call from the high priestess, telling us that the Hougan was in the hospital. He died in a matter of hours. I was one of the few to whom he told about the playing cards and his system. It was an honor to meet him and his lovely wife, and I am grateful that he found me worthy enough to pass down the information he gave me. I hope his cartomancy system sees print someday. It finally inspired me to put mine down in writing.

So, here I sit with my baby. I hope that this book will "stir it up" as Oswan said, I hope that some of the magic, the light, the wisdom that the cards have embodied in so many different times and places finds its way into this book and so into the world. If this happens, I will be satisfied. What else can we do in life but pass on a little wisdom and joy?