

Emerging Women

READING TEA LEAVES ON TV AND OTHER WOMENS MYSTERIES

(WAYS MY GRANDMA TAUGHT ME)

By Sophia

“Action, Roll em!”

And with that prompt, I looked into the Snapple bottle of the women sitting across from me. I looked at the patters of the leaves shifting in the bottom as the cameras stared at me. I saw an image and said to her “Congratulations, you just got promoted.”

“That is right,” she said, “I just got a better job at my company!”

“Cut!” yelled the director. “How did you know that?” he asked, turning to stare at me.

“You asked me to read the tea leaves and so I am,” I replied.

“Oh my God.... roll em.” he sighed. The rest of the shoot continued like this for over an hour. I sat across the table and peered into the snapple bottle and read this woman’s fortune as I had been taught to do. Of course my grandmother never read a Snapple ice tea. This was my first time as “a real person“ (as the Snapple people call us) to do a real commercial. It was exciting and amazing to get pulled into the different universe of Hollywood and New York advertising. The director was busy with his work and the cameramen with their tasks as well. I was absorbed with mine, being psychic. The problem was how to give her a fair reading. Would I reveal too much in the company of strangers and make her uncomfortable because I brought up too much personal information on camera? This was a new one for me.

The next image that came up in the snapple bottle was a wagon with a broken wheel. Today this has little meaning, nobody

travels by wagon anymore. I have to modernize it a little, this is easy; wagon translates to car. A broken wheel to car problems.

“Have you had recent problems with your car?” I asked? I knew it was recent because of where the image was, close to the rim of the bottle, meaning that it was a recent event.

“Yes,” she whispered, “but nobody knows that. When I started my car this morning, oil leaked everywhere. I have not mentioned it to anybody. That is amazing....,” her voice trailed off.

“Cut!” yelled the director. “How did you know that!?” he asked again. Although this was serious work for me, I could not smiling to myself. It brought back so many memories of my childhood.

How did I get here, reading tea leaves for a Snapple commercial in an esoteric bookshop in Seattle? My grandfather and grandmother who now are on the otherside taught me how to be a tea leaf reader. They would have been so pleased to see the tradition carried on to so many people in such an unusual way. I started learning the family tradition at the age of three when they would spend hours teaching me how to read the leaves. Being northwest natives, they loved their coffee and so they also they taught me how to read grounds too. We all have learned something precious from our grandmother, sister, mother or female friend; not as a lesson, but something, some deep wise mystery that is passed down to and through us. Some receive family jewelry, others a love of gardening. I have been thinking a lot of women and our traditions and I have realized that most of these are oral traditions. How many of us remember a women relative saying “I have something special to show you?” This it is a key moment because it means that you are about to be initiated and that you will hear all about a tradition, whether you want to or not. You have taken the first step, interest; the next is the beginning of understanding.

As women, we all need to think about what is it that we want to pass on. What is it that we want to teach our daughters, friends and female relations? Lately I’ve asked, what do I want others to remember about me? This is the seed of oral tradition that women

communicate to others, what we want others to learn. My grandparents would watch over me and give me advice when I was learning to read the leaves. Some kids practice the piano or embroidery, I practiced divination. Is this what my grandparents were preparing me for? To open up a tradition that few practice today? They wished they could give me money or something of 'use.' But they had their psychic ability and I inherited that from them. They taught me how to be a medium and a psychic and during that time when you did not take money for your services. They needed to pass on the tradition to the most psychic one in the family and that, I guess, was me. They took a risk thinking that they might be leading me to spend my life in poverty reading to help others who had lost their way, but it turned out differently. Oral traditions are the link with our past and future. It is women who decide in most family what is important and what is not. Much like spring cleaning or the moon-time cycles, we decide what to keep and what to throw out. Now it is my turn to pass on the oral traditions that I learned from grandma. I do not have a daughter, but one of my nieces has shown some interest in readings. My son couldn't care less. I believe this is why I have been approached by a woman from a major publishing company to write my stories so that others will read them in books. My stories are about tea leaves and visions. We all have stories to tell, we all have songs to sing, we all have a path, but it is lonely to walk it alone. We must take others with us, and we must teach others our songs and our language. To be heard, we as women must help others. By doing so, we help ourselves.

It is no mistake that when learning language we learn it from our mother, this is why it is called our "mother tongue." Like the language of divination that my grandparents passed on to me, a family tradition of reading the tea leaves. They, of course, also received this from other members of the family a long time ago. Who would have believed that what was passed down to me would then be made into a national television commercial?! It shows the importance of oral traditions, no matter what they are. Women are

the keepers of oral traditions and usually the ones who keep many cultural aspects alive. My grandfather may have also taught me about tea leaf reading, but it was my grandmother who brought the tea out with the right doses of leaves, the proper cups and saucers, and of course, she knew the best tea to use. She taught me the other parts of tea leaf reading, like when asking questions about health use peppermint tea, but for questions about love use tea of wild rose petals picked in moonlight. My grandfather also knew this wisdom, but he forgot it. It is women that keep the stories going and the wise information that is needed to keep traditions alive. My grandmother made sure that I understood every little detail about this subject. After a while, when my tea leaf readings started to be accurate, they graduated me to reading for clients and doing more psychic work like working with ancestor spirits and contacting loved ones that had passed on.

Now, to look at it in a larger context, what we pass on to others we do not write down, more often it is oral traditions. Television is a great example of this. I have been on television before, I was a featured guest on Northwest Afternoon. I had a much wider audience than I was used to, but the message, the oral tradition, was the same. We tend to talk about what we need to get across to others and what type of information is the easiest to do this. The example that sticks with me the most is a friend of mine whose grandmother is Polish and who could not read or write in English. She was an excellent cook, but she was unable to write it all down. Even though my friend kept asking her to. Well, she realized that this wisdom would be lost and the recipes from Poland would only be a memory, so she videotaped grandma cooking in the kitchen! Because of this, another oral tradition survives, it would have been a shame to have that disappear from the family. It doesn't matter what kind of materials we use in relying on our memories and mysteries. It matters more that we women who are keepers of traditions pass them on to others and support each other in what we do. The opportunity for me to do a Snapple commercial was possible because several women

helped and supported me. A woman referred me to a casting director who was looking for a “real tea leaf reader.” That woman was Krysta Gibson, the editor of this paper who talked very highly of me. Another was one of the owners of Mandala books where it was filmed. That was Jann van Ysselsteyne who also allowed us to use their store’s space. The third woman involved was Tess at Stargazer who also gave me the endorsement of being “the real thing.” The producer was another open-minded woman and it was a woman who wrote to Snapple and asked she could have her tea leaves read from a bottle of Snapple. Only a woman would ask such a funny yet psychic question! We all supported each other in this. The lesson is that we all need to do this in order to be successful. In the end I called my mother to tell her how it went, she asked me the questions that I heard long ago from my grandmother: “Did you give a good reading? Did you help the woman when she saw you? Did you entertain her so she felt at ease with you and the reading? How many times did you turn the bottle, did you keep within the tradition and turn the bottle three times counter clock wise?” It was not good enough to answer the questions briefly, my mother wanted more detail. She wanted facts and assurances that I had kept faith with the family tradition. It was and is important to us both. Before we shot the commercial I asked mom what she thought of reading from a Snapple bottle. She said that is OK as long as you see tea leaves. My mom also said that as long as you follow the guidelines, then you really are keeping with the tradition, no matter what you do. I agree with her, it is OK to loosen the reins now and again. Choose what you know that is important and pass on the secrets that our grandmothers and mothers taught us to share with others, but most of all keep them true within yourself