

## Chapter 1



Chuck was standing in front of the science fiction section of my bookstore when he called me over to him. He spoke as if he was imparting a great secret. "Now that you have been accepted as a student, your life will go beyond anything these authors have ever imagined," he said as he scanned the works by Barker, Tolkien, Bradbury, etc.

At the time I had no idea what he meant, except that Chuck knew things, saw things, and I trusted him. He had walked into the bookstore several years before this day. He was a Vietnam war veteran, a Ph.D. candidate, a voracious reader, and an aspiring magician. He ordered the most esoteric books and actually read them.

On our first meeting he was wearing an army fatigue jacket, had long hair, and smoked Marlboro cigarettes. I was at the height of my feminist separatism and downright hostile towards all males. He wanted to be friends. He wanted to talk of things which mattered. I had only contempt for inquiring men. They did not deserve to know our mysteries. He insisted on pushing the issue further. I finally told him that being born a woman was a higher birth. Women were seeking liberation and men were only looking for more insidious ways to oppress. Men were pressing downwards and women moving upwards. Women were growing towards the light, men were promoting darkness.

Frustrated and irritated, Chuck blared at me, "If being castrated means that I would have a better chance at Enlightenment, I would do it in a minute!" What more could a man have said to me? What more could I have demanded from the oppressor to strike a relationship than renounce their weapon of oppression? And so began one of the most astonishing and important friendships of my life.

In the Bahai faith there is a name for a person who announces the coming of the Enlightened one; the Bab. It means the gate. Chuck was my Bab, my Saint John, my gate.



For fourteen years prior, the principle study of my life had been liberation. The very word held all truths for me. I did not just want it for myself. I wanted to know everything about the process of liberation. What led to oppression? What was the nature of the struggle for freedom? What was happening to a soul who oppresses or the soul who is oppressed? I investigated astrology, mathematics, metaphysics, history, and religion.

With a B.A. in Roman Catholic Theology, I knew the machinery of oppression in a male-dominated church. I also knew that the founder of the faith was not an oppressor. But how could women find liberation if they accepted a male for their god? The liturgy, the scripture, the structure of the church had to be rejected fully for women to discover their power.

I had found one significant ideology in Catholicism: Liberation Theology. Father James Gutierrez had written a book by that title and his theory was that God would always join on the side of the oppressed. God could not be a party to oppression. The sides on which one fought would reveal who is fighting on the side of goodness. That side must be the one seeking liberation. I became obsessed with it, reading King, Gandhi, anything about a person fighting on the side of freedom.

While I was working on an M.A. in Religion, a student mentioned to me that I might enjoy a particular book, *The Dialectics of Sex*, by Shulamith Firestone. And so began the wildest, most intense reading adventure of my life. He (!) had opened a door that would point me to my magnetic north.

I could not get enough: Daly, Steinam, Freidan, Dworkin, Greer, Stone, Bunch, DeBouvoir. I was hooked. I haunted woman's bookstores. I ordered from esoteric publishers. I wandered through libraries. I was buried in woman's books: morning, noon, and night. I had found my fight, my beachhead, my life's purpose: the liberation of women. I wrote my graduate exams on Liberation Theology as applied to the American Women's Movement.



I bought and read hundreds of books. I was spending over half of my income at bookstores and publishers. The only sensible thing to do was to sell the house and open a woman's bookstore. I would be able to buy any and all of the books I wanted to read and then sell them. In just a few months the task was done and I opened "The Magic Speller." It was a beautiful little alternative bookstore with special sections on women and metaphysics.

Women came in everyday looking for the best book on battering, on child abuse, on woman's history. They phoned with questions about local political groups, concerts and networking. I had my dream come true. My apartment was over the bookstore. My work and my interest were one and the same. I was self-employed and provided a service in which I believed fully. I was poor but fortunate. I could read anything I wanted. I knew about books being published months in advance.

There were meetings of every type at the bookstore. Women performed, read poetry, signed books, hung posters. I became an officer in the local chapter of the National Organization for Women. I was lecturing any place that would have me, from Woman's Unions at universities, to luncheons for business women. No boss could complain about my time off or personal phone calls. No management could require pantyhose. My cats and dogs came to work with me.



Then one day in early May the phone rang as it had never before. It was Sonia Johnson calling. We had met months before through an autograph party I held for her first book, "From Housewife to Heretic." We talked of the deadline for the Equal Rights Amendment which was July 1, 1982. I had been folding flyers, licking envelopes and hosting fund-raisers for years. Both of us wanted to do something more. We didn't know what it was going to be but we pledged that we would do it together.

"We are going to fast for the ERA," she calmly explained to me. "We are going to go to Illinois, sit in the capital rotunda, live on water only and win the ERA." Of course. It was obvious. It was the only thing to do. We could not lose. We agreed. We set the date and hung up. I slumped into the wall. What had I done? What had I agreed to do? I could die fasting for 45 days on water.

A week later I left the Magic Speller and went to Illinois. Seven of us began the fast a couple of days after arriving. We sat on folding chairs in the rotunda. We were interviewed and photographed. We were courageous. We were hungry. We were making history. We would win. Fasting could not lose. NOW put us up in a hotel. Gloria Steinem rented a van for us. And, women from around the world felt hope.

Thirty seven days later it was over. Florida fell and finally Illinois. On June 24th, 1982, the ERA was over and so was the fast. I rejoined the world of eating people, the world of oppressed people, the world of unequal people. I was depressed beyond comprehension. I had lost the ERA. I had lost it for every woman.

Returning to my bookstore, I started a new speaking tour. We could not ask the boys' network for permission any more. We would have to start our own laws, our own culture, our own world. I told the groups that I was looking for midwives for the new age. It would be an age by, for, and about women. I wanted to start a community of women who would not accept the status of being unequal. We would seize our equality, with civil disobedience if necessary.



In late August, Chuck walked through the door. He had a stack of newspapers he wanted to drop off. He told me that while he had been getting his hair cut and leafing through a People magazine, he saw my picture. "You are tilting your sword at windmills and I believe that I have found someone who can help you." With this he handed me a hundred copies of Self-Discovery magazine and left.

The cover was an outrage. It was a picture of a pretty blond woman sitting on top of a Porsche. The headline read, "Samadhi is loose in America." The copy was story after story of people seeing miracles. They saw this teacher disappear or grow thirty feet in the air. They said that he was Enlightened.

Why would I care about such a thing? I had seen many a customer over the years insist that they had found a master and I didn't see any big change in their lives. The people in white would come in, the people in saffron would come in, the people in sunrise colors would come in and insist that they had found a real teacher. I was not looking for a teacher.

Secondly, it was a man. I had no use for men, certainly not men who said that they could help women. Women had to help themselves. This man could be no different than the rest considering the sexist picture on the cover of his promotional brochure. In spite of my judgments and doubts, I left the stack of Self-Discoveries on the magazine rack.



A couple of weeks went by and Chuck called asking if I wanted to attend a series of seminars on seven consecutive Thursday nights given by this teacher, Atmananda. He said that there were lots of feminists who were his students, one in particular that he would like me to meet. I wasn't sure. I had nothing to lose. I was curious. How could Chuck be so off about this man who advertises with sexist pictures?

I called my closest friend, Patty, and asked if she would go with me. I was still on shaky footing from the fast. In the time since Illinois, I could only eat things that were white and in very small quantities. My driving was unsure. Nevertheless, my hopes were reassembling. My lectures were not going very well since most women really did not want to hear about women's rights for a while. They needed time to heal.

Patty and I drove to the Sheraton Miramar in Santa Monica on a Thursday night in late September. I would look for myself, but I would never accept a teacher, certainly not a man. The seminar was held in a large ballroom with beautiful chandeliers. The chairs were arranged in

precise rows. People were milling around. Electronic music by Jarre was very loud. I was not impressed. The people were classic examples of sexism. The men were wearing suits, dealing with tickets and money. The women were all wearing dresses selling books and tapes. The gender lines were definite and Victorian.

In front of the room was a stage surrounded with flowers and burning incense. Chuck saw me and came over to say hello. He turned and introduced me to his friend, the supposed feminist. She was wearing a flowered silk dress. She tried to defend her politically incorrect outfit saying, "I guess this doesn't look like I am a feminist." I avoided the question and sat down in the third row on the right with Patty.

Finally this man entered the room, walked to the stage, and sat down. People shuffled in their seats, sitting bolt upright. He was in his early thirties, American, tall, and handsome with curly hair. He was wearing trousers and a blue silk embroidered jacket. He began to talk. He explained about the art of meditation. He led several meditations. I was not impressed.

He was articulate. He was funny. He spoke with purpose. But, in the course of the talks, he said that Gandhi had made one grave mistake, allowing himself to be shot and thereby creating bad karma for his assassin. He said that Gandhi should have had armed security for his ashram. I was most definitely not impressed.

After a couple of hours, he got up and walked to the right of the stage. He was standing just fifteen feet in front of me talking. He said that certain people had incarnated at that time to be spiritual "midwives." I heard it. He said it. MIDWIVES!

I left the meeting very confused. I found his students, the music, the incense to be totally unacceptable. Many of the things he said were in direct opposition to my position of pacifism. But what did he mean about midwives? Why did he use that word?

It was clear to me that women did not need meditation. They needed just laws, equal rights, child care, health plans, and shelters. Stopping thought could not change the world for women. This was all nonsense. I decided that night that I would not go to any more seminars.

The next Thursday night arrived and as I sat on my couch watching the rain pouring outside my window, I felt a loss of missing something, or not finding something. This feeling was deeper and more desperate than any of the losses of the summer; it spread across lifetimes. I knew I had to get something from him.

He had something I needed. He had something that was mine by necessity. He had something I had earned by wanting it so badly. I must have it. I wrote him a letter. I told him that the Goddess had told me to find the blueprints for what was to come. I knew that he had them and he was to give them to me. It was a very short letter. I was very sure. He would have to give them to me. I was the one searching for the midwives, and I needed the blueprints.