

## COMING HOME

By Cynthia Crisp

It had just turned dark and the wind had picked up as I entered the large tent where I lay down beside my friend along with 65 other people . The grandmother began to beat a small drum with a cadence that was both comforting and hypnotic. She instructed us to go down through a hole or tunnel and enter “the lower world,” where we were to search for a Power Animal, a Spirit Animal that was willing to be our “ally” at this time. In a flash of an instant my mind filled with thoughts: Where was I? What was I doing there? Would it work for me? Was it just nonsense? Who *were* these people?

The year was 1991 – the place was a retreat center in New Hampshire owned and run by a well-known Cherokee Elder Teacher – the event was a unique gathering of many tribal leaders from all over the U.S. intermingled with many people like myself who were seekers, fellow journeyers, spiritual nomads. I was 42 years old, recently divorced, a single-mother, a serious “seeker,” who had spent 18 years in an elite spiritual school during the 70’s and 80’s, studying, practicing, and teaching all over the country, and then 2 years working with a renown Kwan Yin Master. I had become disillusioned with “following” groups and masters, even though I had had the great good fortune to work personally with six Realized Beings before I turned 40. Yes, I had been disillusioned with hero-worship and giving my power away to charismatic teachers (mostly men), and was determined to find my own connection to the Divine and to reap the benefits of empowerment that were sure to follow.

So, back to my story...As the Elder drummed us into an altered state I did indeed find and enter a long rabbit hole, much like Alice, and landed a short timer later with a thud into a dark forest. It looked like a place I had been before except it was also different. Things were shiny and wavering. And the smells were different. Before I could get my bearings, I was swooped up by a large bald eagle who flew me up to the top of a giant sequoia. I have always been terrified of heights. It must have been 100 feet tall. I was dropped into a nest where there were eaglets. And then the eagle began to communicate with me. I can’t share all the details here but it was a powerful experience receiving wisdom and healing from a large bird while sitting high above the world aware that my real body was lying on the ground inside a make-shift tent with 65 strangers in the middle of New England. It was my first Shamanic experience. I learned that I was to become a shamanic

healer myself, sharing wisdom, balance, and harmony in all aspects of my life, with the assistance of my Helping Spirits.

Shamanism has become quite the fashion nowadays. It is the oldest spiritual practice on the earth. I have studied with many powerful shamanic teachers since then and completed many advanced trainings in shamanic techniques. The word *shaman* comes from the Siberian tradition and means one who sees in the dark. Many old world cultures had shamans that functioned in their communities as doctors, seers, healers, therapists, storytellers, and community builders. In fact, the survival of the people depended on the information the shamans would bring back to them regarding the harvest, the hunt, illnesses, nature, the elements, etc. And to think that I in the 20th and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries would be beating a drum and shaking a rattle much like shamans 60,000 ago is quite remarkable. Throughout history, shamans have performed many roles as I have said, but there are three rituals they all share in common: they remove from a “patient” what doesn’t belong in them, they bring back power or soul parts that have been lost, and they assist the soul’s migration after death. And these rituals are conducted while in an altered state *and* in partnership with a Helping Spirit, either a Spirit Teacher (in human form) or a Power Animal.

Since then I have helped hundreds of people with these compassionate rituals *and* found a connection with Nature and with my Ancestors that I had never dreamed possible before. I don’t wonder any more about how it works or what it is for. I personally believe that at this time on the planet humanity needs to reconnect with the forces of Nature and practice rituals that bring us into harmony and balance, for our very survival. Shamanism is not a substitute for psychotherapy or allopathic medicine, but I have found it to be a missing ingredient in the healing I offer my clients. I am not trying to be a Native American or an Amazonian witch doctor. I have gone back to my own roots that happen to be in the Celtic tradition and found the shamanic traditions of my ancestors that have always been there. I’ve spent most of my lifetime searching for a practice that would lead me to wholeness and support me in my soul’s purpose, including many spiritual traditions - Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Sufism, and now I have finally come home where I belong. Connecting with Mother Earth and Father Sky, and, of course, Spirit as it reveals itself to me.

**Cynthia Crisp, BA**, has over 35 years experience in the Performing and Healing Arts, including teaching with the Arica Institute for 18 years. Since 1991 she has studied and practiced shamanism: a graduate of the 3-Year Advanced Training with The Foundation for Shamanic Studies, and with Tom Cowan, Geo Cameron, Claude Poncelet, Myron Eshowsky, Carol Proudfoot, and indigenous shamans of North and South America. She completed a Teacher Training with Sandra Ingerman, and has a private healing practice in NYC and the southern Catskills.