

Many of our ancestors used to gather around fires in their communities every evening to prepare food, cook, eat, relax and share the challenges and highlights from their day. Children, parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, aunts and uncles all came together to connect. What a beautiful ritual. During any given gathering around that fire, there might be stories shared, tears shed, jokes and laughter, scolding, reassurance and wisdom passed along. Often all of the above, along with food, cuddles and dancing.

The oldest members of the community were often the most respected and revered. Everyone knew that these wise Elders had already walked life's long and winding path, and in doing so had faced and overcome much adversity, and learned many hard-won lessons along the way. The Elders knew it was their role and responsibility to reach out a guiding and steadying hand, to support those following in their footsteps. The next generations. So, when these wise Elders spoke up at the gatherings by the fire, people in the community stopped to listen. And when they didn't speak, people listened even more.

Now, some of you may be lucky enough to still have these kinds of extended family connections, if not gathering around a roaring fire, at least around a dining table. However, for many of us this is not possible, as various family members often live far apart, even in different countries. For those of you, like myself, who come from a dysfunctional or

estranged family, there might be zero access to any older and wiser family members.

We have lost many of these deeply important and connecting communal rituals that bind us. Like learning how to listen to the wisdom of the seasons, and the sun and the moon. How to respect and tend to the land, with its different plants and food sources, and how to prepare and cook produce. Along the way, we have also forgotten important initiations that these gatherings offered to support us in crossing the threshold from childhood into adulthood. No wonder so many young people feel so lost, disconnected and untethered ... because they are.

Many are still unconsciously yearning for the support and guidance of community, and specifically Elders, to help them navigate their own rocky path into and through adulthood. But who can they turn to now for this love and support? Who is there to guide and reassure them when they feel lost, confused or afraid? Who will give them a firm nudge or a 'ticking off' followed by a loving cuddle when they stray too far from the 'right' path?

Of course, some people do have their parents to lean on, but they too might be wrestling with their own challenges and struggles. Often the parents need their own 'Elder' to turn to and guide them. Without any family lineage foundation, nowadays the only thing many younger people have as an alternative 'Elder' is social media, and it seems people have a lot to say on there, although I'm not sure how much of that is wisdom! What I believe is really needed are wise Elders, and that doesn't always have to be someone related to you or part of your extended family.

Although both men and women have traditionally taken on an eldership role, in this book we focus specifically on the female Elders. Throughout history, women have been the gatekeepers of the beginning and ending of the human experience, with midwives welcoming us into the world and death doulas or daughters supporting us as we leave it. In between these two portals, it is women who share their wisdom, offering guidance and support in their respective roles as friends, sisters, mothers, grandmothers, healers and teachers. Alongside these roles, we also have the female archetypes of the witch, crone, wise woman, goddess, queen, shaman and Elder – to name a few. It is the divine feminine within each of these archetypes that nurtures, nourishes, comforts, guides and loves others into their own growth and healing.

Most of us women were born into and raised within a patriarchal system, and feel the weight of that burden that we have been carrying, even if we can't put it into words yet. As we begin to awaken from this outdated toxic masculine model, we start to reclaim our essential nature. This book is about that journey. A return for the divine truth of ourselves. It is my view as a training Elder that if the world is to be saved, it will be the divine feminine that will ultimately save us all.

So, what is an 'Elder'?

An Elder for me is someone who has grown both older *and* wiser. Many people sadly only grow older and lament the loss of their youth. Always looking backwards for what has or might have been, without taking the necessary gifts

and learnings, wrapped up within their struggles, to move forwards and pass on. My parents sadly were very much like this. Perhaps yours are, too. An Elder, however, recognises that she has been on a heroine's journey. She has courageously faced both the darkness within and without her, and has wrestled many demons and dragons along the way. She has remembered that Love begins with a capital L.

During her many struggles, the Elder, whilst down in the dark waters of her life, has always picked up a lesson and brought it back with her. These precious pearls are the gifts she then commits to sharing with those who might be drowning in the shallows or still learning to breathe underwater. An Elder knows it is her responsibility and duty to share her wisdom with all those ready and willing to listen and learn.

A true Elder will Love you completely with her whole heart. Sometimes tenderly and sometimes with a splash of cold water thrown into your sleepy face. Needs must. She keeps her own ego in check, regularly seeking out embarrassing moments to ensure humility is never far. An Elder, perhaps most importantly, knows and lives pure Joy. She radiates it out across the world and every awakening Soul feels it when in her presence, or nearby. She acts like a compass, a guiding light, showing those who follow in her footsteps where to avoid unnecessary pain. (She basically shows them where the dog shit lies on the path of life!)

This little book of wise words is a collection of some of my own hard-won wisdom, acquired along the rich and messy path of my life so far. At this stage, as I write, I see myself as an Elder in training, because I'm still stumbling, getting back up, learning and expanding with each tumble.

However, I do feel ready to pass on some of the wisdom that I have gained so far, as well as some that has been passed on to me by wise Elders in my own life.

This book offers a collection of short pieces of my writing, and is aimed at women of all ages and from all walks of life: young women still in school or heading off to university, women who are career-focused, new mothers, single parents, those who are retiring or those on a spiritual path. Essentially, women like you. My intention is to offer words that I hope will soothe, comfort, challenge and inspire you, as well as offering hope, love, kindness, wisdom and direction. Occasionally, these words might even feel like a little splash of cold water on your face (but always only in the name of love, I promise!). These words will, if you let them, work as a healing balm, applied to the places inside you that ache or hurt.

This book is called *Wise Words for Women* and that, of course, includes all those who identify as a woman, even if their birth certificate might say otherwise. However, if you're male, identify as male or are non-binary, you are also most welcome here and I do hope there is something within these pages for everyone. I'd say that the title is more like a dedication to women, primarily because women are simply fabulous, and they also tend to be the gatekeepers of healing and lead the way in all matters of the heart. This book has something to offer each and every one of you.

An 'Elder in your pocket'

Opening this book will be like turning to a wise female Elder to be guided, challenged and supported. Like the

mother or grandmother you perhaps always wanted or needed to help you navigate your life's path. Women are increasingly turning towards books as a means of searching for some answers to the deeper meaning of life and how to navigate its challenges. The words in these pages cut to the heart of it all with short accessible pieces, covering universal topics of love, loss, healing and everything in between. Each piece is an invitation to wake up to life, beyond past hurts and traumas or current struggles. To encourage you to question your old beliefs and go deeper, and see things and your life from different perspectives. You will hear your own voice spoken within these words, even if you can't yet articulate them. Each page acting as a wake-up call, daring us all to live a bigger life than the one the world has offered us.

My hope is that you will want to carry this little book with you in your bag, keep it by your bedside or dip into it first thing every morning as you drink your coffee, when you need some inspiration or words of encouragement. It can serve as a source of support for you in challenging times or read daily to stay connected and inspired, perhaps as a personal ritual. You might wish to open it intuitively to a 'random' page and find the perfect words that you need for that day, or for this time in your life. I call this the Universe showing off! (Don't you love it when that happens?) You might also feel drawn to a particular chapter because of the topic covered and how this resonates with your own current focus or struggles. Trust your gut!

And let's be clear: this book is definitely not about giving advice, or telling you 'THE truth' or what you *must* do. It's

more about offering another perspective from someone who might be a few steps further along life's path ... that's all. Because all the wisdom contained within these pages is the same wisdom you have within you! Yes, it's true. This little book will merely help guide you back to that quiet place inside and support you to listen to your own deeper wisdom, rather than the nagging voices in your head. In reading and re-reading the words that most resonate with you, you will slowly start to trust yourself once again. To view your many struggles as a necessary part of the human condition and, over time, to find the gifts that are always wrapped up within the painful bits.

It will also reconnect you to your joy (or even the possibility of it), because, yes, there are many struggles and stumbles along the road of life, but one thing I know for sure is that we must never ever forget to notice and smell the flowers. So when you fall down on your back, remember that you can also open your eyes, look up and see the stars. Or when you end up face down in the dirt of Humility Street (again), remember to smell the fresh grass or earth beneath you.

So, before you turn to the next page to fully begin this book, I invite you to take a moment to close your eyes, book resting in your lap, and imagine yourself sitting around a campfire. Smell the wonderful scent of the burning wood and hear the crackle of the fire as in your mind's eye you see the flickering beautiful colours of the magical flames. Visualise now a community of your people sitting here alongside you. Look closely at all their beautiful faces. Perhaps your own family or the family you have chosen – friends, partner, siblings, pets. Invite them all along. Once

again, feel the heat of the fire on your face, warming your hands and whole body. Notice how good it feels to be here, outside in nature and in community. Breathe that in.

And as you take one final look around your gathering by the fire, you will see there, sitting opposite you, a wise Elder with a warm smile, a mischievous twinkle in her eyes and some important stories to share with you. Be still now and come closer to her, like a child, humble, open and curious. Lean in and get ready to listen carefully to what she has to say, for there may be pearls she shares here, especially for you. And if you pay really close attention, there may even be a deeper meaning for you, hidden in between her words.

And later there will definitely be some dancing ...

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Family

