

Spiritual Gossip

Spiritual and Environmental Articles and Stories

A cocktail hour of spiritual and environmental stories and information. Stirred, not shaken; refreshing and invigorating.

Ruth Kenrick-Smith is a woman of many talents who is currently juggling her writing commitments and family duties to contribute to our first monthly section. Read her enlightening insights into the disappearing initiation rights for young children entering adulthood.



The New Rite

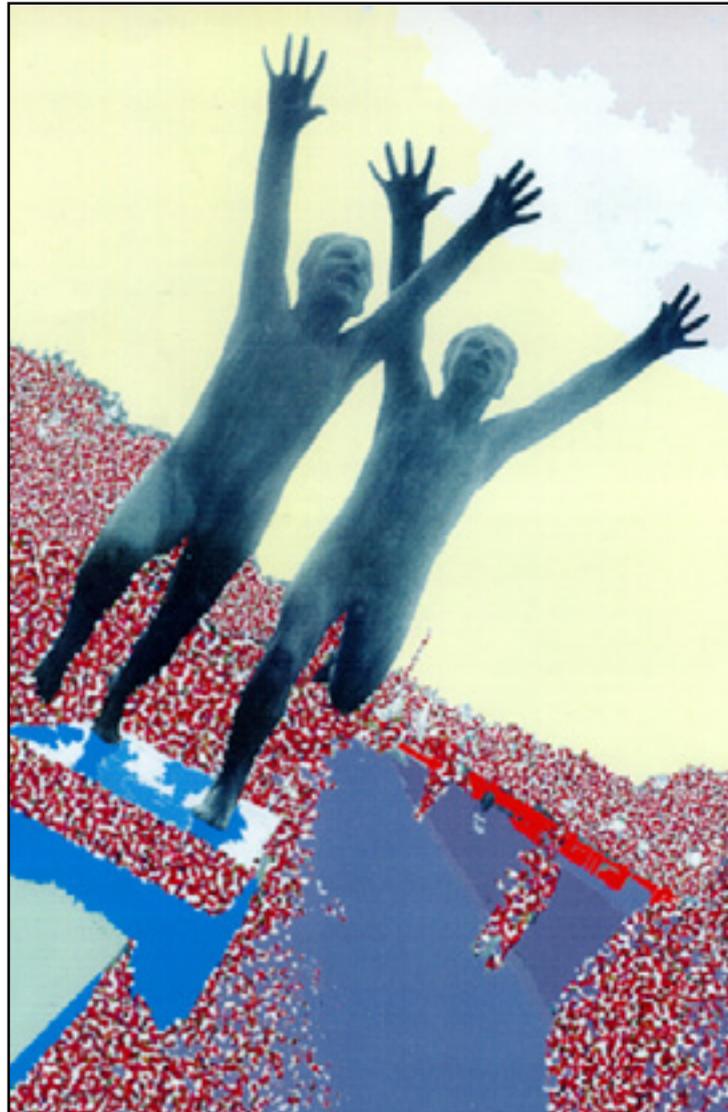
BY RUTHY K.

Recently I was at an eighteenth birthday party for my niece - one of those giant bashes where everyone and his dog comes along.

We are lucky in our family to be able to party our pants off at a great big sheep property out in the Western Districts.

We decorate the big tin woolshed for dancing, ignite a row of barbies and pull up hay bales around a huge bonfire.

I have loved these gatherings since I was embraced into my



partner's family nearly twenty years ago, but this time the celebration struck me as something strange. Here was a group of beautiful, alive, young adults with so much fresh optimism in their hearts, celebrating a milestone of adulthood in our culture. And all they could think of to do to mark this moment was to get pissed out of their brains. Embarrassingly legless.

In our society, crossing the threshold to adulthood is no longer a time of shouldering mature responsibilities; of being old enough

THE NEW RITE

for the government to play Russian roulette with your life in one war or another; of truly becoming a man or a woman and the accountability that ensues. The meaning of turning eighteen has been totally lost.

Modern Society Is Ritually Bereft

Believe it or not, adolescents look to their parents to be role models for what it is to be grown-up. They are seeking what was forbidden to them as children; actions that symbolise attaining acceptance into the adult world. Parents in current Western culture seem only to have sex, drugs and alcohol on offer. These are frequently indulged-in by underage youth anyway, so as rites of passages into adulthood they are essentially meaningless. The graduation from the seventeenth to the eighteenth year is now merely a matter of legality. There is no social or spiritual depth to the ritual. It is just a milestone signifying that the drinking, screwing and smoking that young adults are already doing, can now continue without fear of punishment from the law.

Certain religious ceremonies aside, our current rituals for young adults involve little more than gaining a driver's license and Schoolies or Leavers' week. These types of activities fail to address the significance of attaining maturity. Not that maturity is revered so much these days, with the mainstream media's constant focus on preserving youth at all costs and relegating the aged to the dustbin. Little wonder, our obsession with our looks and indulgence in self-centred behaviours. From the conduct of the guests at the party, it was apparent that nowadays there is no delineation between adult and child. We had eighteen year olds dancing like jaded strippers and fully grown parents getting pissed and joining in teenage squabbles.

Other Cultures' Rituals

In many ancient cultures rites of passage were constructed so that adolescents could prove their worth, maturity and character to a group of respected elders. Often they were required to pass tests of pain, endurance or intelligence and have their

lives examined by the adults of their community.

In the modern world, there are elements of service and self mastery in Buddhist societies; the celebration of adulthood and religious admittance in Judaic tradition; and the deeply significant rites of Australian Aboriginal, and Polynesian peoples. Even the warrior ritual of national service in countries such as Israel is a rite of passage for many. Agree or disagree with it, the "growing up" effects are tangible for those who have experienced enforced military duty. Yet for the average urban Westerner, we have empty commercial celebrations of Christmas and Easter and not much else. There is a tangible yearning for meaning amongst the young – the re-awakened interest in Anzac day is proof of that – but there are few outlets for its expression.

Creating Meaningful Rites For Young People Using The Seven Year Cycle

Parents, mentors and friends are in the hot seat for this one. By formulating special rites of passage for their young ones, adults create choice. Children and adolescents can have a

real alternative to 'popular culture' rituals that are mass-marketed by commercial interests. Remember to consult with your children before formulating your plan for a ceremonial celebration every seven years and work together to achieve your outcome.

At Seven

There is a shift in brain function in most children around the age of seven, and the logic circuits start to kick in. For this age a demonstration of trust and responsibility is important. Formally placing the care of a pet into the child's charge can be good at this stage, or allowing them their own garden plot. Begin a class with your child like meditation, cookery or pottery and emphasise the fact they are now old enough to participate in these aspects of the grown-up world. There are many possibilities, all of which can bring families together and engender pride and self-esteem in the child.

At Fourteen

The young person is well on their way to becoming an adult but the hormonal

changes mean that the mind will need focus. A retreat for this purpose is ideal, whether it be a camping trip, a weekend workshop or travelling together - anything that will take the teenager out of their social circle and stretch them. Bonding in these unique situations will give you insight into the mind of your young person and build their respect for you. Make the experience unique, like concentrating on what it is to be feminine or masculine through belly dance or drumming, and create lasting memories. Now is the time to also address the universal longing for unconsciousness as an escape from pain. Explain to them that the easy path of using alcohol and drugs to reach unconsciousness only delays their true, more challenging path to consciousness. However do not fall into the preacher role and remember to lovingly accept the adolescent for who they already are.

At Twenty One

The twenty-first birthday completes the seven year cycle to adulthood, and although we never stop developing through

stages in life, it is here the central role of the parent/carer is relinquished. This is the time to stand eye to eye with a young adult and truly welcome them into adulthood (this assumes, of course, that you and those around you have reached the maturity to truly call yourselves adults - but that is another story). The dress rehearsal for the young person is over and true responsibility begins. You will be ritualistically resigning as 'carer of a child' - so make sure you embarrass them well and good with lots of nude baby photos - and move to your new roles as equals. If you have to, nudge your young adult out of the nest. Make it clear that there are no more free meals, money and washing.

This is a loving gift to them (even if they do not realise it) because every time they stumble and fall, every time they pass a new test of pain, they are learning new strategies to survive their lives. If you have collected memoirs of their childhood - letters, pregnancy diaries, home-movies - now is the time to pass them on to your young adult. Then stand back... they are about to fly.

We welcome any new writers.
If you have something to contribute to the Spiritual Gossip section,
please go to Vine's **Contact Page** and send a brief outline of the
topics you would like to write about.