

Story by Rev. Karen Tate

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Her other titles include: *Sacred Places of Goddess: 108 Destinations*, *Walking An Ancient Path*, *Goddess Calling*, *Voices of the Sacred Feminine*; *Conversations to Change Our World*, *Awakening the Feminine* and *Goddess 2.0*. Karen is an inter-faith minister who leads sacred tours. She lives in the Pacific Northwest with her husband of 35+ years and their feline daughter, Lilly.

Loss Inspires Growth

by Rev. Dr. Karen Tate

It was roughly around my second Saturn return that I began to think more deeply. Until then it seems I just reacted to circumstances thrust upon me or passions ignited. I had a never-ending list of sacred sites to visit, things to accomplish and research to do that excited me. Deep reflection took a back seat to doing.

Our second Saturn return happens roughly around our late fifties or early sixties. These returns happen every thirty years or so, so the first is roughly around our thirtieth birthday. And if we're lucky enough to live that long, there's a third return very late in life. These are times of focus, clarification, getting out of one's comfort zone, and reflection. It was only during the second Saturn return that I began to think about my first Saturn return. As I pulled back the veil of memory to delve into what was happening in my life around the age of thirty, I questioned if there was any basis for this Saturn return theory? Turns out it seems to be right on.

First Saturn Return

It was about this time that I was reassessing my life, though I was not conscious enough to have described it that way at the time. I divorced my first husband who was my high school sweetheart and more like a brother and comfortable old shoe. He had no intellectual curiosity. He could never have been the wind beneath my wings.

I married my second husband whose outlook was much more mature and adventurous. He was ten years older, had experienced the world and his personality matched my wanderlust and my passions. I changed jobs several times and eventually we relocated from our childhood hometown of New Orleans to Los Angeles, all the way across the country. That was a big leap of faith for this young woman from the South.

No doubt there was a lot of conscious and unconscious assessment that led to these many changes. There was soul-searching and a quest for clarity even if I wasn't fully aware of it or could language it. I was definitely out of my comfort range and stretching my wings on the way to being who I eventually became over the next thirty years. And I realized several decades later during my second Saturn return, there was a lot of change and loss in that early shift, most of it necessary to start from a clean slate or like planting in virgin soil. There was the loss of the familiarity with the place where I grew up and the corresponding culture unique to New Orleans. There was the loss of the simplicity of life there and any remaining vestiges of Catholicism. Good and bad, there was the loss of my connection to family and friends.

As for family, in hindsight, it was good we weren't terribly close. I was anxious to escape familial drama and did not think I'd miss the complicated relationship I shared with my mother who I felt did not value me and preferred my step-sister. That distance already between us made the leaving easier. I had not yet realized the importance of the loss of family history that would never be retrieved or the opportunities that were lost to develop

a better relationship with my mother. Escape was my priority at thirty.

I felt the loss of my herstory and identity even though I wasn't fully cooked, yet. The fertile soil of my past, including memories, were mostly left behind or buried deep. All this change, this pruning, this discarding of the old for the new, led to tremendous growth, especially in my outer world. But the inner world was being shaken up, too. My white supremacist beliefs that had been planted during my racist upbringing also faded.

All the aforementioned loss cleared a path for the person into whom I would develop. I became a woman I would never have become had I not said goodbye to everything and accepted the losses. I became a six-times-published author, a sacred tour leader traveling across five continents, and a podcaster for over a decade. As a Goddess advocate, I became an ordained minister and social justice activist, speaking at prestigious venues like the Parliament of World Religions. I founded and ran a not-for-profit for half a decade and started a Covenant of Unitarian Universalist Pagans (CUUPS) group. I cannot see any of that happening had I not flowed with the energies of my first Saturn return. I think I would still be in New Orleans married to my first husband, going to football games, doing ceramics and nurturing spider plants.

Second Saturn Return

It was the second Saturn return, however, that really stoked and reshaped my inner landscape, equal to or perhaps even more important than the first Saturn

return that shaped mostly my outer life. I began to see how suffering and loss can really help us evolve and grow if, of course, we choose to see the gifts in that suffering and loss and choose to respond positively rather than with bitterness, anger, jealousy or hate.

For the next thirty years, I thrived and suffered in one of the largest communities practicing Goddess Spirituality in the United States. While I owe a debt to this group, I likened it to a dysfunctional family that simultaneously nurtures and scars us—but even the wounds offer opportunity for growth. At the hands of Dianic women, I transformed from a Fox News listener into a devotee to a feminine face of god—deity, archetype and ideal. I learned about alternative healing modalities, ritual, mythology, magic and social justice. Without this group—my coming from the sexist and racist Bible Belt—I'm confident I would never have discovered the path of sacred feminine liberation theology, but this path is so flawed and immature and can be so misguided. It needs an overhaul, consistency and substance. Some within the movement need to move out of Goddess fundamentalism. Absent role models, I experienced the practice of patriarchy in a skirt, woman's inhumanity to woman, the cult of personality and what happens among the power-deprived seeking personal empowerment in a male-dominated world. Did I say it left me with scars?

However, during my second Saturn return, which happens over years and is not a one-and-done kind of thing, I had the first epiphany. And it came to me in a dream the night my beloved feline daughter, Xena, passed on to be with her sister, Isis. That dream helped me reconcile not just my rocky relationship with my

mother, but also a few women within the Goddess community who left me wounded and scarred.

The Dream

That first night after Xena passed away was a tortured and sleepless one. I finally fell asleep in the early morning hours and had an unusual dream. The "light" in the dream was particularly striking, like I'd never seen before in a dream, as if it were suggesting illumination and I should take notice. And I did.

I was standing at the edge of a table and looking over the side. On the floor, playing as she would when she was younger and in good health, Xena was rummaging among some books and papers in the trash can. She looked up at me, as her younger self, with eyes shining bright and playful. I grabbed the person's arm next to me and was tugging at it, crying out, "It's Xena. Do you see her, too? It's Xena. Look! Look!"

It wasn't until then that I noticed the arm of the person I was tugging was my deceased mother's. I didn't see her. I felt her. It was a kind of knowing, and quite a surprise, as I had not had any dreams of my mom since her passing several years earlier. Instantly, I got a comforting auditory message that Xena was with Mama and Mom was caring for her. I also knew in some strange moment of "knowing" that this was Mama's gift to me for my disappointment in her on the earthly plane. She was trying to make it up to me. Suddenly, all the pain and resentment for Mama seeming to prefer my troubled sister to me faded away in that moment. It was the most remarkable thing. That heaviness and angst I was

carrying around for years was lifted. Tears of joy flowed and flowed.

Unexpectedly, Xena's passing helped with another emotional issue that plagued me. As I lay in bed thinking about the twenty years I had shared with my beloved Xena, it occurred to me how much emptier my life was now without her. I thought how much emptier it would be one day without my beloved husband, Roy. Without them both, the loneliness would be devastating. My thoughts went to how people cope without love in their lives, what things they might do or not do to others. In that grief, I thought about several of the women I'd known, women who'd betrayed and hurt me, and how they didn't have this kind of love in their lives. Perhaps that's what drove them to their ugly and hurtful ways. In that moment, I felt compassion and understanding for these women. I could let this all go, too, and forgive.

It was amazing the revelations and wisdom gleaned from Xena's tragic passing. Could this gift to me have been her soul's purpose? What a powerful little girl she was.

Two weeks after Xena's passing, we went to the vet to pick up her ashes. It was extremely unusual that there was no one in the waiting room but Roy and I. As we sat there, suddenly a tri-colored kitten revealed herself from behind the counter. She looked at Roy, then me, then Roy again. Roy and I looked at each other. She was the exact image of Xena's sister, Isis, who had passed away six months earlier. Yes, we lost both our darlings within six months after sharing twenty wonderful years with them. Their passing left us empty and sad.

Soon we found out this new kitten's history. She had been left for dead on the vet's doorstep, but they took

her in and had been nursing her back to health the last eight weeks. She needed a foster home, so we offered ours. We named her Lilly—short for Lilith, the archetype of women's independence and personal empowerment—because of her brave and courageous spirit to fight for her life. Lilly, we felt, was Isis coming back to us in answer to our closing plea to her as she passed away. We also felt Xena had facilitated her sister's return in this magickal meeting between us and Lilly as we came to pick up Xena's ashes. Perhaps her own return, too, assuming kitties reincarnate.

Xena left this world about 4:30 on September 28, 2017, and Lilly entered our world about 4:30 on October 11, 2017, the season when the veil between the worlds begins to thin.

Within a year of this powerfully emotional transformation, little did I know there were more major life changes and challenges ahead that were further catalysts for me to continue to grow wisdom, compassion, patience and kindness—all of which seemed birthed from suffering and loss, all during my second Saturn return.

More Second Saturn Return Transformation

My husband and I worked as a management team for thirty years. When Roy fell and hit his head and incurred a brain injury, we lost our jobs, income, the roof over our heads and all the perks that came with the job that included our utilities, insurance, cable, credit card, phones, and car expenses. Roy was like a zombie. The worker compensation system was and is egregious and it took over a year to get Roy the treatment he needed at what I call brain boot camp: eight hours of therapy a day,

five days a week, for several months, to help him come back from the injury. He couldn't and still can't drive. His eyesight is forever compromised as is his cognitive ability, but he's alive. Not only did we lose our jobs and lifestyle, but I lost my soul mate and partner. It was clear the person Roy once was was now gone as he tried to heal this shadow of a person he had become. Besides his abilities and personality, we lost our way of life. We had to move to an isolated place and the distance cost us our friends. In the winter we were snowed in, further adding to the isolation. I had so much anxiety when I heard floor boards creak, I irrationally feared the house was going to collapse. I had dreams of someone trying to trap me in dark holes. I'd wake up having panic attacks and have to do breathing exercises to calm my heart palpitations. I didn't open my closet for three years and didn't care if I bathed or brushed my teeth.

But so much good eventually came of this time period of several years that I liken to "living under a rock." Of course, at first, I cried a lot, mourning all we'd lost, beseeching Goddess, asking if the rest of my life was going to be just taking Roy to the next doctor and going to the grocery or the pharmacy to pick up medicine. I could no longer do much of what made my life normal before Roy's accident. No talks, no social media, no radio show. The minister of my former church never reached out to see if we were alive or dead. Friends I thought cared never picked up the phone, never came by to visit. It was as if now that we were no longer in our friends' orbits, no longer useful or visible, we were forgotten when I felt we needed support most.

But then, in time, over time, I started to breathe and listen and think. The suffering and loss

fundamentally changed how I saw the world and everyone around me. Building on what Xena's passing had begun to awaken in me, I would extend a hand in kindness and patience that I might not have before all our turmoil because I was too busy to see that kindness or patience was needed by another. Now I reach out to those who are suffering to ask if I can help or just offer an ear. I pick up the phone to call the new widow or the person who is sick. I ask if they need something from the grocery store. I don't just say I'll put their name on my altar. I see the wounds a person might have that could cause them to act out and do ugly things. I have less judgment. I felt I was beginning to understand human behavior on a totally new level, though of course, I'm far from perfect and still a work in progress. I think this suffering and loss has made me a more sensitive and caring person. It helps me walk the talk of Goddess ideals.

I had been a social justice activist years before my descent, but during this time "under a rock," I was seeing more of the pervasive abuse and exploitation in so many facets of our lives. More importantly, I was seeing how we normalize that abuse to survive, so I wrote a book about it that will soon be published titled, *Normalizing Abuse*. During that time, I also learned more about forging new alliances and finding common ground with people fundamentally different than I. On that mountain where it seemed there was a church on every corner, we lived in isolation among Trumpers and Republicans, which we clearly were not. I started seeing the whole person, not just the political aspects of the person, and many of these people were decent and good and wanted the very same things I did in life.

I looked for the gift in all the suffering and loss and learned it is always there. I recall when I asked a long-time friend if she might drive me home from the hospital after my hysterectomy and her response was, “It’s a long drive for me. Can’t you just tough it out and drive yourself home?” Of course, her selfish response hurt me deeply, but this woman was a tool of the universe like so many of the other people playing their role as my universal teacher. Little did she know her response was the proverbial “final straw on the camel’s back” leading me to that next phase of a better life. Would I have packed up our house and moved out of the isolation had she not replied to me in such a selfish way? I later thanked her for tipping me over the edge and told her the role she played in helping Roy and me decide to move off the parched and isolated mountaintop and head for the lush and green forests of Oregon where we began a better life.

What I’m trying to say, and hope I have, is suffering and loss can be a gift. It can inspire us toward wisdom and growth no matter how hard it might be in the moment. I came to learn this during my second Saturn return as I focused, sought clarity and ceased to be afraid of the unfamiliar and uncomfortable that is so necessary for transformation. Like Isis shaking her sistrum to keep the energies of the universe flowing so life does not become stagnant, we too must also be willing to shake up our lives and transform so that we might evolve and grow into our life’s purpose.

Rev. Dr. Karen Tate, age 66, is a thought leader, speaker, author, workshop presenter, social justice activist and the radio show hostess of the long-running internet podcast,

“Voices of the Sacred Feminine” on Blog Talk Radio. She speaks at prestigious institutions such as the Council for the Parliament of World Religions, the American Academy of Religion, Joseph Campbell RoundTables, conferences, theosophical societies, colleges, churches and many private organizations. She can be seen in the influential docu-film, "Femme: Women Healing the World," produced by Wonderland Entertainment and actress Sharon Stone. Karen is the author of four books and she's curated three anthologies which are referred to as the "manifesting a new normal" trilogy. Her newest and seventh book, "Normalizing Abuse," came out in early 2023. Karen is a certified Caring Economy Conversation Leader and Power of Partnership Practitioner with Riane Eisler's Center for Partnership Studies and she has a certification from Smith College in the Psychology of Political Activism: Women Changing the World. She's been named one of the Thirteen Most Influential Women in Goddess Spirituality and a Wisdom Keeper of the Goddess Spirituality Movement. She lives in Oregon with Lilly, her feline daughter, and Roy, her husband and partner of more than thirty years. You can find out more about her and her work at her website, www.karentate.net.