

**Some Assembly Required**  
*(for Anonymous)*

Motherless,  
She became a sly collector of fragments,  
Which she would assemble  
Into something resembling  
A mother.

Like sifting seashells from a seashore,  
Like searching a still night sky for certain stars,  
Like drinking raindrops to quench thirst  
Like crowdsourcing sentences to complete a story  
Like a secret agent gathering intelligence  
She went in search.

She did it discreetly.

She wouldn't be needy.  
She wouldn't let them know what they were to her.  
She wouldn't ask too much.  
She wouldn't scare them off.

She didn't think she could live with herself if she lost another mother.

She gathered fragments.

From the professor of Women's Studies 101,  
Who served tea and made her speak in positive affirmations.

From the health food store, where the woman behind the herb counter  
was comfortable in her own skin,  
and anointed herself with essential oils  
Modeling self-love at the age of fifty.

From the crowd of church ladies, open armed,  
Who served side by side with her  
As she secretly loved them.

From artists, who wove and sculpted their lives, which were holy.  
From business mentors, and therapists,  
and from the midwives, who trusted women.

When her children were born, she found a support group

Women of glorious shapes and shades  
Who gardened and cussed  
And brought wine and cake to their gatherings  
who wore what made them happy  
and taught her 100 ways for women to love each other.

Mothering was made of  
Small beautiful pieces  
Shape shifting and mosaic  
a kaleidoscope

And within her a cylinder  
Not a mother-shaped hole  
But a vessel  
For carrying light.

Light was shining from her as she told me this.

Quietly, I added it to my own collection  
That we might pass it on.

## Love Song to Elizabeth

by Raven Reed Starr

Mother's Day is one of those bittersweet celebrations that brings up a whirlwind of emotions for me. There are things to grieve over and things to celebrate. My first conscious memories are of grief. My birth mother abandoned me when I was three, and that loss took years to heal from. However, I also have the absolute joy of celebrating my relationship with my foster mother, Elizabeth, on Mother's Day and that sense of focusing on the positive is something I definitely "inherited" from her.

When I first laid eyes on Elizabeth it was 1986, I was 16, and we were in the family court in Santa Monica, California. A random judge was deciding my fate. I had already been placed in one foster home that was, diplomatically said, not an appropriate home for me. Given the blessing of the judge, off Elizabeth and I went to learn about each other. We went to a wonderful Chinese restaurant, the first for me, and just one of many interesting meals we would share together. We had no idea in that moment that we would still be together and a family over 30 years later.

What can I say about my relationship with my mom other than, sometimes the universe gets it right? We needed each other. I had already had a few maternal figures in my life who were, shall we say, not up to the task. Elizabeth needed a daughter and didn't know it. I introduced her to Paganism, and she led me to Unitarian Universalism. Almost 2/3 of foster children who age out of foster care end up homeless, in jail, or dead within the first year of leaving the system. I have no doubt that my escaping that dreadful statistic is in no small part because of the love and support Elizabeth gave me even after her job of foster mother was officially done.

My sons are her only grandchildren, and they dote on her, as they should. She has helped them so many times along the path to their adulthood as she has me. We would never have moved to Albuquerque were it not for Elizabeth. She wanted a more stable, successful environment for me, and the boys especially, and made it possible. A Ph.D. herself, at any point when someone expressed an interest in college she was right there helping to figure out the logistics and the finances. Now, as she needs help in her later years, her grandsons are given the opportunity to be there for her. How precious is that? Oldest son is back in school again (thanks, in part, to grandma!), and in his spare time helping her with things like email and other mundane tasks that have become challenging since her recent strokes left reading difficult for her. One of the odder things she has lost has been her memory of her favorite foods. I get to reintroduce her to the many delightful dishes that she first exposed me to all those years ago! It's an adventure all over again, and much needed in a time of difficulty for the family, and especially for Elizabeth. She is usually a ray of optimism and hope, but this latest health issue has definitely taken a toll on her eternally sunny nature.

It hasn't always been sunshine and roses between us. There were squabbles along the way, and opportunities to walk away from each other. Forget the Hallmark commercials and our

idealized, soft focus views of what love should be. Life is much more messy. Love is messy. Relationships are work. All of them. There are times when it's a choice to be in each other's lives, even in that primal relationship with our parents and our children. It's about who is there when you need them. It's about who makes your life better with their presence in it and who gives you an opportunity to grow into a better person. I find myself asking more and more in my life, WWED? What would Elizabeth do? When people say, "I heard my mother come out of my mouth," I can only think in my case, how is that a bad thing? I am a better person for having her in my life, I am a better parent for having her in my life. We often joke that we have so much in common that our ancestors must have crossed paths somewhere. Ultimately, although I don't carry Elizabeth in my genes, I carry her in my heart. Always.

## Mother Earth Monologue

Many of us know, with a kind of knowing deeper than thought, that the planet we live on is our mother. We call her Mother Earth.

It seems that humans have told this story of the earth as our mother for a very long time. We see ancient images of the Goddess and imagine – even, from the armchair of our modern comforts, envy - our distant ancestors' relationship with her: a bond that understood all things that issued from her as meaningful and sacred, that knew her as life giver and nurturer and ourselves as her offspring, forever dependent on her well-being.

In a very physical way, it is undeniable that we rely on the earth as a mother. We are literally flesh of her flesh. We grow our food from the earth's body and eat it to nourish our own: We are embryos who will never leave our mother's womb. We build shelters of wood and stone, grown and pulled from the earth. We heat and cool our homes, run our automobiles and airplanes and computers, on energy that comes from her blood and her soil and her wind and her waters.

But the sense we have of the earth as mother goes beyond this physical reality. We call our planet "her." We give her a name: Gaia. In doing so, we demonstrate our sense that we are approaching a being - an individual - albeit one so vast and unfathomable that we must use our human imagination to relate to her, must tap into that part of ourselves that reaches beyond the known and knowable and into the mystery. That part of ourselves that is able to see and know what is beyond our five senses, and is able to make sense of that.

The earth mother as felt, imagined, and understood by humans has framed life in one way or another for millenia. Yet over the past few thousand years, in certain cultures that have become dominant on the planet, the female aspect of the divine has been subverted. The earth became, in our imaginations, not a life like ours, but a machine to be manipulated; not our mother, but an adversary to be conquered and controlled.

And then, paradoxically, 48 years ago, out of this conqueror culture, from a machine shot from the earth into the sky, came this photograph... **[Slide 1]**

Though not the first illuminated image of the earth from space, this one, dubbed the “Blue Marble,” is the one that captured our collective imagination and brought the Goddess into our understanding in a new way. Beautiful blue... and green, and brown, and white. Bright, turbulent, enormous, and tender... a globe floating in blackness. Teeming with life and yet so alone. So singular. Our home. Our mother.

Gaia.

Forty-eight years ago, for the first time, we humans had a perspective on our planet from afar, and her fragile place in the universe. We were challenged once again by this being whose scope we cannot fathom. **[Slide 2]** For the first time we could see our Mother Earth as an individual, as when a child begins to realize that her mother is separate from her. A being with her own intention, needs, and destiny.

And now we find ourselves struggling to comprehend the devastation that is occurring on our planet. We watch ecosystems collapse and violent weather patterns wreak havoc across the globe. And the metaphor of the earth as our mother, the felt sense of that truth, makes us weep.

How do we relate to this mother? How do we know her as a mother? How does she show up in our lives, as metaphor and as reality? How does she shape our experience? There are beautiful times when it seems she offers us the most intimate love, like a moment spent watching bees move in and out of apricot blossoms. And at other times **[Slide 3]** we are devastated by her enormity and power, overwhelmed by her seeming rage or her indifference to us, her children - lives and communities ravaged by flood, fires, hurricanes. The things she does to us. The things we've done to her.

Kathryn's story **(9:30 service)**:

As I was working on this monologue, I was walking through an ugly industrial part Round Rock Texas, the area of town behind my fleabag motel. From the map on my phone, I knew there was a park not far from where I was, but because of the roads, and fences, and Texan attitudes about private property, I was going to have to walk about 3 miles to get there. I was surrounded by concrete, with strips of grass along the sidewalks, a wide boulevard, and industrial emptiness. I found it hard to relate to what I was seeing as Mother Earth. **[Slide 4]** If I looked at all the wires and concrete, with the little bit of organic life peeking through, I did not sense my mother.

However, if I softened my awareness, listened more gently to life around me, let the blue of the sky beyond the wires and the play of the pink of twilight on the clouds call to me and invite me to relationship with them, if I received the life that was humming and breathing through me, I could feel the presence of Mother Earth. [Slide 5] She was there. A being as close as breath, yet so vast she is unknowable. Too large for our brains to hold, but contained always in our bodies nevertheless.

Kristin's story (11:00 service):

As I was working on this monologue, I was sitting in a coffee shop on Lead Avenue. I was surrounded by people, jostling with them for too few, too-small tables. [Slide 4] Drinking beverages flown from Kenya and Sumatra, places most of us will never see. Eating pastries stored in cases of shining metal and glass. Sitting within inches of each other, but staring at devices that took us each to a different place.

Tapping at my laptop, butt cushioned by a vinyl booth, I did not sense mother earth.

But she was there, if I listened. Of course she was. I ate an egg, and the golden yolk held air and water and earth. The door opened to let in yet one more patron, and a breeze sighed in as well, cool and heavy with the scents of springtime. And car exhaust. But notably of springtime: green leaves and a touch of wetness from the will-they-or-won't-they clouds above. She was there. [Slide 5] A being as close as breath, yet so vast she is unknowable. Too large for our brains to hold, but contained always in our bodies nevertheless.

Like Gaia herself, our mothers are infinite. Never fully known but always within us - whether we desire that or reject it - and encompassing a million symbols and feelings: Love and loss. Understanding and confusion. Care and abandonment. In every relationship between a mother and child, a motherer and the ones they mother, all these feelings exist - the harmony and cacophony of the lives we create together.

On this Mother's Day, I invite you to listen to that felt sense of the earth all around you and forever within you - to your sense of the earth as a mother. You may find that, like your own mother, she is not one thing, but many. And it is in holding the many that you might find a sense of her being: a wholeness that cradles you like a mother.

NASA photos for projection

Blue Marble (slides 1 and 5):

<https://www.nasa.gov/content/blue-marble-image-of-the-earth-from-apollo-17>

Earthrise (slide 2):

[https://www.nasa.gov/sites/default/files/297755main\\_gpn-2001-000009\\_full\\_0\\_0.jpg](https://www.nasa.gov/sites/default/files/297755main_gpn-2001-000009_full_0_0.jpg)

Hurricane (slide 3):

<https://www.nasa.gov/image-feature/hurricane-florence-as-it-was-making-landfall-0>

Lights (slide 4):

<https://www.nasa.gov/sites/default/files/thumbnails/image/iss043-e-86375.jpg>