



Stephanie Mills

When I think of celebrating a woman in the Queen/Crone stage of her life, Stephanie Mills immediately springs to mind. Stephanie Mills is a renowned author, activist and lecturer on ecological restoration, community economics, bioregionalism and voluntary simplicity and is based in Michigan in the USA. An ecological activist for over 30 years, her work has been prolific. She has written or edited six books (my personal favourites being *Whatever Happened To Ecology?* and *Epicurean Simplicity*), countless articles, a number of publications (including *Earth Times* and *CoEvolution Quarterly*), as well as lecturing at numerous institutions, including the *E.F. Schumacher Society* and the *Harvard Graduate School of Design*.

I contacted Stephanie when I was writing my second book *Other Than Mother: Choosing Childlessness With Life In Mind*. Even though I've never had the good fortune to meet her in person, I have got to know her through our warm email correspondence, in reading her books and enjoying the kindness and clarity of her online talks. I emailed her shortly after I read about her graduation speech from *Mills College* in Oakland, California, in 1969. Concerned by overpopulation and the growing exploitation of natural resource exploitation, she told her class mates, 'I am terribly saddened that the most humane thing for me to do is to have no children at all.' This statement propelled her into the public eye, with *The New York Times* calling her statement 'perhaps the most anguished...of the year's crop of valedictory speeches.' In 1996 she was named as one of the world's leading visionaries by *Utne Reader* (a US digest of fresh perspective in the arts, culture, politics, and spirituality).

In *Wild Mind*, Natalie Goldberg's excellent book about writing practice, she asks the reader: 'Who gave you permission?' She explores how all writers have a person, or people, they feel give them the permission to start or continue their writing life. This 'permission' is something deep and unspoken, taking the form of encouragement and support, with your permission-giver being someone who understands your need to write on a deeper level. Stephanie became that person for me as I completed my research for *Other Than Mother*. I asked her if she would write the book's Foreword and was so delighted when she agreed. Writing about voluntary childlessness is a scary thing to do, especially given the stereotypes about women who choose not to have children. When I was floundering and doubting that I would be able to finish this book it was Stephanie and her life's work which would come to mind. What I most appreciate about Stephanie is how she has dedicated her life – in quite a humble way – to inspiring in us a renewed sense of love for the Earth, our home.

Kalamamani

Melanie Eclare Petherick

19th April 1963 -
3rd September 2016

'Each of us is an artist of our days; the greater our integrity and awareness, the more original and creative our time will become.'

~ John O'Donohue



When I read this line I instantly thought of Melanie, who so embodied this kind of integrity and awareness from which her breathtaking originality and creative genius seemed to flow so effortlessly - whether chatting with a friend or making her extraordinary photographs. At her funeral, Melanie's lifelong friend Catherine Phelps described her as 'open and clever, thoughtful and loving, and because of all these qualities, she had an extraordinary number of friendships made all over the world on her many journeys. Journeys motivated by her curiosity and enthusiasm for life and her extraordinary enjoyment of the natural world: its rhythms, colours, scents, textures and forms delighted her and her shared delight opened our eyes wider to the world and reminded us of its beauty.'

Melanie's New York friend Lyle Davis added, 'And rising above all this was your courage and commitment to healing the past and confronting demons head-on, so that love and creativity can blossom and flourish and sow the seeds of more love and creativity. Such is the ground that brought you and Tom together, and that from your partnership allowed you both to bring beautiful Rose into this world. You will always live on in them, and in the many friends you have touched in so very many ways - and I am forever grateful for the blessing of knowing you.'

From the moment of her diagnosis of acute aggressive leukaemia on the 15th July, to the moment of her last breath on the 3rd September, Melanie was not only fully present with herself and what she was going through, but also entirely aware of and responsive to the needs of others. Melanie continued to extend herself generously to those around her and shared her unfolding experience with characteristic visceral honesty and sense of humour that delighted in the absurd. Her posts went viral, touching literally thousands of people.

During those last weeks it was as though Melanie gave us, as a parting gift, a masterclass in the art of living and dying. Throughout she remained so awake and intelligent, so funny, clear and honest, so loving, so able to receive the love and support that was all around her. Melanie died as she lived, and it was a profound honour to be with her in dying, as it was to be with her in living.

I'm sure her many friends will join me in sending heartfelt condolences to Tom and Rose, and to her dear sister Sarah. With Melanie's passing, the world has lost a creative genius, and we who loved her have lost one of the dearest and most original souls on the planet.

Kanada Elizabeth Gorla

To see some of Melanie's photographs visit
www.melanieeclare.com