

Dreams, Another Way of Knowing

Electrifying Dream Images: What's the Point?

Outside, a woman dressed as a cowgirl in a long skirt and large hat, slugs down a drink while still mounted on her horse. She sets the shot glass on a nifty, small sideboard just the right height (of her horse), and rides away. I say admiringly, as I pass the saloon, "That's what I call one for the road!"

This delightful image grabbed every member of the dream group in which it was shared. The discussion it spurred is likely to be remembered by us all for some time. This is the power of electrifying images: to brand into our psyches what leads us forward to more fulfilling, authentic lives.

We humans are created anew by imagination, by our ability to think outside the boxes labeled Familial and Cultural Scripts. Joseph Campbell said it this way: "A dream is your creative vision for your life in the future. Dreams and goals should be just out of your present reach but not out of sight. Dreams are the coming attractions in your life." For that to be true, we must escape the prisons of stagnant, unimaginative, programmed thinking. No better place for that than a great dream.

When presented with a tantalizing image like our cowgirl, move into the symbol, circle it, smell it, touch it, act it out, laugh (or cry) about it, kick it around. The dream group talked about the archetype of the cowboy, the era in American history that spawned it, women's roles during that period and what this marvelous image brought to the party. We recognized that most of us, raised on cowboy movies and TV programs, identified this formidable creature as an independent loner, competent with instinctive nature and significant in developing this country. Thus, the dreamer may be connecting to a feminine aspect of such power, a force capable of activating some instinctive, undeveloped part of herself.

From our training in movie theatres across the land we recalled that "nice" women did not frequent saloons, and presumably, did not down shots in one gulp even in sedate, velveteen parlors. Our dream gal is definitely breaking the rules and has some support for doing so (*a nifty, small sideboard just the right height*)! No muss, no fuss, no dismount, she wets her whistle just like one of the guys in this drive/ride through saloon!

What does this image want for and from the dreamer? Perhaps she needs to recognize that breaking of rules must be done from a position of power (atop the horse) out in the open for all to see. Because the dreamer identified the phrase "on your high-horse" we played with the truth that jumping outside the box treasured by our trainers often leads to the judgment of arrogance. Perhaps we need to challenge the implication that being on a high horse is a bad thing. It certainly works for this dream character.

The dreamer admires the cowgirl getting what she wants in this fascinating fashion (*"That's what I call one for the road!"*) She gets what she needs for the

journey ahead. Since she is not drinking Crystal Springs or Pepsi, we should examine the metaphoric value of whiskey.

Now we're dealing in the realm of the spirits, of *getting high*, of creating altered states of consciousness. Even in a spiritual collective like Santa Cruz there are limits to acceptable *highness*. At the very least, a one-gulp shot of whiskey will loosen inhibitions and quell the voices of inner critics and scriptwriters. For women riding an awesome amount of power on the road of individuation, such an inner jolt may be delightfully productive.

Whether an image as delightful as our wild cowgirl will create the kind of transformation it suggests depends greatly on the will of the dreamer, on how she chooses to let the image guide her and use her. For marvelous symbols like this want something from us and for us. From the perspective of depth psychology, psyche speaks for our personal and collective development. It can show us the way but we must commit to following. As Marsha Sinetar writes: "Identifying your enthusiasms requires courage and heroic creative vision. You have to believe that what you want is possible for you." And we dreamers have to learn to trust that what the *dream* wants for us is not only possible but valuable. In my work, that is a given. Therefore, understanding the desires of psyche is not enough. We must be willing to move beyond awareness into action, using whatever ego strength and focus to change mind and behavior patterns to activate the dream. This discussion leads into the next step of dream work—dream coaching. Tune in next month!

Since 1981, Kathleen Sullivan has been a dream professional and counselor in the Monterey Bay area. She is the author of *Recurring Dreams: A Journey to Wholeness* and *Recurring Dream Symbols: A Map to Healing Your Past*. Web site: recurringdreams.com Phone: 831-372-8534