

**Kathleen Sullivan's
Dreams, Another Way of Knowing**

The Shadow Knows: Marriage to Ronald Reagan

When the sun shines on your face, the shadow trailing you is unseen. Since you cannot change what you cannot see, the dream may place that shadow before you, encouraging you to recognize, own and transform the dark and difficult, as well as the extraordinary and radiant, parts of our personality.

The shadow side of the psyche is more than the primitive, vile aspects of human nature (or learned behavior) that inflict damage on self and others. The shadow contains all that we cannot see or will not admit about our feelings, behaviors, motivations and potential. Each human child wisely forms his/her shadow as protection from the rejection of parents and other life-giving/life-threatening agents. In our brilliance, even before verbal life begins, we adapt to the fear, disgust, anger, and rebuff of powerful people by stuffing significant parts of our wholeness into Shadow Bags that we trail behind us until conscious awareness and deliberate decision-making reverses the process.

You can suspect that your own shadow is running the show when you have an extremely strong reaction, either positive or negative, to an individual or group. By using a common dream approach you may be able to bring the shadow into focus. Ascribe characteristics to your hated or adored one. List five adjectives. Then apply the list to yourself by saying, I, too, am _____ and _____. Continue until you recognize yourself in some form or during certain situations. Apply the same process to your dream characters.

In 1985 I was bedeviled and blessed by a series of dreams containing the character of Ronald Reagan. No matter how I defined Ronald Reagan, I could not see myself in him. Because we are blinded by the sun that creates our shadow, I asked friends to verify my self-understanding and, in this case, all concurred with my confusion.

In the first dream of the series, I answer a knock at my front door to discover Ronald Reagan, my date for the evening. Since I am not fond of the man, I'm horrified in the dream and more than a bit confused when I awaken. Nonetheless, I perform my duty as a student of the dream and write it in my journal.

Three nights later I'm astonished to find myself at a grand ball designed to celebrate my engagement to Ronald Reagan. In the dream I cannot understand what is happening. I ask my best friend to explain how I could possibly be engaged to RR. My friend smiles enigmatically but provides no clarification. I'm further confounded to discover that Ronald is a smooth and graceful dancer. I truly enjoy being in his arms.

In the next series dream, I am fully enchanted with my groom, Ronny. I'm anticipating a wonderful life with this man. My awake self continues to be dumbfounded. I told a

dream buddy that I could not overcome my negative bias against this character to see even a shadow of what this series could be suggesting. There was more wisdom in that sentence than I could recognize at the time.

As you study a series of dreams you may begin to notice that whatever is recurring heats up, becomes more bizarre or adds important elements. Thus the next, and final dream of this series, showed me happily married to Jerry Falwell! This horrifying addition led me to ask an important dream question. How are Falwell and Reagan alike? The answer was obvious, immediate and simple. They are both extreme conservatives. Continuing my inner dialogue I asked: Why do I need to marry a conservative masculine? The answer came in that form of deep knowing called the Ah ha! If I was to heal the myriad physical ailments that plagued me at the time, I desperately needed, metaphorically, to *marry* a *conservative* way of *thinking* and *doing* (masculine principle). ^

Until this dream series, little to nothing about my personal approach to life was conservative. (My astrology friends blame that on my sun sign, Scorpio.) Since I am a Sullivan, my identification with the Irish Rebel (and all the chaos it frequently created) is equally valid. For those and other reasons, I took on every day swinging, charging into the fray, expecting to slay dragons and bloody my head against many obstacles in the process.

Because the medical profession offered little help or hope for future improvement, I had to find my own ways to rebuild a dreadfully depleted immune system. This dream provided the antidote of the conservative, of conserving energy, of embracing and dancing with the shadow side of my life in many areas. Eventually, the balance brought by this shift positively altered my behavior, allowing a full physical recovery. The Shadow knows. Embrace it.