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Women, Writing, and Soul-Making: Creativity and the Sacred Feminine
By Peggy Tabor Millin
Story Water Press, a division of ClarityWorks, Inc., Asheville, NC (2009)

Women, Writing and Soul-Making: Creativity and the Sacred Feminine, Peggy Tabor Millin's new book published by Story Water Press, encourages writers to claim their power and voice while exploring a feminine approach to inspire creativity. Far from a how-to-guide, Millin's book functions as a creative companion, filled with metaphors, philosophy and techniques that rally readers to take risks and creative leaps in both their lives and in their writing practice.

"*Women, Writing and Soul-Making* is an invitation for you to explore the feminine, with all its strengths and vulnerabilities, as a way to claim your creative power, your writing, and your life," Millin writes in her introduction, setting the stage for her journey into the challenges and rewards that writing can have on an individual, both physiologically, personally and spiritually.

Millin, the author of *Mary's Way* and a teacher leading workshops with her business Clarity Works Inc., suggests that women writers nurture the qualities of feminine energy— intuition, emotional sensitivity and empathy— harnessing them as tools to deepen their creative process. A theme that Millin returns to throughout the book is that of placing "process before the product." By focusing on the process of writing, Millin suggests that one can detach themselves from the expectations and traditional notions of "success" that often stifle creativity. For example, emphasizing process over product can enable a writer to judge themselves on the honesty of their work, their devotion to their craft, and their diligence and persistence despite the many challenges and distractions that life presents. In this way, a writer can empower their everyday writing routine, defining accomplishments on a more personal level.

From Millin's perspective, focusing on the product instead of the process can often lead writers to judge their work by whether or not they get an agent, whether their work is published, sold or well received on the market. Overcoming these

expectations is one the greatest obstacles a writer faces, argues Millin. To truly succeed, a writer must have faith in their work, and learn to persevere no matter what criticisms are encountered along the journey.

Millin is a thoughtful and passionate writer, attuned to the many impulses that guide her own writing. By investigating her personal writing practice, Millin sheds light onto the many complexities that go along with putting a pen to paper: “My frustration with writing arises because I expect my love for it to make it easy. Yet everything I have ever learned about love tells me otherwise. The very things that cause me struggle and pain give my relationships depth... I have to remind myself that I am not seeking perfection through my writing, I am seeking to express the imperfection that makes life rich and full of wonder.” These observations become valuable lessons, prompting questions like: What is it that propels my writing, that terrifies, frustrates or motivates my work, and how can I become more aware of these feelings and influences?

Women, Writing and Soul-Making also focuses on the importance of community for women writers. As a teacher, Millin shares her experience leading writing circles and stresses the unique role that female companionship plays in nourishing an individual’s writing. “Writing and certain values generally held by women— desire for community, willingness to nurture, pleasure in one another’s company, opening of emotional expression—form the metaphorical hearth around which the writing community gathers.” When participating in a supportive writing circle, Millin poses, women are able to push their writing to new levels.

Interestingly, Millin’s fluid and circular writing reflects the “Spiraling Down” technique that she encourages other women to embrace. Specific themes and topics, such as the Western world’s perspective of masculine verse feminine energy and the challenge of looking inward (instead of looking for external confirmation) to find one’s power, are probed using multiple vantage points, cropping up in nearly every chapter of the book. In an ongoing exploration of masculine and feminine energy, Millin looks at the Chinese philosophy of yin and yang and even examines how different languages might foster different understandings and cultural perspectives of what is “masculine” and what is “feminine.” This cyclical style of writing, Millin

observes, is common among women writers: “Women tend to explore meaning in a circular pattern—meaning that their writing and talking begins on one level and spirals inwards to what really matters.” Millin’s book mirrors this statement, creating a lyrical narrative that builds in depth from beginning to end.

Women, Writing and Soul-Making should be read slowly, savored and returned to in times when creative inspiration is needed. It is a poignant, soulful book that strives only to spark the creative within: “You can do it,” writes Millin. “You can grow and change and burst the seams of past limitations. Oh, yes. You can.”

—Aiyanna Sezak-Blatt