

Hysterectomy

Lisa Foxley

Last year I had a hysterectomy, following two years of trying alternative therapies to cure the problem.

Apparently one in five women have hysterectomies nowadays. I remember when I was a child it was 'fashionable' for the medical profession to perform tonsillectomies and appendectomies. These are now less frequent.

I attended a hysterectomy support group and made my own decision to go ahead with the operation. The registrar told me that they routinely remove the ovaries 'just in case they become malignant'! — I replied to him that I did not wish mine to be removed, and asked him, politely, how he would like to be castrated for no reason! — I was allowed to keep my ovaries!

During the few weeks leading up to this major operation I began to feel a deep sense of grieving at the loss I was about to incur. As a therapist I very much value working with imagery and symbolism, and one day I spontaneously felt that I would like to bury my uterus under the pear tree in my garden as a rite of passage, giving my fertility back to the earth, saying goodbye to my youth, and inviting the next phase of my creative life cycle to emerge.

Asking the consultant gynaecologist if I might take my uterus home with me was

an extremely empowering experience and, though greeted with some surprise, my request was treated with respect.

On a beautiful sunny September day two close friends and I performed a moving ceremony that I had written. We chanted and meditated; then, following the burial, I said goodbye, gave thanks for my children and that creative phase of my life, passed through an arch and was presented with gifts and poems symbolising my new creative cycle. After this ritual we ate a tea comprising delicious food containing grains, pulses, nuts and a ceremonial fruit cake, with accompanying lightness and laughter. This had been a very joyous as well as a deeply sacred experience for us all.

I have lived in this present house for seven years, and each year the pear tree has borne six, perhaps ten pears at the most. I was deeply moved this year to discover over 300 pears on the tree! To me this symbolises and affirms my belief in death and rebirth and the constancy, within change, of life no matter what.

I have no regrets regarding my hysterectomy, only warm memories of a special time of my life when I turned what could have been a depressing and negative situation into an empowering and fruitful one.

Lisa Foxley is a humanistic counsellor who lives in Exmouth and practises in Exeter. Her personal process includes the integration of Buddhist, Jungian and Pagan traditions.