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## THE TAOGIRL GATHERING

### A Celebration of Taogirls Everywhere

September, 2006;

The Taogirl Gathering

Issue Number Four



Welcome , Taogirls

Sometimes staying on task is difficult, as it is for me today. I am at my computer composing this month's Taogirl Gathering but my thoughts keep straying to the events of this week. Joe and I are in Snowmass, Colorado, on vacation with our children and grandchildren. The weather has been magnificent, the natural beauty of this state breathtaking and, of course, spending time with the kids a joy beyond description. Yet as my mind scrambles to find a theme for this, my welcoming paragraphs to you, I am reviewing the many adventures I have had these last several days. And the one that stands out above all others was yesterday morning.

We invited Emily and Alix, our 4 and 6 year-old granddaughters, to stay in our hotel room overnight for a "sleep over" with "Grams" and "Boopah". The next morning I arose at 7:00 with the girls and took them to the lower level of the hotel where, in a large open air shopping mall, we got ourselves coffee (me) and hot chocolate (them) at the Paradise Bakery. We then spent half-an-hour or so at the little playground before proceeding to the hotel elevator to return to our room. There was only a small glitch: "Grams" has no sense of direction and ended up marching the girls up and down numerous flights of stairs in search of the correct elevator. It took about twenty minutes of aimless wandering before we happened upon the correct route.

Certainly no one was upset, we had turned my lack of an internal compass into a game, but the girls did see a need for me to get better at this direction stuff. If I was ever to lead a party of

adventurers like the girls again, I had better take a course in orienteering. And to start my studies both Emily and Alix took it upon themselves to draw me a map. While each did their cartography independently, they both handed me the same picture: a circle with a straight line through the center, running from top to bottom.

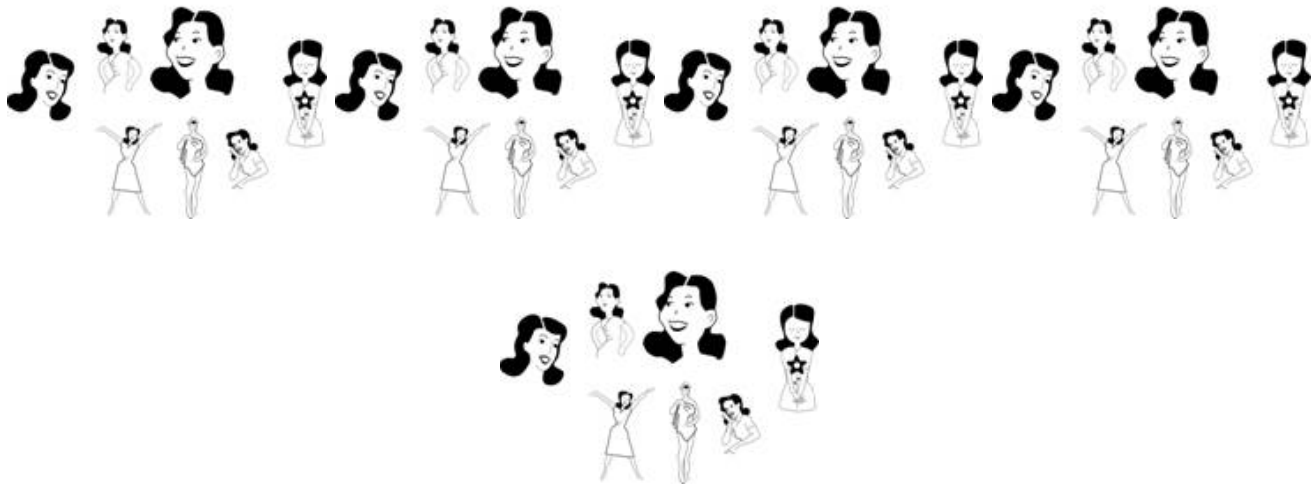
Today as I think about these wonderful little maps, I realize how they hold true for all of us as we stumble around, finding our way through life. The path is not always a straight line; often it is muddled with forks and turns and round-about; making the route appear more like a labyrinth than a well marked hiking trail. Yet, if we continue on our route, forging our way through the maze, ultimately we find our way. Had I merely stopped walking yesterday morning and chosen to give up, I would never have stumbled upon the correct elevator. True, I certainly did not take the most direct route, but I learned from that experience and will, next time, march myself in the correct direction from the outset.

Life is like that, you know. We stumble. We get lost. We veer off in the wrong direction. But we have the opportunity to learn from each experience so we continue on, through and over the hurdles. We are offered this amazing adventure with unlimited possibilities. I hope the learning never ends and I keep finding my way. Just in case I might get lost, however, I think I shall carry my Alix and Emily maps.

C J

This month's Taogirl Gathering will feature:

- ✚ A interview with an "original Taogirl" from Texas
- ✚ The Taogirl Wisdom of the Month
- ✚ A Very Special Opportunity
- ✚ Our question and answer section
- ✚ A listing of my September travels – I would so love to meet you when I'm in your part of the world
- ✚ And now I'd like to welcome...
- ✚ "Let's link"
- ✚ The Taogirl Boutique (giving you the opportunity to purchase and show off your Taogirl pride)



This month, in our interview section,

I am proud to feature an "original" Taogirl who hails from Texas .

When BJ first emailed me this past February, she introduced herself as the "original Taogirl" and described herself as an "Army-sergeant-ballroom dancing-poet-artist-cowgirl sorta' mystic." The interesting thing is that I happened to be traveling and, coincidentally, was in BJ's home town when she contacted me. It was unfortunate, however, that we didn't have the opportunity to meet face to face, but I suspect we will some day in the not too distant future.

In the meantime, I feel that BJ is a woman we would all enjoy getting to know a little better.

And now I am pleased to introduce BJ ...

*BJ, when you first corresponded with me you said that you call yourself the "original Taogirl. Would you please introduce yourself to the other Taogirls out there and give them some of your background as you did for me when we first met way back in February?*

I was born in Colorado as Deborah Jane Reid, when I was two my family decided there were too many Debbies on the block so they began to call me after my mother, Betty Jane.

Later, when I was in the military, I found I could get quicker response to correspondence if I was SGT BJ Stewart, rather than SGT Betty. I grew up during the sixties in New Mexico, the daughter of a Christian minister and a talented mother, who eventually retired as a ski instructor. My father has passed, Mom, now eighty-three, still rides her mountain bike and skis as often as she can in the winter.

My father had been the lead tenor in an opera company in Europe for twelve years in the Thirties and early Forties. When Mussolini took over Italy, my father, his Italian wife and their young son barely escaped with their lives, and thanks only to the connections my grandfather had through Lion's Club International. They eventually had two more sons, however, their marriage did not last and my father was left with three small boys to raise.

My mother, the daughter of a cobbler and a tailor, married her high school sweetheart and had three children. After the war, her husband was different, and so her marriage also ended.

In 1949 my father was managing an Arthur Murray Studio in Colorado Springs, CO, when my mother applied for a job as an instructor; two years later they married. Beginning their life together with six children between them, they soon added my brother and then me.

When I was three years old, my father responded to a call he had as a teenager to go into the ministry. Fortunately, he was well-read, well-traveled, open-minded, and deeply sincere in his beliefs, which allowed me the opportunity of a spiritual education beginning at a very young age.

By the age of twelve quite a bit was going on: all of my half-brothers and my one half-sister were out on their own, leaving only my brother and myself; I was helping my parents teach Junior Cotillion; the rude awakening of the Civil Rights movement, exposed the hypocrisy in the faith I trusted; and my father's gift of spiritual healing which he received suddenly three years earlier was all but gone.

My father's gift of healing came about during a minister's camp when both he and my mother received the "baptism in the Holy Spirit". Upon returning home he began to hold healing services on Thursday evening. Quietly, in the candlelit sanctuary, his hand softly on the top of the head of the kneeling person, he would say a two sentence prayer, many of the healing were medically documented. For a year or so my mom and dad became very effective in healing prayer, surrendering outcomes to a greater will, and helping many people. Unfortunately, the church, at the time, believed it was too controversial, and he was encouraged to cool it, and was relegated to smaller churches in the conference.

Given the circumstances of my childhood, I think it would be easy to understand that when I read Siddhartha, by Herman Hesse in my sixteenth year, I, in my naiveté, proclaimed: That's what I'm going to do; I'm going to find out for myself!

The first book I read on my quest that same year was Zen Mind, Beginners Mind by Suzuki which I think prepared me for the Tao in later years.

Right out of high school, I took off for the wiles of South Dakota and had my first experience with ranch life, after that I spent several years in Colorado and New Mexico taking odd jobs and a few college classes before joining the military in nineteen-seventy-six.

The next ten years as wife, mother, and mental health counselor in the military kept me busy. At times my spiritual interests took a back seat, but never faded. And in spite of all that I had learned and the understanding my soul longed for, I was asleep. I suppose like all of us at one point we must untangle the vines of perception and conditioning that have grown up around our genuine self, and except the law of cause and effect.

I was introduced to Taoism in my late twenties by my then-husband who gave me a copy of the Tao De Ching. For me, the way of observation, the stillness of The Tao as expressed in the Tao De Ching, filled in gaps that I had questioned in my search to understand the deeper meanings of the Bible.

After the military I had the opportunity to do some more ranching and I embraced it fully. I would say those are the happiest years of my life. I did a little wrangling for television and movies during that time, but much preferred the solitude of being on a remote ranch. Somehow those physical trials washed clean the inner trials of grappling with a society going faster and faster by the day.

*You mentioned that your life as a cowgirl had great trials; can you give us some examples?*

The trials were not great, but there were many, especially for a beginner like myself. The trials I faced during ranching are common to anyone who depends directly on nature for survival. Long cold horseback rides; nights spent with a sick horse in the barn rather than in a warm bed, sweltering heat and drought. One year the heat and drought were so intense that we fed trailer loads of hay at three o'clock in the morning.

Even during the most trying times I was so grateful to being paid to do something I loved. Even as a child I had a fascination with the little ranch houses tucked back off the road, and the herds of cattle that seemed as fascinated and as scared of me as I was of them. Most of my family are professionals and have no interest in country life, except for one nephew. Perhaps there are some of us who are born with the song "Don't fence me in" on our lips.

*You also talked of the "great intrinsic reward" of that life. Can you explain that statement a bit?*

The rhythm of nature creates ones daily routine and often determines the work for the day, or if that work will be easy or hard. Over time, being at ease with nature's rhythms creates a meditative state and daily interaction with nature increases awareness on all sensory levels.

*Did – or do you now have – any role models who helped you find your path?*

Lord Jesus; Hildegard of Bingen; Martin Luther King, Jr; my mom; many strong women I have met over the years; and two genuine cowboys I had the privilege of knowing.

*Do you recognize yourself as a role model to others and, if so, in what ways?*

We are all role models in one way or another. I hope that I model compassion, endurance, and determination.

*You talk about your "Tao Girl Psychology". Can you explain just what that is?*

Tao Girl Psychology came about as a mixture of some military and ranching jargon and a no-nonsense type of cowgirl's perspective on mental health issues. A couple of the Diagnostic Categories are: Out There Flappin' (OTF) and Cranial Rectitus,(CR, which is often chronic and serve re.) both of these are pretty self explanatory, although at one point I developed some diagnostic criteria which was fun, perhaps I can dig them out again.

*How has that helped you as you have followed your own path?*

Gotta' keep a sense of humor. One of the defining characteristics of a Taoist is their happy-go-lucky nature.

*I know you are now involved with a very worthy cause. Will you tell our readers about this?*

I have initiated a petition for the release of Suzanne Swift who went AWOL rather than endure the sexual harassment and abuse that she experienced her first tour in Iraq . More information can be found at [www.suzanneswift.org](http://www.suzanneswift.org) which has a link to the petition.

Sexual coercion of junior soldiers by their superiors is known as command rape. The women veteran groups that came together in support of Suzanne are pursuing not only a more aggressive approach to finding and prosecuting these predators, and improving treatment of victims and trauma.

Currently in our military instances of command rape, and sexual harassment/assault is occurring at an alarming rate, and is under-reported and largely ignored by our government. While women still constitute the highest percentage of sexual abuse victims in the military, in actual number there are more men than women victims of sexual abuse.

Not only does command rape and other sexual abuse undermine military readiness, but claims for Military Sexual Trauma and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder adds to the already strained funds for disabled veterans.

Untreated trauma greatly contribute so to domestic violence, substance abuse, divorce rates, and ultimately our society as a whole pays the price.

*I know that you have written a Tao Girl poem. Would you share that with us now?*

Tao Girl is a summary of sorts of my ten years of ranching and wrangling.

Tao Girl

it's not that it was a better life, it is just what I preferred  
to be free upon the open range, 'stead of readin' someone else's words.

So I took my chances horseback through grasslands and sage,  
and put my trust in pine trees 'stead of the experts of the age.

To feel the nature from within reflect that which was without, was to be free of traffic jams,  
video cams, and restaurants serving gout.

Days into months in quiet solitude I remained; moments melting like snowflakes, patterns  
of time never the same.

Along with sun and moon, I danced with the earth, and I heard the song of the universe.  
No, it wasn't in churches, books, or teachers I found the path of Light; it was sittin' on the  
tailgate of a pick-up on a starry, starry night.

bj stewart 2001

*Is there anything you would like to add to this interview that I haven't thought to ask you?*

There is so much more...another time perhaps.

*Many thanks to you, BJ for sharing you life; your story; passions and beliefs with us. I truly  
hope that when I am next in your hometown I get to meet you!*

CJ

I'd love to hear from all of you Tao girls out there. Please email me so I can share your stories  
and photos with our readers. [www.taogirl.com](http://www.taogirl.com)

## TAOGIRL WISDOM OF THE MONTH

Don't wait for a light to appear at the end of the  
tunnel,



stride down there....  
and light the bloody thing yourself.

– Sara Henderson

***A Very Special Opportunity for a Very Special Cause:***

***Dear Taogirls, you Can Help Make A Documentary Film That Supports Women As Leaders...***

Did you know the women only comprise 14.9 per cent of the seat in the U.S. Congress? And that even though women make up almost half of America's labor force only two Fortune 500 companies have women CEO's or presidents?

On November 18<sup>th</sup> I will be speaking at a leadership conference in Newtown , Ct. called Lead Out Loud!. The conference is conducted by the Esteemed Woman Foundation in partnership with the Southwest Athletic Conference of Connecticut. It is a wonderful full day program introducing high school girls to leadership skills and women leaders in a variety of fields.

As part of this project, Filmmaker Suzie Galler (*I am Beautiful, I am My Mother's Daughter*) is currently working on a documentary about women and leadership to bring public awareness to the growing movement in the U.S. to place women in decision and policy making roles within our government and corporate arenas. The film, entitled *Taking the Lead*, will focus on women who are leaders in their respective fields in an effort to define the skills and characteristics necessary for women to become leaders, whether in the White House, the Board Room, or the PTA. It will also highlight the growing number of leadership programs that have been blossoming across the U.S. in the past 10 years, and the results of those efforts. "Ultimately, our hope is that, in addition to providing healthy role models for our daughters, this film will help to de-stigmatize the concept of women in top leadership roles in the U.S. and help the public understand that women need not serve only at the dinner table—they can serve the world at large," Galler told me when we met recently.

The film will be shot by a professional crew with the support of a group of student volunteers from Lead Out Loud! who will conduct interviews with women leaders and act as research and production assistants.

***Make a Donation and Receive a Copy of "The Tao of the Defiant Woman"***

You, too can help. The producers have taken a grassroots approach to funding the film and are asking for donations of \$50 or more from individuals to help get this film into production quickly – before the November elections. I will donate a copy of "The Tao of the Defiant Woman" to anyone who contributes \$50 or more to help see this film made. In addition, your name will be listed in the film's credits.

So please, help us spread the word about *Taking the Lead* and tell your friends about this wonderful project. This is proof positive that we can all help to make a difference in our world if we chose to.

Send your donations to: The Esteemed Woman Foundation

P.O. Box 693

Georgetown, CT 06829

For more information called (203) 938-8833 or visit [www.esteemedwoman.org](http://www.esteemedwoman.org).

It's ? time

Dear Taogirls,

Last month Sophie V. asked our advice for starting a Taogirl Group. As a result of her query, and similar ones from many of you out there, I have begun to put together a handbook that will aid you with your own groups. It will be filled with suggestions for the organization of the group as well as exercises and discussions that you might wish to follow as you create your own paths.

I would be very happy to have you all contribute to this effort by sending me your thoughts and suggestions: what have you found helpful by way of discussions, events, formats, etc, that you can share with me so I might include in the handbook?

Please email me at [thepath@taogirl.com](mailto:thepath@taogirl.com)

As always, I thank you for your participation in helping make the Taogirl Movement as strong as it is becoming.

While, with your help and additions, the handbook will always remain a work in progress, I intend to have the first edition completed within the next several weeks. Please check the website for the publication date. [www.taogirl.com](http://www.taogirl.com)

CJ

Now for this month's question:

*ON TAOGIRL AND COSMETICS...*Regarding the Tao philosophy. It sounds basically to follow the serenity prayer. Accept the things that cannot be changed, but if you can change some things to make you seem somewhat younger, more to match your internal age, younger inside, Is that wrong according to Tao philosophy? Hair dye, cosmetics and that sort of thing. I couldn't quite get it straight in my mind if it meant they were unnecessary. I couldn't imagine life without them. I won't even go to the mailbox without at least lipstick on. - Carol

*TAOGIRL'S ANSWER TO CAROL...*Of course Taogirls wear makeup. When I was younger I wouldn't even leave the house to put out the garbage if my face wasn't painted and my hair perfectly coiffed. As I have gotten older, however, I still recognize my need to look the best I can, but I do not feel compelled to wear make up all of the time. There are many days when I forge my way out into the world "au natural" and feel quite comfortable doing so. This is one way in which I have incorporated the Taogirl philosophy into my life. I still have the desire to look my best, but don't always think that makeup is necessary to do so. I am the age I am and do not mind allowing the years to show. I don't wear my makeup to look younger; I wear makeup to feel prettier. It becomes, then, a personal choice. Do what makes you feel happiest, most comfortable with who you are. But remember always the wonderful quote from Rosalind Russell: "Taking joy in life is a woman's best cosmetic."

CJ

*Dear Taogirls,*

*Please remember that I would love to hear from you. Would you like to add to my response to Carol and her question about wearing makeup? If so, please email me and I will post your comments on next month's newsletter. I'm sure she and all Taogirls will benefit greatly from your comments.*

*And, of course, I'd love to have you write in with questions of your own so we might keep up a Taogirl dialogue with each other.*

[thepath@taogirl.com](mailto:thepath@taogirl.com)

*Thank you,*

CJ



On the road again.....

Here's where I will be in September:

Monday, September 25

Katonah Library

26 Bedford Road

Katonah , NY

7:30 – 9:00 PM

I will be running an introductory Taogirl workshop

Wednesday, September 27

Borders

Wilton , CT

7:00 – 9:00 PM

I will be participating in an author's roundtable

Keep checking the Travels page of the website for current updates.



*And now, I would like to take this opportunity to welcome...*

***Brandon Henry!***

The brand new baby son of Cara S. was born on Wednesday, August 16th

Congratulations to Cara and Brandon and the entire family!

(Cara, you might remember, had asked us the very intriguing question

that was featured in the July issue of The Taogirl Gathering)

### LET'S LINK !

If you know of, or have a website that I think Taogirls would enjoy seeing, let me know and I'll be happy to set up a hyperlink from this newsletter to that site. Conversely, if you would like to do the same from your site to this newsletter, please contact me to do so.

It is in this manner that we can support each other as we all strive to support women everywhere!

**Esteemed Woman Foundation...** This amazing and important organization was founded in 2000 by filmmaker **Suzie Galler** who began conducting research about women and self-esteem which led to the making of the highly acclaimed documentary film *I Am Beautiful*. The film then became the cornerstone of an outreach program designed to help women explore and strengthen their self-image.. It now includes ongoing workshops, resource materials and an outreach network that provides support nationwide. The foundation's primary focus has been to develop comprehensive programs for women of all ages and backgrounds. The programs teach that self-esteem is not a destination, but a life long journey--one that requires recognition of the sources of self-esteem, and a willingness to address those areas that impede a positive self-image.

Visit the Suzie and the Esteemed Woman Foundation at: <http://esteemedwoman.com>

**Connecticut Muse...** This seasonally published newsletter is the brain child of **Patricia D'Ascoli**, columnist, essayist and author of *Home Is Where the Humor Is*. The Connecticut Muse is a celebration of contemporary Connecticut authors featured in a quarterly newsletter. Each issue focuses on a different literary genre and includes book reviews, author interviews, a listing of upcoming author appearances and information on new releases. You Taogirls who do not reside in Connecticut will also enjoy reading the Muse to discover what new books are out there for us all to enjoy.

Visit Patricia and The Connecticut Muse at: <http://connecticutmuse.com/aboutus.html>

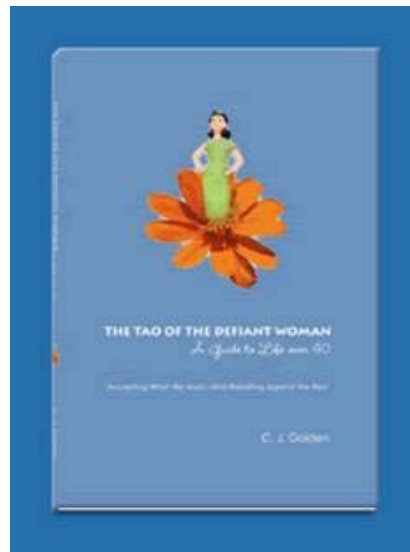
**Donna Ferber ...** is the author of the wonderfully supportive and encouraging book, *From Ex-wife to Exceptional Life: A Woman's Journey through Divorce*. Donna is a licensed professional counselor and licensed alcohol and drug counselor. She is also a psychotherapist and experienced speaker who has drawn on her twenty years of experience counseling women through this difficult process to create a comprehensive guide comprised of 365 one page essays that offer inspiration, insight and information.

Visit Donna at: <http://www.donnaferber.com/index.htm>

**Prill Boyle ...** Like the women she writes about in her book, *Defying Gravity*, Prill Boyle is a late bloomer. After graduating from college at 38, she became an English teacher. Then in January of 2000 she read an article in *The New York Times* about a 65-year old Kentucky woman named Wini Yunker who had waited 39 years to join the Peace Corps. Inspired by this woman's persistence and courage, Prill decided to write a book about late bloomers. Her book recounts the stories of 12 "ordinary" women who've done extraordinary things later in life. It is a delightful and inspiring book to read and all the more so as Prill connects these first-person accounts together with her own story. Prill is also very active on the speaking and workshop circuit.

Visit Prill at: <http://www.prillboyle.com/index.html>

## THE TAOGIRL ON-LINE BOUTIQUE IS OPEN





Some final words:

I began this issue of The TaoGirl Gathering by talking about the map that my granddaughters had so wisely drawn for me. As I have forged my way through life I've often found myself lost but, somehow have continued down the path; a path that has led me to this wonderful life I am blessed to live. I don't know where it will go from here, but I shall endeavor to continue around whatever hurdles are placed in my way and remember to never give up or give in.

I would love to hear from you TaoGirls out there – what roadblocks have you had to find your way around? Have you, too, ever been lost? How did you get yourself back on the correct path? What did you use as a "map" to help you forge your way?

Please email me and let me share your story with our readers in the October issue of The TaoGirl Gathering.

[thepath@taogirl.com](mailto:thepath@taogirl.com)

My thanks to **BJ** for allowing me to feature you this month; to **Carol** for your thought-

provoking question; and a very special thank you to **Emily and Alix** for my wonderful maps!

And, as always, a big thank you to all of you out there for being the wonderful, sharing and caring Taogirls (and Taoguys) that you are.

CJ

**Spread the word - share this issue of THE TAOGIRL GATHERING with your friends !**

If you would rather not receive future issues please respond to this email and put "unsubscribe" in the subject line.

For information, or to share your thoughts and wisdom with us: [thepath@taogirl.com](mailto:thepath@taogirl.com)