

BEFORE TAMPAX, THERE WAS MOSS

A Portland woman is on a mission to take the curse out of menstruation by Oriana Green

Come on, women, admit it—you've never been completely happy with the monthly interruption in your life that our grandmothers called the Curse. Especially for lesbians, many of whom have little interest in breeding, a monthly menstrual cycle can be an expensive nuisance and a literal pain in the rear end.

long way toward reconnecting to the earth, she suggests.

"My inroad to the topic has been my earth-based spirituality," explains Traut, who curls her bare feet beneath her while sitting on a park bench one recent hot afternoon.

Perhaps her earthly roots in Kentucky first shaped Traut's world view. It was also fostered by an array of Native American teachers, by her training at the Chinook Learning Community on Whidbey Island in Washington, and later as a member of the Bear Tribe in Spokane, Wash., in the early 1990s. And it was the Native American foremothers who created the traditions Traut shares today.

In her classes, Traut teaches the concept of moontime, a reference to the magical synchronicity of women's cycles and lunar cycles. Most women who live truly connected to the earth experience a menstrual cycle in sync with the moon, so they always bleed during the same phase of the moon. (The words *menses* and *moon* are both derived from the Latin word for month.)

Historically, Native American women gathered together to bleed inside a moonlodge. They used the time to turn inward and receive visions.

every garden in Amsterdam failed to thrive save one—the garden that was fed nutrients from menstrual blood. Closer to home, country dykes near Portland report success hanging blood-soaked strips of cloth to keep deer away from their gardens.

In her classes, Traut also explores the various rights of passage in a woman's life that go largely uncelebrated in the Western world. She teaches ceremonies for a young girl's first blood and crossover into womanhood, as well as rituals for croning, or menopause.

Much of the trauma some women experience during menopause makes sense to Traut.

"Women are literally doing a huge psychic shift becoming crones, and they need to be more inner-directed at that time," she says. "But it's also a stage of their life with high demands on their time, a period when they are still caretaking others, and that conflict creates a schism and health crises."

For women embarking on that journey, Traut advises them to "create a circle of women who are also going through that transition, and also include some women who have already gone through it to lend support and advice."

She also recommends reading *Women of the*

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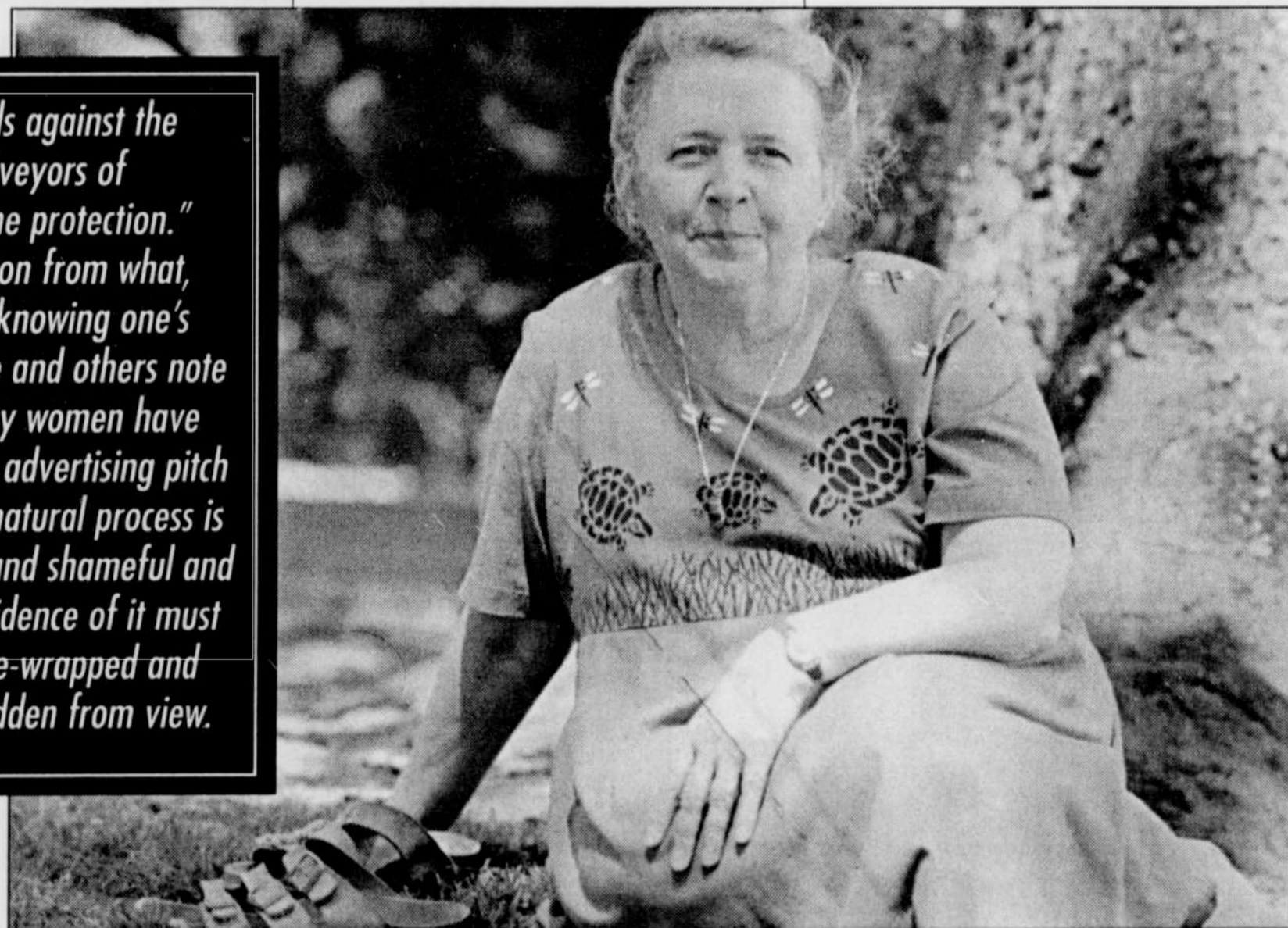


PHOTO BY K.H. KIMBALL

Ruth Traut is a Portland dyke who fully embraces her cronehood, her hair turning a shade of steel gray. She has traveled the world teaching other women how to discover the power and magic in their own blood. To women who still bleed, Traut urges: "If you can only do one thing, touch your own blood."

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But before Tampax, there was moss. And one of the best ways, Traut says, that women can reclaim the power of their blood is to bleed directly into the earth.

"It was so strong to have your own soft lips touching the earth and in communion—so powerful and sweet," she says of the experience.

Even an hour each month sitting in one's back yard, naked beneath a skirt, would go a

While "on their moon," the women were cared for by others and freed from all obligations. This was an honorable thing to do, and bleeding women were much revered for their power and the wisdom they acquired in the moonlodge. They even carried clots of menstrual blood in their medicine bags to use for curative purposes.

"Native American women actually communicate with their blood," Traut explains, her passion for the subject evident as she shares her stories. Their blood literally becomes an oracle, she adds, pointing out that the famous Hopi prophecies are moonlodge visions from thousands of years ago.

Traut aims to restore that reverence—starting with how each woman feels about her own experiences. For a modern day example, Traut tells of a woman she met while teaching a class in Amsterdam. The woman had begun using reusable menstrual sponges and poured her bloody rinse water on her garden. This was soon after the Chernobyl disaster, and that summer

Thirteenth Moon, an anthology of women's menopause experiences. She is a big believer in natural medicines and supplements if women need help with physical symptoms.

Women who are beyond menopause are said to "hold their blood" and are considered the wise women of their tribes. They belong to the Grandmothers Lodge, where women sense and name their own moontime and reserve some time each month to go within and be receptive to higher guidance.

"That is a strong position to be in society," Traut says. "You carry a lot of power—in the good sense of that word."

■ Ruth Traut will discuss "RECLAIMING THE POWER OF MENSTRUATION" at *It's My Pleasure* on June 8 at 7:30 p.m.; preregistration is required. She is also holding a series of classes this summer called "WOMEN AND THE EARTH" at Common Ground Wellness Center. Though she is as earthy as they come, you can reach Traut via e-mail at bethruth@compuserve.com.

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