Childhood Role Models: How Fairy Tales Come True!

Here are four different women's life scripts from the Fairy Tale, Cinderella:

**CINDERELLA AND KINDNESS:** One woman used the Cinderella story to comfort herself that, even though she had to live with the dirty work and deprivation, she could maintain her spiritual ability to remain cheerful and helpful.

**CINDERELLA AND SUFFERING:** Another woman allowed herself to stay in the kitchen cleaning up ashes believing that, if she remained dutiful to the suffering and hard work, that one day a good man would come for her and take her away.

**CINDERELLA AND VICTIMHOOD:** Some women identify so strongly with the Cinderella role that they are convinced that the only way to get a husband and home is to stay the victim and wait faithfully for the rescuing prince to appear.

**CINDERELLA AND MAGICAL THINKING:** One woman kept herself going through adversity on the hopes that a Fairy Godmother would appear bringing her a beautiful ballgown and would take her to the Ball to meet her prince charming. The Cinderella story can be a beacon of hope with adds a spark of light no matter how dark a girl's childhood circumstances.

Other Popular Feminine Role Models

**BARBIE:** Beware those women who identify with Barbie or image with little meaning—they often over-emphasize the fashion model idealized image and wonder why their body and their life isn't ideal. They may want a mate to shower them with attention so they don't have to be responsible for themselves. They may also have other favorite stories making Barbie dolls their source of delight in feminine beauty and grace. Some girls learn the skill to sew with making their Barbie wardrobes.

**SLEEPING BEAUTY:** The girl who identifies with Sleeping Beauty may spend much of her life waiting sincerely for her prince to appear and awaken her so he can take her away to his castle. She may have faith in her man, but she may also wait without making herself available. This Damsel or immature woman and over-romanticized script appears in the Disney princesses. These are sweet feminine roles but may create and unconscious script for naivete.

**SCARLETT:** A woman who identifies with Scarlett O'Hara from *Gone With the Wind* may choose any of various elements. In intimate relationships, she may play with men and be overly independent. She may have an unreachable and over-romanticized love (Ashley Wilkes) and/or a man who wants her (Rhett Butler) but whom she finds too intimidating because she fears the vulnerability of intimacy required in a true peer relationship or marriage and is, therefore, unwilling to give up power and control. She might be gifted with tenacity and courage to overcome great odds. She may be deeply loyal to her family, her roots, her country. She could be a remarkable entrepreneur or a beauty queen. She may cultivate dear friends.

**LADY AND THE TRAMP:** When a woman identifies with Lady, she plays the lady who wants a stable husband, a home and family but ends up falling for the charming, clever and romantic yet undependable kind of guy like Tramp.
**Masculine Hero Figures**

**THE LITTLE ENGINE THAT COULD:** Those with this archetype are often workaholics who achieve in spite of adversity but have a difficult time resting or creating a balanced life. Their script helps them become high achievers and great employees but these are the ones who can compromise their health and home life for work.

**UPERHEROES:** Those who identify with superheros such as Spiderman, Batman, James Bond or Han Solo usually take on substantial responsibility taking for granted that it is their role to help others and to solve important problems. They often lack strong intimate relationships or ties to home and tire themselves being honor-bound to living as “The White Knight.” This can be a recipe for emotional repression, self-criticism, perfectionism or being ‘the fixer.’ The paragon in the stories inadvertently prepares some men for attracting ‘Damsels’ who want rescuing rather than a woman who wants the depth of marrying a true peer.

**PAUL BUNYAN AND STRENGTH:** I encountered a woman who was reared in a rural setting among all brothers with a submissive mother. She proudly patterned herself after the Paul Bunyan character taking on masculine body language and the ability to do heavy work to gain the strength she experienced among the males and to avoid being a disempowered female like her mother’s overly submissive example. As an adult, this woman wore camouflage fatigues and moved with the bravado of a male laborer proud of her manly strengths and denying the aspects of her feminine side. Through the characteristics of Paul Bunyan, she learned to value and develop strength in her masculine side. However, this woman wasn’t provided with a story or archetype with examples to equally develop, enjoy and become proud of being female.

**THE WHITE HAT:** The men who identify with John Wayne, Wyatt Earp, The Lone Ranger or Indiana Jones usually have great success in business, entrepreneurship and travel but they never seem to figure out how to have a home and/or someone to come home to! However, Davey Crockett was a well-rounded figure in the television series and books. My dentist’s name is Dave and he exemplifies the early role model in his current life. The Coonskin Hat he had as a boy is now a man known as a helping professional, a man of integrity and gentleness, a devoted husband and a warm dad who goes to the games and recitals. Davey Crockett had it all. So does Dr. G.

**RAPUNZEL AND THE MOTHERWOUND:** A man recalls the Rapunzel story where Rapunzel is a princess imprisoned in a castle tower. She lets her long golden hair fall down the outside of the tower through the window to allow the prince to climb her hair in order to reach her and save her.

A doctor who was a client remembers himself as a boy who longed for nurturing from his distant and cold mother. He used the Rapunzel story to comfort himself that one day his mother would extend herself to him and allow him to climb up into her lap or arms for comfort. He never gave up hope even though, after decades of showing her his high achievements, she was still the same emotionally-blocked and unempathetic woman who never recognized what he accomplished.
THE STORY: What was your earliest favorite fairy tale, favorite activity, role model, childhood story, television program, or famous person? Write the title and a description of the story. There may be more than one story and they may be similar or different. This is unique to you and your growing up years. This archetype may not be a book or movie or story you learned, it may be a pattern of relating to your life, eg: playing explorer, rescuer or warrior with the neighborhood kids, when you were always ‘playing house’ or fort or tree house in a particular role, etc. (Recall this pattern from as early as possible, between 3 and 10 years.)

TITLE OF THE STORY: _______________________________________________________

YOUR UNIQUE MEMORIES - I want to caution you: What do YOU recall about the story or activity? Remember…your selective memories are important—not the accurate details of the story. We naturally have selective recall of those parts which uniquely held importance for us. Your personal impressions are the source of the information valuable to you today. Be careful to include both the positive and negative elements of the story. What stood out for you? For example in Snow White some women remember the Seven Dwarves or the Wicked Step Mother or the forest animals. Your memories won’t be quite like any other person.

For Example: The woman whose favorite fairy tale is Snow White...she remembered how wonderful life was with the Seven Dwarves and how kind they were to her. She also remembered the Wicked Step Mother looking in the mirror angry that she was no longer fairest of them all. Through her life this woman has had many friendships with men and has been very suspicious of women.

WHAT WAS THE MAGIC OR THE POWERS IN THE STORY OR PERSON?

WHAT WAS THE RESOLUTION OR TRIUMPH? How did it turn out? For example in one girl's after school Search and Rescue game in the woods behind their houses with her neighborhood friends, the group of rescuer's would bring the lost people home.
**My Role Model – Who was my first role, hero or heroine?**

IMENSIONS OF THE ROLE: Who was your favorite cartoon, fairy tale character, favorite activity, animal, role model, childhood hero, television personality, avatar or famous person? Describe the role you chose as a model. How did you identify with the person, animal or experience in the fairy tale, story or game? How did that mirror you, your environment or your feelings at the time?