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Naming the Journal

Choosing the Title
Lisa Hansen

During one of our early Women's Journal meetings, the editing staff tackled the topic of what to call our publication. It was late one afternoon when twenty women began offering up titles that both inspired and gave voice to our vision. Lively discussion ensued around the boardroom table until, finally, the conferencing, conversing and contending narrowed our choices to two. Would we call this journal AWE, or would we call it Cassandra? The voting remained stubbornly even despite an expressed unanimous love of the name AWE, because the women voting for Cassandra remained hopeful that the power of Cassandra’s symbolism (see the note on Cassandra which follows) would generate an urgency for hearing women’s voices that seemed absent from the connotation of the name AWE. Half of the editing staff believed that the role of the journal in magnifying women’s voices was the journal’s most important raison d’être. In moving toward the consensus that settled on the name AWE, these women requested this first issue pay written tribute to the role of Cassandra in mythology and in society. The voices of our various Cassandras must be heard and not lost.

Cassandra
Chelsea Adams and Aubrey Luddington

Cassandra is sometimes overlooked in Greek mythology, yet her story symbolizes the fate of women’s voices in every culture. Although she was given the gift of prophecy, her curse was that no one believed the truths she told. Yet Cassandra was not deterred from declaring what she knew. Despite being
powerless to help others see the future she saw or to convince them of the worth of her vision, Cassandra was true to her gift.

Cassandra was the beautiful and intelligent daughter of King Priam and Queen Hecuba of Troy. To celebrate her birth (and the birth of her twin brother, Helenus), the royal family held a celebration at the temple of Apollo. When the festivities continued into the night, the exhausted twins fell asleep in a corner. While they were sleeping, the magic snakes of Apollo licked the children's ears clean, enabling them to hear the divine sounds of nature and bestowing upon them the ability to see the future.

Will we continue to share our voices, to be true to our gifts, even when it seems no one is listening?

As a young woman, Cassandra returned to the temple of Apollo where Apollo appeared before her and began to teach her about her gift, hoping to seduce her. When she accepted him as a teacher but refused him as a lover, Apollo cursed her in his wrath. Unable to deprive her of her gift, he distorted it: She would foresee the future, but no one would believe her when she revealed it.

Returning to Troy, Cassandra attempted to warn the Trojans of the impending dangers of the Achaean war. She could see the danger of the Trojan horse, of the death of Agamemnon, commander of the Greek armies, and of the death of her brother Hector, but when she revealed these dangers to the people, they dismissed her as insane. Her brother in prophecy, Helenus, was occupied in the war and could not offer support to Cassandra's message, which went unheeded. Despite the scoffing received at every turn, Cassandra could not remain silent. She died still giving voice to her gift.

Women's voices and experience are often similarly unheard, but being ignored is not synonymous with losing voice. Will we continue to share our voices, to be true to our gifts, even when it seems no one is listening? Will we speak of the Trojan horses we see? Will we warn the world with the unique power of our gifts? Will we share ourselves with a world that seems uninterested, unwilling, unmotivated, and determined, occasionally, to believe us insane? Cassandra’s choice even now echoes down the ages to us.