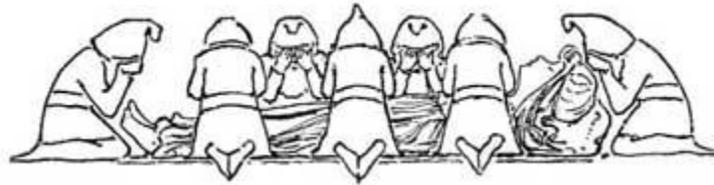


# Little Snow White: Coming to Terms with Aging

## *Interview with Ilene Cummings*



### ***What first drew you into the story of Snow White?***

It was a favorite story of mine when I was a kid. I used to go to the library, take the book out and then bring it back again. Then, I don't know, a month or two later I just had to have that storybook again. And my mother would say, "Oh my goodness, I'm so sick of reading that story to you!"

### ***So it has been a story that has been with you for many years! What is it in the story that you are drawn to as an adult?***

Well, of course, I really liked the Queen. I identified with her, having got to a point in my life when I look into the mirror I don't exactly feel great joy at all I see there! So that scene with the mirror, when she's told she's no longer the fairest in the land, that's a very dramatic moment as far as I'm concerned. I think it's the real crux, where the whole action starts.



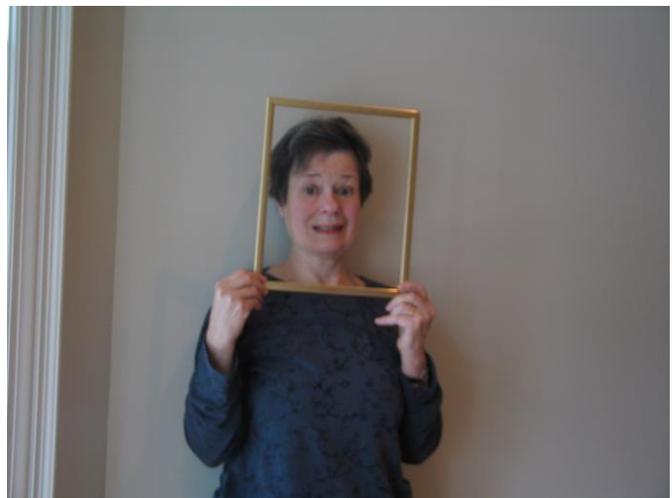
### ***Can you tell more about the connection you made with the Queen—is it a sympathy for the loss of her beauty?***

Yes. I felt that was all she had. And now she was losing that. She didn't have much inside, you know, I think she was just kind of empty. The way I see it, her only joy is to be considered the fairest of the land, and all the sort of selfish things she can get for herself. I began to wonder, who was the Queen and how was she born? Maybe she was born to a King who loved gold more than his daughter, and he dressed her in gold and made her look beautiful all the time. The only way she was ever going to be cherished, was by being the most beautiful, and that's how she grew up.

I also felt the mirror had a character.

### ***You saw the mirror having a story?***

Yes. I thought of the old saying by (the baseball player) Yogi Berra "I calls 'em the way I sees 'em." I imagined that this mirror had been passed from person to person down through the ages. Maybe the queen was given the mirror when she was sixteen or something. I felt that the mirror really wanted *not* to have to tell the Queen. He tells women they're beautiful but at a certain point, he has to tell them, "You're no longer the most beautiful" Maybe this has been going on for centuries!



Anyway, I had it in my mind that this poor little mirror was saying to himself, “I’m not going to tell her, I’m not going to tell her, I’m gonna lie, I’m gonna lie,” but as soon as she asked the question, his good intention just fell away from him and he couldn’t help it. The truth came out: “No, you are no longer the fairest in the land. It’s Snow White.” I keep seeing this mirror as a male, and I’ve given him a little song:

*I tells ‘em the way I sees ‘em  
I can’t help it that’s the way I am!  
I mirror the world around me  
I can’t help it that’s the way I am!*

***How does the Queen react when the mirror tells her the way it is?***

I wrote out some of the Queen’s diary entries. Here’s what she said:

NO! NO! NO! This cannot be true! This morning the mirror told me that SNOW WHITE is the fairest in the land! I nearly broke the mirror but I gritted my teeth and held on. I need that mirror. Soon I will be the fairest once again as I have a plan. Today my husband is going to the kingdom to the west for three whole days. While he’s gone I am going to call in the woodsman and get him to take that bitch Snow White into the woods and kill her. He will bring back her heart and I will eat it. Then we will see who is the fairest in the land. I’ll tell my husband that the woodsman took her into the woods and she got lost—



*Three days later.* I can’t believe how easy it all was. My husband left on his trip. I wore my golden corset and multi-layered skirt and black diamond top when we said goodbye at the gate. So romantic. As soon as he was gone I called in the Woodsman and told him my plan. He agreed to do as he was told although he didn’t look happy about it. I should do it myself of course, but I’m so soft-hearted I can’t stand the sight of blood. Just now I saw the woodsman and Snow White head out into the woods. My plan will work. I won’t ask the mirror until tomorrow morning, after I’ve eaten her heart.

***This is a story that is populated by so many characters—I can see how your lively imagination took hold of it. In your reading of Snow White what would you say was the central wound?***

I guess for me it was the loss of the mother. Snow White was born and her mother died shortly thereafter, so she never had her true mother’s love. And then she was subjected to this stepmother who had no interest in her at all, so I picture Snow White as someone who has always been searching for a mother.

If you think of the mother as Mother Earth... I began to see that the Queen was an example of this false sense of separation that is troubling humankind. We’re feeling that we’re above the animals and the earth, we’re separate from them, we can take everything from the earth and not give back, we can have our own things and not worry about anybody else, and I began to realize that the Queen was an expression of that.

I was taking a course in Indian Ayurvedic medicine not long ago and they were talking about the concept of *ahamkara* which is what Indian philosophy refers to as that false sense of separation. Thousands of years ago, people saw *ahamkara* as a prime source of evil in the world.

Today we’re even further along the path of a false sense of separation.

When I realized that I began to see that little Snow White was more like the interconnected web of all existence. She was that part of ourselves that is very innocent and related to the earth, the animals, the plants. At first, I thought the Queen was much more interesting, that Snow White was kind of stupid. But then I suddenly saw that she was very sympathetic. In her innocence, she was much more connected with everything else than the Queen.

Snow White is driven into the woods, which I saw as significant because that's like nature, really raw nature. There she is able to hide and find her strength.

I've done a lot of yoga, and Reiki and therapeutic touch, and we're very conscious of the chakra system. So suddenly it occurred to me after I had been working with Snow White for several weeks, that there are seven dwarves and there are seven chakras. And I thought, isn't THAT interesting? Maybe, these seven dwarves are the seven chakras, the energy points in the body. They care for and keep her alive in the forest.



I named all the dwarves according to their chakras, from the root to the crown. I thought that it was particularly interesting that when Snow White tries out all the beds, the one that she chooses is the seventh one, crown chakra, the mystical one. That bed fits her best.

***So do you see Snow White experiencing a reconnection. Is she healing the wound created by a false sense of separation?***

I think so. We have less of a sense of connection than there used to be. Older cultures had a lot to say about these things. They could connect with the plant spirits, the animals spirits, find out what they needed to know by going into deep meditation or trance. They would get a lot of information that we shut ourselves off from as a result of our separation and superiority to the animals and plants and everything else.

When I look into Snow White I see that humankind is in the state of semi-death. We've got a poisoned apple stuck in our throat, and until we cough it out, and really reestablish our interconnection with everything—with each other, with the earth, the plants, the spirits and so forth—we're just going to be lying there in this limbo.

In the story, there was a big bump and I just wonder if humanity is going to get a big bump, and maybe that will help reconnect us.

***When you look at the prince and his role in the healing, what do you see there?***

I don't know as much about him. He certainly has his own story. It seems to me that he too is part of an interconnected web and he definitely feels that connection with nature and animals and people. He's that kind of a person. When he sees Snow White, he sees she's obviously the one for him, but she's dead. And he wants to take her to the castle with him to have her there just so he can look at her!

***It's kind of extraordinary that he brings back this comatose young woman in a crystal coffin!***

Yes, and the dwarves are very reluctant to let her go. Yet, somehow, he's able to persuade them that he's trustworthy and he's not going to do anything bad to her. I think, definitely, that's the way it's supposed to be read. He doesn't have some bad idea that he's going to take her back and exploit her. I think he just wants this beauty to be with him.

***How would you say you were altered by your experience in the story? What changed for you from the time you went in and the time you came out?***

I think it's just a feeling of great gratitude and happiness that we have these old stories and that you can see much deeper into them than I originally thought. I had heard about telling stories and myths before, but it never really appealed to me somehow. But then I found how deep it's possible to go. You can find aspects of yourself, of the world, of everything in these stories. They speak to many generations and they speak at a different level than we really know. The story says one thing on the surface, and yet it is saying something else on another level. That can be very upsetting, or very satisfying, but it's very fundamental. We need to be reminded.