

Wonder Woman, Xena and Buffy: Finding Female Empowerment Through Popular Culture

Date: Sunday, August 6, 2006

1. Bell

2. Gathering Music [On CD]:

Wonder Woman

Music by Charles Fox

Lyrics by Norman Gimbel

Performed by John Bahler with the CBS Orchestra and Chorus

Wonder Woman, Wonder Woman.
All the world's waiting for you,
and the power you possess.

In your satin tights,
Fighting for your rights
And the old Red, White and Blue.

Wonder Woman, Wonder Woman.
Now the world is ready for you,
and the wonders you can do.

Make a hawk a dove,
Stop a war with love,
Make a liar tell the truth.

Wonder Woman,
Get us out from under, Wonder Woman.
All our hopes are pinned on you.
And the magic that you do.

Stop a bullet cold,
Make the Axis fall,
Change their minds, and change the world.

Wonder Woman, Wonder Woman.
You're a wonder, Wonder Woman.

3. Welcome

LESLIE: Good morning! Welcome to the First Unitarian Church of Hamilton. My name is Leslie Kaye and I am your service leader this morning.

Whoever you are, whomever you love, wherever you are in your search for truth and meaning, today you are the people who are the Church and you are welcome in this house of worship. We invite you to stay after the service for coffee and conversation so that we may get to know you better and answer your questions. If you are new to this church, pick up a copy of our newsletter at the greeting desk so that you may find out more about the life of this church. Our

service can also be heard in the foyer where there are comfortable chairs and toys if you need a place where your small child can feel more comfortable.

Welcome.

Our speaker today will be Lyla Miklos. Lyla is a national television programmer, community activist, local radio broadcaster, queer rights advocate, publicist for several not-for-profit organizations, local theatre performer and accomplished vocalist. Lyla's extensive knowledge of television and pop culture comes from over a decade of working in the broadcasting industry along with over three decades of watching far, far, far too much television.

We are blessed in this congregation with wonderful music and today is no exception. Helping Lyla today is Pamela Marques. We will also enjoy readings from Chris Borst and Biljana Vasilevska.

Out of respect for our worship and those who like to meditate and to our musicians and other service participants, we ask you to express your appreciation for everyone's contributions at the end of the service, rather than by applause during the service.

4. Announcements:

LESLIE: [TBD]

5. Prelude [CD]:

LESLIE: Now let us prepare to worship together as we listen to our Prelude.

Sisters Are Doing It For Themselves
From the Xena episode *Lyre, Lyre Hearts on Fire*
Music and Lyrics by David Stewart and Annie Lennox
Performed by Lucy Lawless, Gillian Iliana Waters and Chorus

Now there was a time when they used to say
That behind every - "great man."
There had to be a - "great woman."
But in these times of change you know
That it's no longer true.
So we're comin' out of the kitchen
'Cause there's somethin' we forgot to say to you

Sisters are doin' it for themselves.
Standin' on their own two feet.
And ringin' on their own bells.
Sisters are doin' it for themselves.

Now this is a song to celebrate
The conscious liberation of the female state!
Mothers and daughters and their daughters too.
Woman to woman
We're singin' with you.

Sisters are doin' it for themselves.
Standin' on their own two feet.

And ringin' on their own bells.

Now we ain't makin' stories
And we ain't layin' plans
'Cause a man still loves a woman
And a woman still loves a man

Sisters are doin' it for themselves.
Standin' on their own two feet.
And ringin' on their own bells.

Sisters are doin' it for themselves.
Standin' on their own two feet.
And ringin' on their own bells.

Sisters are doin' it for themselves.
Standin' on their own two feet.
And ringin' on their own bells.

Sisters are doin' it for themselves.

6. Opening Words:

LESLIE: Our Opening Words come from the Wonder Women episode *Fausta: The Nazi Wonder Woman* written by David Ketchum and Bruce Shelley

“Maybe all women can do wonders if put to the test.”

7. Chalice Lighting:

LESLIE: I would like to welcome Pamela Marques to the podium to give our opening chalice reading while I light our chalice. Our chalice reading comes from the *Xena: The Warrior Princess* episode *Ides of March* written by R.J. Stewart.

[Pamela comes to the podium.]

PAMELA: Xena, you've brought out the best in me. Before I met you no one saw me for who I was. I felt invisible. But you saw all the things that I could be. You saved me, Xena.

[Leslie lights the chalice.]

[Pamela returns to her seat.]

8. Opening Hymn [Hymnal]:

LESLIE: Please stand if you are able and let us join together in worship by singing hymn #109 from *Singing the Living Tradition* entitled *As We Come Marching, Marching*.

#109 As We Come Marching, Marching
Lyrics by James Oppenheimer
Music by Caroline Kohlsaar

As we come marching, marching,
in the beauty of the day,
a million darkened kitchens,
a thousand workshops gray,
Are touched with all the radiance
that a sudden sun discloses
For the people hear us singing
“Bread and roses, bread and roses!”

As we come marching, marching,
we battle too for men,
for they are women’s children,
and we mother them again.
Our lives shall not be sweated
from birth until life closes;
Hearts starve as well as bodies -
Give us bread, but give us roses!

As we come marching, marching,
unnumbered women dead
go crying through our singing,
their ancient song of bread!
Small art and love and beauty
their drudging spirits knew:
yes, it is bread we fight for,
but we fight for roses too!

As we come marching, marching,
we bring the greater days:
the rising of the women,
means the rising of the race.
No more the drudge and idler,
ten that toil where one reposes,
but a sharing of life’s glories,
bread and roses, bread and roses!

9. Unison Readings:

LESLIE: Please join me in the responsive readings, which can be found in your order of service.

From All Star Comics #8 Dec 1941/Jan 1942 – Wonder Woman’s very first appearance! - an invocation to Wonder Woman.

At last, in a world torn by the hatreds and wars of men, appears a woman to whom the problems of men are mere child’s play – a woman whose identity is known to none, but whose sensational feats are outstanding in a fast-moving world! With a hundred times the agility and strength of our best male athletes and strongest wrestlers, she appears as though from nowhere to avenge an injustice or right a wrong! As lovely as Aphrodite – as wise as Athena – with the speed of Mercury and the strength of Hercules – she is known only as **WONDER WOMAN**, but who she is, or whence she came, nobody knows!

From Xena's opening credits an invocation to Xena: The Warrior Princess.

In a time of ancient gods, warlords and kings; a land in turmoil cried out for a hero. She was Xena, a mighty princess forged in the heat of battle. The power. The passion. The danger. Her courage will change the world.

From Buffy's opening credits an invocation to Buffy: The Vampire Slayer.

In every generation there is a Chosen One. She alone will stand against the vampires, the demons and the forces of darkness. She is the Slayer.

10. Offertory [Live]:

LESLIE: We will now receive the offering to be used to further the ministry of this liberal religious community while we listen to our offertory *Under Your Spell* performed by Pamela Marques and Lyla Miklos.

Under Your Spell

From the Buffy episode *Once More With Feeling*

Music and Lyrics by Joss Whedon

Performed by Pamela Marques and Lyla Miklos

I lived my life in shadow
Never the sun on my face
It didn't seem so sad, though
I figured that was my place
Now I'm bathed in light
Something just isn't right

I'm under your spell
How else could it be
Anyone would notice me?
It's magic, I can tell
How you set me free
Brought me out so easily

I saw a world enchanted
Spirits and charms in the air
I always took for granted
I was the only one there
But your power shone
Brighter than any I've known

I'm under your spell
Nothing I can do
You just took my soul with you
You worked your charm so well
Finally, I knew
Everything I dreamed was true

You made me believe

The moon to the tide
I can feel you inside

I'm under your spell
Surging like the sea
Wanting you so helplessly
I break with every swell
Lost in ecstasy
Spread beneath my willow tree

You make me complete
You make me complete
You make me complete

11. Meditation:

LESLIE: This is the our time as a church community to come together to share the joys or concerns of our lives—to listen, to pray, to meditate, or focus our thoughts on the ways we may care for one another.

After the meditation, we will join together in silence and, after our silence, during the music, you are invited to come forward, light a candle, and take a chalice tag so that we may know and support you after the service. If you feel comfortable, please write your concern and your full name in the book on the table to the right if you have not already done so, so that we may follow up with a caring card or letter.

12. In Words:

LESLIE: I would like to welcome Chris Borst and Biljana Vasilevska to come to the stage to give us our meditative reading. Their reading is a conversation between Buffy and a vampire named Spike from the Buffy: The Vampire episode *Touched* written by Rebecca Kirshner. Please join with them together in the spirit of meditation and prayer.

[Chris and Biljana come to the performance mikes on the stage]

Spike: [*sighs*] There's always casualties in war.

Buffy : Casualties in . . . It just sounds so, casual. These are girls. That I got killed. I cut myself off from them. All of them. I knew I was gonna lose some of them, and I didn't [*sigh*]. You know what? I'm still making excuses. I've always cut myself off. I've always . . . [*sigh*]. Being the Slayer made me different. But it's my fault I stayed that way. People are always trying to connect to me. And I just slip away. [*scoffs*] You should know.

Spike: I seem to recall a certain amount of connecting.

Buffy: Oh, please. We were never close. You just wanted me because I was unattainable.

Spike: You think that's all that was?

Buffy: Please, let's not go over the past.

Spike: Oh, no, no! Oh, let's hold on here! I've hummed along to your pity ditty. I think I should have the mike for a bit.

Buffy: Fine. The stage is yours. Cheer me up.

Spike: You're insufferable.

Buffy: Thank you. That really helped.

Spike: I'm not tryin' to cheer you up.

Buffy: What are you trying to say?

Spike: I don't know! I'll know when I'm done sayin' it. Something pissed me off, and I just - "Unattainable," that's it.

Buffy: Fine. I'm attainable. I'm a - I'm an "attain-a-thon." May I please just go to sleep?

Spike: You listen to me. I've been alive a bit longer than you. And dead a lot longer than that. I've seen things you couldn't imagine. And done things I prefer you didn't. Don't exactly have a reputation for being a thinker. I follow my blood which doesn't exactly rush in the direction of my brain. So I make a lot of mistakes. A lot of wrong bloody calls. A hundred-plus years. And there's only one thing I've ever been sure of. You. Hey, look at me. I'm not asking you for anything. When I say I love you, it's not because I want you. Or because I can't have you. It has nothing to do with me. I love what you are. What you do. How you try. I've seen your kindness, and your strength. I've seen the best and the worst of you. And I understand, with perfect clarity, exactly what you are. You're a hell of a woman. You're the One, Buffy.

Buffy: I don't want to be "The One".

Spike: I don't want to be this good-looking and athletic. We all have crosses to bear.

13. In Silence:

LESLIE: Now, may we all bring our thoughts or prayers to rest in the welcoming silence.

[Wait one minute. Then say: "Amen." Signal sound technician.]

14. In Music [CD]:

The Love of Your Love
From the Xena episode *The Bitter Suite*
Music and Lyrics by Joseph LoDuca
Performed by Lucy Lawless

Yes, I lied
Thought I could protect you from the truth
Deliver you from evil
Spare your innocence and youth
That I could simply will it
Was the real untruth

I was wrong
I wore a mask to cover my deceit
But underneath it all I couldn't keep away my doubt
Now I'm left without a mask
And one question left to ask

I'm sorry, please help me, forgive me
Don't hate me, don't leave me, forgive me
Forgive me, my debt as only you could
Forgive me the hate, replace evil with good
Forgive me and find out that you will be able to forgive yourself too

My dear Solon, I never told you that you were my son
I didn't know the days we had left were so few
If I only knew I'd have been with you
I'm so sorry
I couldn't be the mother you deserved
And I regret that I missed your first step, your first word
That I never heard--now it seems absurd

Can you forgive me?
Open up your heart and let me in
No matter if the fates against us turn
There's one thing through all of this I've learned
That what I need from you is to...

Forgive me, I'm sorry, believe me
Stop hating, stop hurting, forgive me
Forgive those who harm you
Do good for those who hate
Forgive, if not forget
I know it's not too late
Forgive me and you'll discover too
That the love of your love is you

[Orchestral Coda]

15. Joys and Concerns:

[During the music people will be coming up to light candles and write Joys and Concerns into a book.]

[Wait for music to end.]

LESLIE: In the spirit of community we share strength and find common purpose. At this time, we turn our minds toward one another, seeking to bring into our circle of concern all who ask for our love and support.

[Read out the Joys and Concerns that people have written in the book, being careful to read only the ones designated to be shared with everyone.]

16. One Last Candle:

[Light one more candle.]

LESLIE: I light this candle for all those joys and sorrows, which remain, in our hearts. Whatever our level of sharing, may this community be a blessing and support to us all. Please join me in the unison words of support in your Order of Service.

“Let us reach out in thought and deed to all who are in need. May we open our hearts to the suffering and the celebrations of others, making a place for each of us in our human condition.”

17. Reading:

LESLIE: Our reading for today's service comes from the Wonder Woman pilot episode written by Stanley Ralph Ross

Marcia: You may have me, but the Third Reich will never be through. It will go on a thousand years.

Wonder Woman: I heard the Greeks say the same thing.

Marcia: You heard that?

Wonder Woman: I may be older than I look. The Nazis don't care about their women. They let you fend for yourself. And any civilization that does not recognize the female is doomed to destruction. Women are the wave of the future and sisterhood is stronger than anything.

18. Hymn:

LESLIE: Please stand if you are able and let us join together in singing our second hymn, *Flying On Your Own* by Rita MacNeil. Lyrics are in your order of service.

Flying on Your Own Music and Lyrics by Rita MacNeil

You were never more strong, girl; you were never more alone
Once there was two, now there's just you
You're flying on your own
You were never more happy, girl; you were never oh so blue
Once heartaches begin, nobody wins
You're flying on your own

And when you know the wings you ride, can keep you in the sky
There isn't anyone holding back you
First you stumble, then you fall
You reach out and you fly
There isn't anything that you can't do

You were never more wise, girl; you were never more a fool
Once you break through, it's all up to you
You're flying on your own
You were never more together; you were never more apart
Once pieces of you, were all that I knew

You're flying on your own

And when you know the wings you ride, can keep you in the sky
There isn't anyone holding back you
First you stumble, then you fall
You reach out and you fly
There isn't anything that you can't do

And when you know the wings you ride, can keep you in the sky
There isn't anyone holding back you
First you stumble, then you fall
You reach out and you fly
There isn't anything that you can't do

19. Sermon:

Wonder Woman, Xena & Buffy: Finding Female Empowerment Through Pop Culture

LYLA: In the opening pages of Diane DiMassa's alternative comic book *The Complete Hothead Paisan: Homicidal Lesbian Terrorist* her title character challenges the reader to play a game.

Take this simple home test!! All you need is yer tee vee and a cheap kitchen timer!!

First, put on the lowest channel, and crank the timer all the way!

OK, now it starts!! Every time you see one of the magical images, ya hafta change the channel!!

An' the magical images are:

***A man with a gun,
A woman cleaning, or
A white person buying something expensive.***

***You can make up your own!!
Any show starring a white guy . . .
Bimbo bikini beer-can babes . . .
Grotesque rock stars . . .***

***A woman being chased!!!
A woman being stupid!!!
A het kissing scene!!!***

See how long it takes to go through all the stations!!

It's a World Record!! 52 channels in 18 seconds!!

Now where else on Earth can you be offended so many ways in so little time??

Who can resist the fascination of monster trucks or wrestling??

Or five white guys in suits deciding the fate of the world as a result of the catastrophes they caused??

Or for those really brain-dead days, you can always find a macho car chase or some helpless BROAD being rescued! Because she just tripped, of course!

And my personal fav'rit: an entire series about the first hormonal stirrings of a pre-pubescent you-know-what!! God, this is great!!

And don't let's forget the family sitcoms, where the boys fix the cars and the girls bake the cakes and the boys laugh at the girls cause the girls are just silly cause the mother is a mom-bot and father is a dick and it runs in the family.

Oh yeh, and the NEWS, the biggest horror show of 'em all.

While surrounded by the magical images, one cannot help, but to grow up confident and self-assured!

Paisan's reaction to the constant onslaught of sexist imagery in pop culture and mass media is proactive, but not terribly positive. She isn't called a Homicidal Lesbian Terrorist for nothing you know? Still she has a point. There is a void when it comes to positive and powerful representations of women on television.

Three women have helped to fill that void.

Wonder Woman.

Xena: Warrior Princess.

and

Buffy The Vampire Slayer.

When we hear these women's names our minds fill with iconic images of female strength and courage. Each one of these women helped to pave the way for more positive mass media images of female power.

WONDER WOMAN:

Wonder Woman the television series first appeared on television screens on December 1976, and went on to air for three season, but Wonder Woman the character had already paved new ground in its original medium, comic books, decades previous.

Wonder Woman was created by psychologist and feminist theorist Dr. William Moulton Marston. Marston was also the creator of the polygraph aka the lie detector test. Marston championed the causes of women throughout his life and created Wonder Woman so young girls could have a positive female role model.

Wonder Woman's first appearance was in the December 1941 issue of *All Star Comics #8*. By the summer of 1942 Wonder Woman became the first super-heroine to have her own comic book.

Wonder Woman's mother, the Queen of the Amazons, longed for a child. The Gods instructed her to sculpt a figure from the sacred clay from the shores of Paradise Island. The clay was then brought to life and made flesh by the Gods of Mount Olympus. Previous to this creation, all the Amazons of Paradise Island were brought to life by the Gods of Olympus from the souls of

women who had died at the hands of men. Wonder Woman aka Diana Prince was sent to "Man's World" to be an Ambassador who would teach the Amazonian ideals of Peace to humanity.

Diana's super powers included: great speed & flight, the strength of the earth, the skill & eye of the hunter, great wisdom, unity with nature & beasts, bullet deflecting bracelets and a magic lasso which gave her the power to draw truth from men.

Wonder Woman the television series was a return to the original imagery and message of the comic book, which had gone through several dramatic transformations over the years. In the 1960's Wonder Woman was turned into the owner of a clothing store and her traditional costume was traded in for trendy jumpsuits and miniskirts and her super powers were no more. It took Gloria Steinem's launch of Ms. Magazine in 1971 to shame DC Comics into restoring Wonder Woman into the strong positive female role model she once was. Steinem had Wonder Woman on the cover of her magazine with the slogan Wonder Woman for President!

Television writer Nikki Stafford in her essay *Holy Butt-Kicking Babe, Batman!* had this to say about the TV series:

While the television show was a precursor to the strong television females that would follow two decades later, Wonder Woman wouldn't fly today. Her outfit was ridiculous: it sported the patriotic red, white and blue of the American flag, complete with the stars. She was touted as an "All American Girl" even though she was from an island far away from the US. She was gaga over Captain Trevor. And, like her comic-book counterpart, she wasn't particularly deep and didn't have a mysterious past.

My own personal childhood memories of Wonder Woman are far more romantized than the campy reality of the television series, which I revisited while doing research for this sermon. Lynda Carter's Wonder Woman is a very wholesome and good character. But she had no edge. No danger. She was very naive, innocent and green. She was beautiful, but didn't use her beauty to ensnare anyone. She has strength and power, but even when she beats up people it wasn't dirty or nasty. It was usually very tidy and bloodless.

Wonder Woman the television series was a step in the right direction. A woman who was strong, smart, courageous and comfortable in her own skin. Still, something was missing. Some nuance. Some darkness. Some texture. Wonder Woman was so kind and sweet and demure and smiled ALL THE TIME. She needed to be a bit more layered, flawed . . . a bit more human.

XENA: WARRIOR PRINCESS:

Dan Scapperotti's magazine article from the 1997 issue of *Femme Fatales* sets up our next series very nicely . . .

I remember when spear n'sandal sagas were the domain of men. As the brawny breadwinner guys chucked papier mache boulders at oversized sock puppets. Italian starlets, clad in tunics, clung to the ankles of these demigods who - in fits of testosterone-discharged delirium - pointlessly swung chains or demolished temples. Once in a while, they'd drop a dubbed line of choice machismo dialogue like "By the gods, I will have my revenge - I swear it! This murderer shall have no peace." . . . Then along came Lucy Lawless as Xena: Warrior Princess.

Xena: Warrior Princess premiered on television screens on September 1995 and went on to air for six seasons. Co-Created by Rob Tapert and Co-Produced by Sam Raimi, the men behind

The Evil Dead franchise, the character of Xena first appeared on the television series *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys* in March 1995, as a seductive but treacherous warlord.

Co-Creator and Co-Producer Rob Tapert explains why he created the series *Xena: Warrior Princess*:

I've always been interested in doing a female superhero show for a whole host of reasons. They tend not to work and I wanted to make one work. And they tended to be kind of mundane and sappy, and I wanted to do a really hard show.

Xena was raised by her mother Cyrene in the town of Amphipolis with her two brothers Toris and Lyceus. The warlord Cortese attacked her village, which caused several villagers, including Xena's older brother, Toris, to run for the hills. Xena and her younger brother Lyceus convinced the remaining villagers to stay and fight. Amphipolis was saved, but Lyceus and many other villagers were killed in the battle. Xena was then ostracized by the town and a rift formed between her and her mother. Xena left Amphipolis angry and distraught and began building her own army.

Xena soon became one of the most feared and powerful warlords in ancient Greece. Her army showed no mercy as she burned homes, slaughtered families, and pillaged villages. Her thirst for power and vengeance consumed her and as a result she lost her family, her friends, her lovers, her son and nearly her soul.

Hercules showed her the path to redemption and Xena began using her powers for good rather than evil. While seeking redemption Xena encounters Gabrielle, a plucky young woman who wants to seek adventure, not the village life. Xena finally finds the yin to her yang. A soul mate who makes her feel complete. Xena and Gabrielle form a rather unhealthy co-dependent relationship which becomes so strained at one point it's almost beyond repair. Yet their love for each other is so deep, strong and lasting they often forgive and redeem each other no matter what the peril.

Xena is a tough streetwise woman. If Lucy Lawless's Xena met Lynda Carter's Wonder Woman I'm fairly sure Xena would start planting whoopee cushions in her chairs and throw spitballs in her hair just so she could see her cheery disposition snap. Xena's that kind of girl. Xena's dark side is always lurking just around the corner and threatening to envelope her.

Xena's impact was felt worldwide. Here was a woman who was uncompromising and unlike her TV predecessor Wonder Woman she was savvy and world weary. Xena was also comfortable in her body and with her sexuality, but unlike Wonder Woman, Xena had no issues with using her body as a means to hoodwink a villain to do her bidding.

With her chakram, her trusted horse Argo, her super strength, superior fighting skills (including her signature move "the pinch") and her sidekick Gabrielle, Xena was attracting huge audiences worldwide. At the height of her popularity she became the top rated syndicated TV drama in North America. TV audiences were drawn to this complex, complicated, and sometimes downright unpleasant character.

In the end Xena gave the ultimate sacrifice to correct a past misdeed. Her sidekick Gabrielle grew from an adventure seeking young girl to a warrior woman in her own right. The adventures of Gabrielle: Warrior Princess have yet to be written.

BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER:

Buffy: The Vampire Slayer first graced television screens in March 1997 and went on to air for seven seasons, but she started off as an unsuccessful 1992 horror-comedy movie starring Kristy Swanson, Luke Perry and Donald Sutherland. Created by Joss Whedon, a third generation television writer, Buffy was his take at creating an alternative feminist icon.

In describing his original vision Whedon said:

I've always been a huge fan of horror movies, and I saw so many horror movies where there was that blonde girl who would always get herself killed. I started feeling bad for her – I thought, you know it's time she had a chance to you know, "take back the night". And so the idea of Buffy came from just the very simple thought of a beautiful blonde girl walks into an alley, a monster attacks her, and she's not only ready for him, but trounces him.

This time our title character starts off as a somewhat anti-feminist persona. She is a teen, living in Southern California, who's superficial, shallow, somewhat vapid, materialistic, and suffice to say from this description wouldn't have been a friend of mine when I was in High School.

The series continually explores the disconnect between this stereotypical privileged white North American teenager and the superpowers and responsibilities thae fates have given her. Buffy resents having been blessed or cursed with the knowledge and powers she has been dealt. She just wants to fit in and be like everyone else, not be a part of a line of slayers who die young, fight alone and have no futures.

The series follows Buffy's journey from teenager to adult. Although, unlike Wonder Woman who worked alone, and Xena who only worked with Gabrielle, Buffy had a whole team of friends to help her affectionately called "The Scooby Gang". The gang includes her mentor Giles (officially referred to as her Watcher), her best friend Willow (who starts off as a gawky computer nerd and later becomes a powerful witch), Xander (the emotional centre of the group), Oz (a werewolf), Anya (a former vengeance demon), Angel (a Vampire with a soul), Tara (a witch and Willow's girlfriend), Dawn (Buffy's younger sister), and Spike (a deeply conflicted vampire who goes through an incredible life journey of his own in the series).

All three of these series gave viewers the message that all women are superheroes. That we all are Wonder Women, Warrior Princesses and Vampire Slayers. But it was the Buffy series finale that would most dramatically illustrate this point.

It took the final episode of the series for Buffy to finally tell her ex-flame Angel that she needed to stop defining herself through her relationships with men and to discover on her own who she truly is before finding that someone who will complete her. Hallelujah!

It is only once Buffy fully embraces and accepts her feminine power, that she is able to envision a future in which the shackles of patriarchy that have been controlling her existence, and the existence of every slayer and every woman before her, can be completely removed. Buffy with the help of her friend Willow release a power from a magical scythe which women have been denied for ages. All potential slayers are now actual slayers. Buffy helps to create a race of strong women who can fight and stand up for themselves. The series ends on a note of uplifting feminist hope.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE:

Carly Stasko, former producer of *CBC Newsworld's Counterspin*, in her essay *How to be Your Own Superhero* from the collection *Witches, Slayers, and Freaks: Girls Who Bite Back* takes this idea even further:

For those of you who have (perhaps in private) considered the possibility that you are a superhero, I would like to affirm your assumption. The first step to considering such a possibility is to step away from the accepted notion of what a superhero looks or acts like. Think about what special gifts you have. Can you communicate with animals? Are you a quirky problem-solver or a spontaneous kitchen magician? Do you dream about the future or can you resolve conflicts? What are your special abilities?

I began an experiment recently that took on a life of its own. It all started when I began to ask my friends and acquaintances about their special powers. I would ask them to name and describe their top three powers and I suggested examples, such as mental telepathy or the ability to de-escalate a conflict. As they described their powers to me, I listened to some of the most interesting stories I've heard in a long while. With this simple and somewhat odd question I had opened myself up to a curious and wonderful shared experience. I have learned that naming your powers is no small accomplishment. It's akin to casting a good spell. The act alone is that powerful.

Wonder Women, Xena and Buffy all tell us that we are already strong. We just need to find and release all the strength, courage, wisdom and beauty we have buried within us and let it out. Ironically all of these strong female characters were created by men. This tells me that men like seeing women who are strong, beautiful and brave just as much as women do. It also tells me that a female superhero created by a woman still needs to be born.

Lisa Rundle, Senior Editor of *The Walrus* and Columnist with *Horizons*, in her essay *Cinematic Superbabes Are Breakin' My Heart* brings the thought full circle:

I wanna get on with the business of saving the world with the real-life super powered gals I see all around me. I want to put my time and energy into stuff that breaks down the staring-me-up-and-down/shouting-lewd-comments-in-the-street status quo. And while I'll take the fantasy of power that's an offer now, I won't stop demanding better. It may be an uphill battle, but women know better than ever that they're up for the fight. Don't forget all those new, real-life, kung-fu fighting women now in training. We may get the last laugh after all.

20. Closing Hymn:

LESLIE: For our closing hymn we shall sing *I Am Woman* by Helen Reddy and Ray Burton. Lyrics are in your order of service. Please stand if you are able.

I Am Woman
Lyrics by Helen Reddy
Music by Ray Burton

I am woman hear me roar in numbers too big to ignore
And I know too much to go back to pretend
Cause I've heard it all before and I've been down there on the floor
No one's ever gonna keep me down again

Oh yes I am wise, but it's wisdom born of pain
Yes I paid the price, but look how much I've gained
If I have to I can do anything
I am strong. I am invincible. I am woman.

You can bend but never break me, cause it only serves to make me
More determined to achieve my final goal
And I come back even stronger, not a novice any longer
Cause you've deepened the conviction in my soul

Oh yes I am wise, but it's wisdom born of pain
Yes I paid the price, but look how much I've gained
If I have to I can do anything
I am strong. I am invincible. I am woman.

I am woman watch me grow, see me standing toe to toe
As I spread my loving arms across the land
But I'm still an embryo with a long, long way to go
Until I make my brother understand

Oh yes I am wise, but it's wisdom born of pain
Yes I paid the price, but look how much I've gained
If I have to I can do anything
I am strong. I am invincible. I am woman.

21. Chalice Extinguished:

LESLIE: Please be seated. I would like to ask Pamela Marques and Lyla Miklos to give our closing chalice reading while I extinguish our Chalice. Our closing chalice reading comes from the series finale of Xena: The Warrior Princess entitled *A Friend in Need* written by Rob Tapert and R.J. Stewart

[Pamela and Lyla come to the musical performance mikes.]

Gabrielle: A life of journeying has brought you to the farthest lands-- to the very edges of the Earth.

Xena: And to the place where I'll always remain--your heart. So, where to, now?

Gabrielle: I think we should go south-- to the land of the Pharaohs. I hear they need a girl with a chakram.

Xena: Where you go-- I'm at your side.

Gabrielle: I knew you'd say that.

Xena: [Chuckles]

[Leslie extinguishes the chalice.]

[Pamela and Lyla returns to their seats.]

22. Closing Words:

LESLIE: Our closing words come from the series finale of *Buffy: The Vampire Slayer* entitled *Chosen* written by Joss Whedon. Biljana will come to the podium to read our Closing Words. This is Buffy's inspirational speech to all the potential slayers and the members of her "Scooby Gang" before their final apocalyptic battle against the forces of evil on the television series.

[Biljana comes to the stage.]

BILJANA: I hate this. I hate being here. I hate that you have to be here. I hate that there's evil. And that I was chosen to fight it. I wish a whole lot of the time that I hadn't been. I know a lot of you wish I hadn't been either. But this isn't about wishes. This is about choices. I believe we can beat this evil. Not when it comes, not when its army's ready, now. Tomorrow morning, I'm opening the seal. I'm going down into the Hellmouth and I am finishing this once and for all. Right now you're asking yourselves what makes this different. What makes us any more than a bunch of girls getting picked off one by one. That's true. None of you have the power that Faith and I do. So here's the part where you make a choice: What if you could have that power now? In every generation, one slayer is born, because a bunch of men who died thousands of years ago made up that rule. They were powerful men. This woman is more powerful than all of them combined. So I say we change the rule. I say my power, should be our power. Tomorrow, Willow will use the essence of the scythe to change our destiny. From now on, every girl in the world who might be a slayer will be a slayer. Every girl who could have the power will have the power. Can stand up. Will stand up. Slayers. Every one of us. Make your choice. Are you ready to be strong?

23. Postlude [On CD]:

LESLIE: We will now bring our minds and hearts into focus and reflect on the inspirational words and music from today's service while we enjoy our Postlude. After the Postlude please join us in the foyer for Coffee and Conversation.

Where Do We Go From Here

From the *Buffy* episode *Once More With Feeling*

Music and Lyrics by Joss Whedon

Performed by Sarah Michelle Gellar, Alyson Hannigan, Nicholas Brendon, Emma Caulfield, Michelle Trachtenberg, Amber Benson, Anthony Stewart Head, and James Marsters

Dawn: Where do we go from here?

Buffy & Spike: Where do we go from here?

Giles: The battle's done and we kinda won,

Giles & Tara: so we sound our vict'ry cheer. Where do we go from here?

Xander & Anya: Why is the path unclear, when we know home is near?

All: Understand we'll go hand in hand, but we'll walk alone in fear

Tell me, where do we go from here?

Where does "The End" appear?

When do the trumpets cheer?

The curtains close on a kiss, God knows,

We can tell the end is near.

Where do we go from here?
Where do we go from here?
Where do we go from here?

Buffy: I touch the fire and it freezes me

Spike (Overlapping): I died,

Buffy: I look into it and it's black.

Spike: So many years ago.

Buffy: This isn't real, but I just need to feel

Spike: But you can make me feel.

All: Where do we go from here?

24. Coffee & Conversation