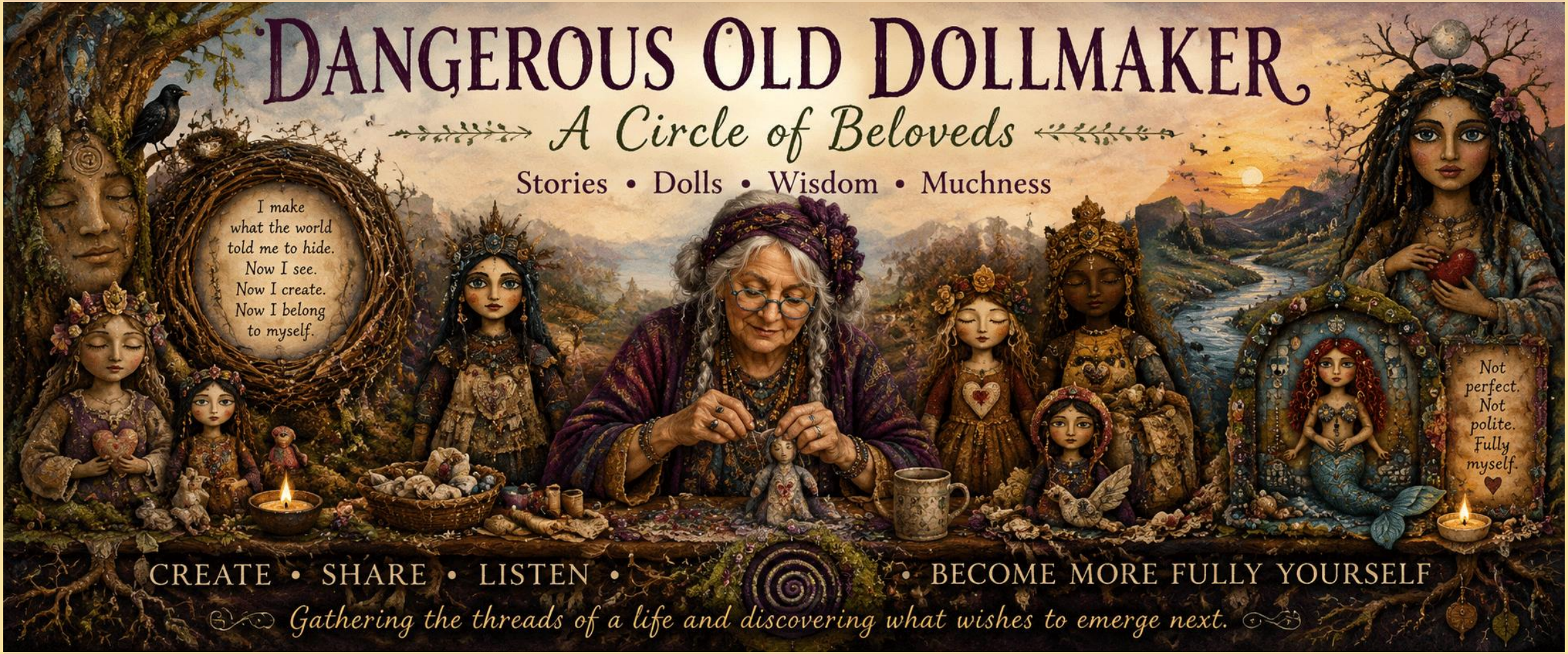
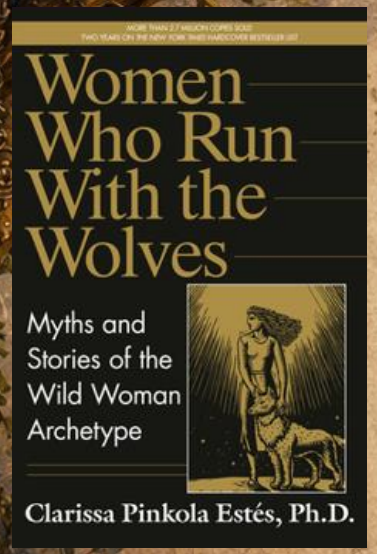

DANGEROUS OLD DOLLMAKER
A Circle of Beloveds
Stories • Dolls • Wisdom • Muchness
I make what the world told me to hide. Now I see. Now I create. Now I belong to myself.
Not perfect. Not polite. Fully myself.
CREATE • SHARE • LISTEN • BECOME MORE FULLY YOURSELF
Gathering the threads of a life and discovering what wishes to emerge next.



I first heard the name “Dangerous Old Woman” from Clarissa Pinkola Estés the author of **Women Who Runs With the Wolves,** from one of her CDs where she explains what she means by **“Dangerous Old Woman.”**

It comes from an interview about *The Dangerous Old Woman: Myths and Stories of the Wise Woman Archetype*. Her definition is much richer than simply being rebellious.

“The fact that she will not stop or restrict her soulful ways to conform to cultural conventions.”

Estés goes on to describe her as a woman who **will not stop because she is criticized, ridiculed, discounted, or devalued**. She follows what comes “straight up out of her bones.” At the same time, she is loving and deeply concerned with protecting life, other people, creatures, and the earth.

And there is another important piece. Estés says the Dangerous Old Woman is **“a being in process.”** She cannot be pinned down to one form, one idea, or one way of being. Estés calls that perhaps the most dangerous quality of all.

Tami Simon from Sounds True: Clarissa, I want to begin by talking about something you call "a psychology of women's giftedness." This idea that there needs to be psychology of women's giftedness and how this undergirds both your previous work, *Women Who Run with the Wolves* and now, The Dangerous Old Woman. What do you mean "the psychology of women's giftedness?"

CPE: If you read psychological theories from the last one-hundred years, you find there is an emphasis on pathology, psychopathology, and an emphasis on what's wrong with everyone. Very little is said about the unique qualities of giftedness. The basic premise of *The Dangerous Old Woman* as in *Women Who Run with the Wolves* is that all **women are born gifted.**

I know the culture wants to sideline groups of people and say they really aren't gifted. But the culture is holding up a critical comparison list of 'attributes of giftedness' that does not accurately cover the full spectrum nor the nuances of giftedness.
Many people in school are in fact rewarded for 'learning to sit still,' for instance, as though that is a talent… rather **than learning to imagine or unleashing their imagination**… which is a profound talent that is handed down. Even if such a gift seemed to jump generations, or not surface because of active suppression…**imagination** is definitely a talent that is part of the legacy and heritage of one's own bloodlines.

Source: https://www.soundstrue.com/a/resources/transcript/clarissa-pinkola-estes-the-dangerous-old-woman-part-one

In the material titled **“Standing in My Danger: The Good Meaning of the Word ‘Dangerous,’”** Estés connects *danger* with **protecting what is endangered**. The Dangerous Old Woman's danger is the territory of her protection: *you stand in my danger because I will protect what is precious (imagination)*. The official description of her work specifically identifies this teaching as central to the program.

So, I distill Estés' Dangerous Old Woman this way:

She is dangerous because she has become difficult to stop.

She refuses to abandon her soul in order to conform.

She protects what she knows is precious.

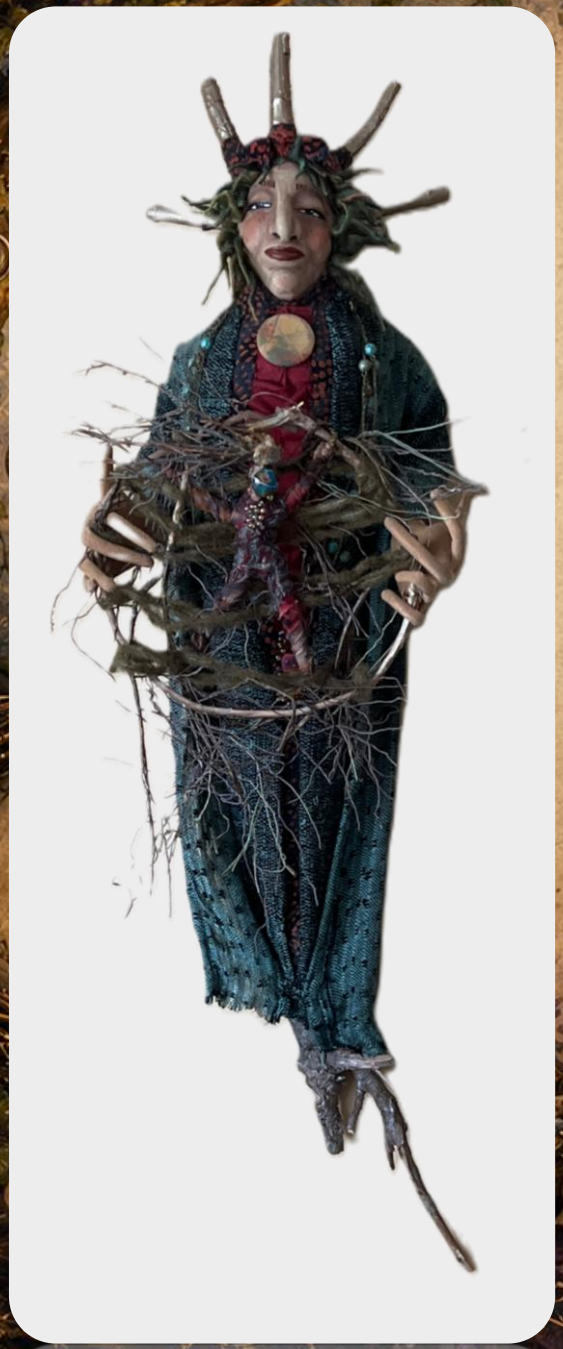
She creates, speaks, changes shape, and continues becoming.

And age has given her enough experience to know what deserves her protection.

That last dimension feels especially important for the **Dangerous Old Dollmaker** concept: *dangerous* doesn't have to mean provocative, defiant, or shocking.

The dollmaker becomes dangerous because she knows what is worth knowing, (truth seeking), protecting, bringing back to life, and carrying forward.

But where did it begin????



I recall in my journal dated April 9–10, 2026
This is important because **Dangerous Old Dollmaker did not begin as a clever title for a program.**

It grew out of my exploration of the **Root Weaver,** I defined as "the one (part of me) who gets to the root of things in order to weave them into a larger whole."

Root Weaver was becoming more than a doll. She was emerging as an **imaginal elder**, the figure who could gather my decades of dollmaking, healing, body wisdom, stories, symbols, teaching, and lived experience.

Then this came in a dream **"You are a dangerous old dollmaker."**

The doll image came first. After a few weeks I looked at her and realized she held a loom in her hands and there was a figure in middle.....hmmm, she seems to be weaving something.

From there I began distinguishing the two:
Root Weaver was the deep, underground identity, the root system.

Dangerous Old Dollmaker became the more public, embodied expression of that elder. The woman who has lived long enough, made enough art and dolls, survived enough, questioned enough, and learned enough that she is increasingly unwilling to erase what she knows.

The Dangerous Old Dollmaker emerged from my lived experience – the one I write about in **The *Healing Doll Way*.**

On April 16 I was in month five of experiencing an eating disorder recovery. I dove into deep research on the subject. There are two threads run that through eating disorders – control and perfectionism, and a deep and strong influence of the messages about being female from the culture. I was exploring "dangerous" as the woman who becomes increasingly difficult to control or persuade to erase herself, according to the culture. I knew dollmaking helped me to gather meaning, stories and symbols.
I knew the dollmaking allowed **"all the better to see myself."**

Doll "Our Lady of Ashes holding a Wailing Story"

So here’s the Summary of the Story

Where Did the Dangerous Old Dollmaker Come From?
The Dangerous Old Dollmaker wasn't something I sat down and invented. She appeared.

In April 2026, I was exploring an image I called **Root Weaver**, an elder woman who gets to the roots of things and weaves what she finds into a larger whole.

She seemed to hold so much of what I had been doing for more than thirty years: making dolls, listening to stories, teaching, healing, searching for meaning, following symbols, and trying to understand what the body knows that words sometimes cannot say.

Doll: Our Lady of the Hot Flash

She is the Dangerous Old Woman.
I had known Clarissa Pinkola Estés's work and her archetype of the Dangerous Old Woman for years. But something had shifted. I wasn't simply reading about the Dangerous Old Woman anymore.
I was becoming one.

And because the language I have spoken all my life is the language of dolls, she became:
The Dangerous Old Dollmaker

Doll: Out on a Limb, this was original doll that I transformed into the Root Weaver

We will develop a comprehensive definition as well make dolls and art.... and you will discover yours.

The Dangerous Old Dollmaker is the woman who has lived long enough to trust what she knows and uses that “language”— to create dolls, stories, symbols, and imagination in order to see what is true.

She questions what she was taught.

She follows what comes from her bones – the beliefs, expectations, roles, and stories she has carried for years.

Her danger is not destruction.

She will not be persuaded to abandon what she knows.

And perhaps most importantly:
She has become dangerous to the identities she once needed in order to survive and move into an identity that thrives and celebrates her body, mind, and spirit.

She recognizes what no longer belongs to her.

She notices the beliefs, expectations, roles, and stories she has carried for years simply because they were handed to her—or because, at some point, she needed them to survive.
She asks: **Is this mine?**
Is this the way I truly see myself, or is it the way I was taught to see myself?
Is this desire really mine, or did I learn to want it?
Is this shame mine?
Is this fear mine?
Is this version of myself still necessary?

She discovers that some identities have served their purpose. They helped her belong. They helped her be safe. They helped her be loved, accepted, useful, or invisible when invisibility was safer.
But what once protected her can eventually become a cage.
The Dangerous Old Dollmaker does not have to hate these old identities. She can thank them. She can honor the woman who needed them.
And then she can let some of them go.

She recognizes that **not everything she has carried belongs in the life she is becoming.**
Some things can be returned.
Some things can be released.
Some things can be transformed.
And some things—perhaps the most precious things—were hers all along, waiting beneath everything she had been told she should be.

What My Body Has Taught Me

There is another part of this story that I haven't talked much about yet.
My health journey has changed me.
It has changed the way I listen—to my body, to my emotions, to my intuition, and to the quiet signals that I might once have pushed aside.
For many years, I knew how to keep going.
I knew how to be productive.
I knew how to make things happen.
I knew how to take care of what needed taking care of.
But my body has taught me something different.
It has taught me that **listening is also a form of knowing.**
That sometimes the body knows something before the mind has words for it.
That exhaustion, tension, discomfort, longing, resistance, and even unexpected moments of energy can become information—not necessarily something to fix or overcome, but something to become curious about.

Fear and resistance can show up anytime during the creative process. It can show up as perfectionism, procrastination, self doubt or even putting projects off because you tell yourself the timing isn't right.

Stay open to the unexpected.
Receive whatever comes, without analyzing it or judging it. Honor your initial impulses. Imagery is not right or wrong, good or bad, better than or worse than, pretty or ugly. It is about finding what is true.

Dawna Markova, No Enemies Within and I Will Not Die an Unlive Life

As I move through the next stage of my life and healing process

I have changed the way I think about my dollmaking, art and life

The doll is not separate from the body.
We sit with our hands.
We feel with our bodies.
We remember through our bodies.
We make through our bodies.

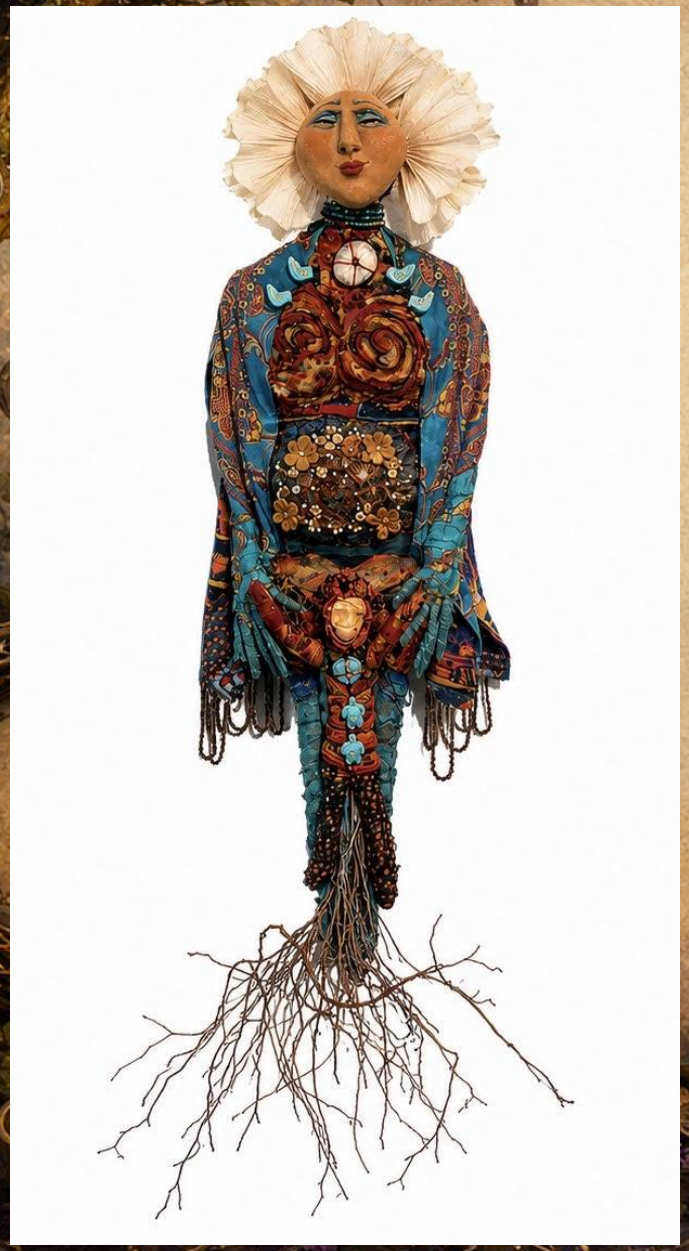
So moving forward, what I have learned through my own health journey will be threaded through the Dangerous Old Dollmaker—not as medical instruction, and not as a promise that making dolls will heal us, but as an invitation to **listen more deeply to ourselves while we make.**

Thinking. Feeling. Making.

These three things are not separate.

Thinking asks:
What am I noticing? What am I beginning to understand? What story have I been carrying?
Feeling asks:
What is alive in me? What am I resisting? What wants attention? What needs tenderness?
Making asks:
What happens when I give what I am discovering a form?

A doll can become a way of thinking with the hands.
A way of feeling without having to explain everything.
A way of giving form to something that may not yet have words.
These are several of the things I want to explore in the next chapter of The Healing Doll Way.



The Dangerous Old Dollmaker has lived long enough to know that the body is not an obstacle to the creative process.

The body is part of the process.

And perhaps this is another part of becoming dangerous:
I am becoming less willing to override what my body is telling me.
Less willing to separate my thinking from my feeling.
Less willing to make something simply because I think I *should*.
Instead, I want to listen.
I want to notice.
I want to make.
And I want to see what becomes possible when **thinking, feeling, and making are allowed to speak to one another.**
That is something I will be bringing with me into the Dangerous Old Dollmaker.

Doll: Mitochondria – Connecting to the Energy of the Earth

I did not know that *The Healing Doll Way* would evolve like this.

I knew the making was powerful. I knew it had depth. I knew it could help makers heal and change their lives.

I knew because it had changed mine.

But I did not see this evolution coming.

Now I find myself revisiting dolls I made in the past—looking at them again, transforming them into the next story, the next awareness, the next layer of healing.

I will be using *The Healing Doll Way*, doll by doll and story by story, to discover what the older woman can see that the younger woman could not yet see.

Perhaps that is part of what makes an **old dollmaker dangerous.**

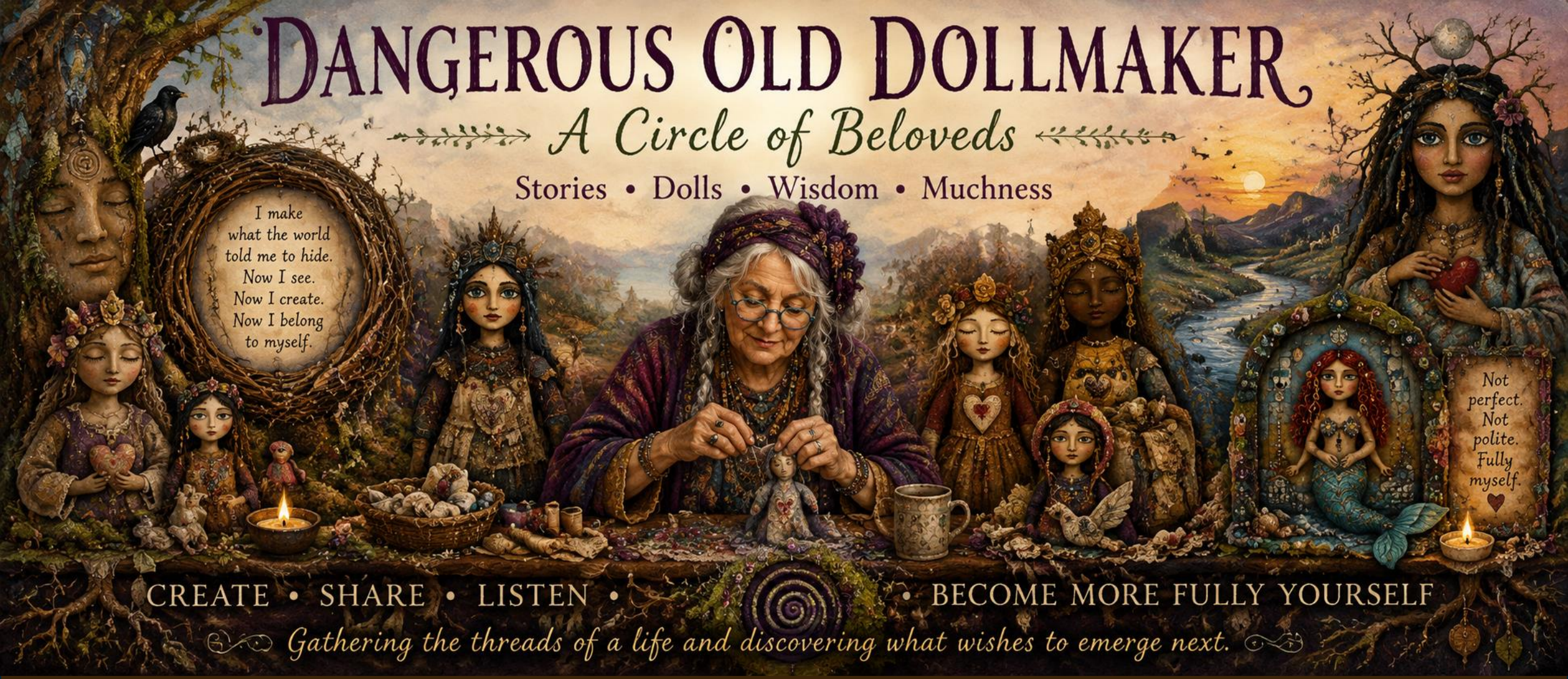
She is no longer making dolls to become who she is supposed to be.

She is making from the knowledge of who she has become.

And now I am revisiting *The Healing Doll Way* at the next level of its evolution—and mine.

One important addition will be **embodiment**.
It strikes me as wonderfully odd that we have been making art that has *bodies* all along, while perhaps only beginning to understand what it means to truly inhabit our own.
What happens when we stop thinking of the doll as simply something we make—and begin to listen to what the body, the doll, and the maker are telling each other?

That is where I am going next.
And I am inviting you to join me.



What's the Plan

MOVING FORWARD – Possibilities
Open Studios + Working Sessions + Focus Processes
+ revisiting the dolls/stories + new Dangerous Old Dollmaker explorations

I imagine that we start with revisiting The Healing Doll Way Discovery

The question is what opens the door to the future – what is next for you, for me and the work.

“The Dangerous Old Dollmaker is the woman who has lived long enough to trust what she knows. – and the dolls and her body will be her companions.”

And we will be joined by the spirit of Elinor Peace Bailey. The work and voice of Pamela Hastings and other dangerous dollmakers from the past.

August 2026