

Buffys of the World Unite

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I mentioned in "Life after Work" that I would someday write about my ongoing appreciation of female heroine books, TV, and films. Well, today is the day. As I am recuperating from a series of work events I've referred to as a "gauntlet" - I think I can relate to my medieval and supernatural heroines quite well these days.

I actually think the book that got me started on this path was Ruth Ozeki's "My Year of Meats," a wonderfully well-research book about the meat industry, disguised as a woman's coming-of-awareness book. The main character defies convention, challenges the status quo, and makes a general mess of things as she produces documentary shows for a Japanese meat exporter that is trying to encourage Japanese families to eat more beef.

While she is no archetypical heroine, she is a woman with power to shape other's perspectives. As a videomaker, I was drawn to her experiences in the media industry. She was hired to tell one story, but her conscience compelled her to tell the truth. She changed course, from a video director for a corporate sponsor, to a journalist, deep in the meat industry trenches.

And then there's sci-fi and fantasy, a genre I quit around age 13, and resumed at 28. I've read my share of Charles De Lint, Sheri S. Tepper, and Connie Willis thanks to BC, and while many of their characters are powerful women, it's really Tamora Pierce's books that have grabbed me. Her women are flawed and have vulnerability, but temper that with an acute sense of their responsibility. They work with others, but feel like an island apart. Keladry, of the "Protector of the Small" series, is the first young girl to become a knight after it was legalized. No matter how many other knights fight beside her, follow her orders, and support her, she is still the only one. My favorite character, Ali, of "Trickster's Choice" and "Trickster's Queen," must hide her identity as the daughter of a rival country's spymaster to serve a royal family, and still use her talents to keep them safe. At the same time, she must try to encourage the oppressed people of the country, the *raka*, to unite with sympathizers, no matter their race, to make change.

I think that this appeals to my sense of isolation as a boss, and my desire to make REAL change happen for the people I serve. The medieval worlds of magic and destiny are all about QUESTS and CHALLENGES.

And then there is Buffy. An ex of one of my girlfriends loved the "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" series, and turned me on to the show in its final season. While critics consider this season weaker than earlier ones, I sympathized with her struggle to be a leader, amongst doubts, disagreements, and competition. I shared her despair and exhaustion, when the responsibility of life seem just too hard. At the end (spoiler here), when she is

no longer the ONE, and there are many young women who own the mission, I cried and cried, wishing I could share my responsibility, hoping that someday the youth I serve will be the new ONES, who continue the fight and lead us somewhere better.

I've since rented or bought every season. While the early seasons are fun, it's the later, deeper stories that I love. I'm back to Season 7 right now, watching the final showdown unfold between Buffy and the First, the biggest, most nebulous evil there was. I think we all have our Big Bads, the things we have to fight each day, just to stay in the game. And while I'm special kind of masochist, I know I'm not the only woman who believes she is the chosen One, who must take care of all her family, work, and community needs. I'm not the only one who puts everything else before herself.

So while I share in her despair, I am also emboldened by her strength. A skinny little woman, wearing too much fashion leather, manages to kick butt every hour. Sometimes she is wounded deeply, but she keeps on ticking. I like to think there is a little Slayer in me - that when push comes to shove, I have the tools to kick some major vampire butt.

Really, I think there's a bit of Slayer in all of us, the entrepreneurs, the change agents, the artists, the homemakers. Our bloodsuckers are a little better disguised - Karl Rove does come out in daylight (I think), and our personal demons become good friends - but they need to be sent away, all the same. We have our weapons too - friends, family, a good night's sleep, confidence, and good old determination. Sometimes our stakes need a little sharpening, but they are always there when we need them.

Today, I'm fighting a migraine, the knowledge that I have royally angered a colleague, and complete emotional exhaustion. I need all the help I can get. My stakes are packed, my mind is clear, and I know what I have to do. While I'm not the toughest Slayer today, I'm pretty sure I'll make it home before dark.