

# A Conversation with Carlos

by Starhawk

[As reported in our last issue, members of the reclaiming community have been working to support a network of co-operatives and campesinos in the countryside of El Salvador. This past winter, Starhawk, Aurora (Joy Kirsten) from British Columbia, and Amie Miller traveled to El Salvador to see the work first hand. Aurora's impressions appeared in our last issue. Here is an account by Starhawk. Future issues will carry updates.

You can get directly involved in this important work by joining the El Salvador Circle of Love — see page 5.]

I am lying on a blanket beside Joy and Marta, in the shade overlooking the pyramids at San Andres. The grass is that shade of warm green that seems to be illumined by more than sunlight. The group of students from Pennsylvania are wandering around the site; the Salvadorians we have brought are also climbing the ancient structures or picnicking on a knoll. A young man named Carlos comes and sits down with us. He is small and wiry, with dark, red-brown skin and a scrubby beard.

Carlos wants to talk with Marta about the trade school they are hoping to

open in Acajutla. He very much wants to go, but he lives far away, and he has to work to live. So he is worried. Marta assures him that in the process of development they will consider those who live far away, but he is not reassured. She asks him how he likes the pyramids.

"Mas or menos," he says, shrugging, smiling almost apologetically and spreading his hand and wagging it back and forth in a universal gesture of qualification.

I know this is one of Marta's pet peeves—that she can never get the campesinos to express joy, delight, or simple confidence in their well-being, as if to do so would be to court the forces of disaster lurking in the universe. But this is a cultural pattern I know well from my own grandparents, who never expressed a positive thought without adding, "Kenna h'ora"—"No evil eye."

This is something new, Carlos admits. He's never been to the pyramids before, in fact, outings of any sort are an unknown phenomenon to him. "We just work all the time," he says. "But now that we know these are here, we could come on our own."

I ask about his work. He worked in a maquila, one of the factories mostly

owned by multinational corporations set up in the Free Trade Zones, where local labor and environmental laws don't apply. His job was to set up materials for the other workers, and he earned about \$3 a day. Somehow he managed to save money to go to Guatemala,

where he worked in another maquila until immigration discovered him and threw him out. During the war years he fled to Chiapas with his grandparents where again he worked in maquilas.

But when peace was signed, his grandparents wanted to come home to El Salvador, so they came back.

In Chiapas he met an American woman who offered to bring him to the United States to work in a factory for eight months—if he paid her a fee of \$1,200.

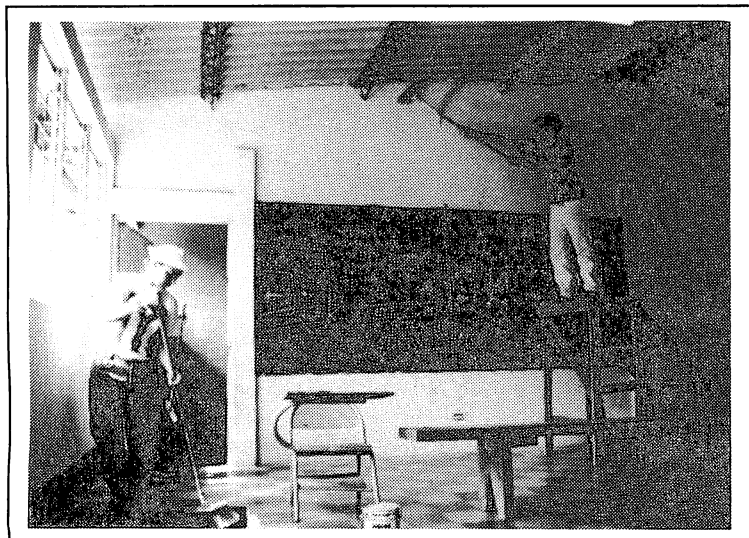
He's thinking about it. To Carlos, it seems like an opportunity. He's got to do something with his life, he says. He needs a source of income. He worries about it, so much that he is not enjoying the day, is barely present among the beauty of the pyramids and the laughter of the others.

Marta scolds him, tells him he must celebrate while he can, must take every opportunity for joy and life. I can't help thinking that he is an illegal immigrant waiting to happen—and can we wonder why? Even a job paying what we consider slave wages—\$3 or \$4 an hour, means he would earn in an hour what he now earns in a day. I think about that \$1,200 he is considering paying the mysterious and I suspect unscrupulous woman who promises him work. At \$3 a day, that represents 400 days of work, over a year's salary! The fact that he considers this an opportunity, that this is, in fact, the only thing resembling an opportunity he knows about other than the hope of the trade school, tells me how desperate he is.

Should he make his way to the U.S., he would be breaking the law. He would be blamed for taking jobs and services away from natural born U.S. citizens.

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***This article is the forerunner of a regular column by Starhawk beginning next issue, prospectively entitled "Magic, Sex & Politics," or perhaps "Magic, Gardening & Politics," as the spirit moves her.***



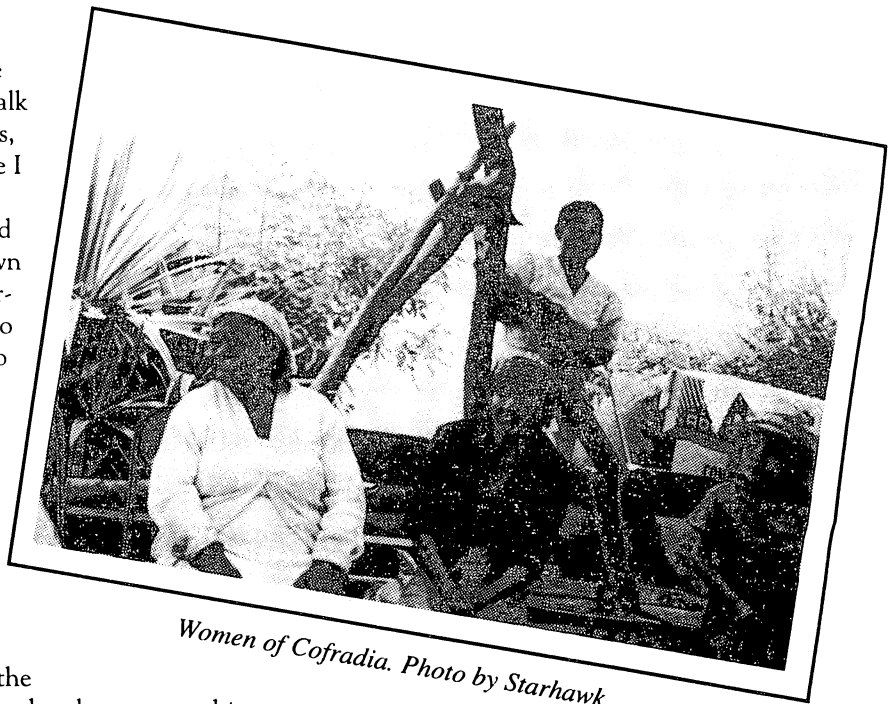
Acajutla: Volunteers help convert an abandoned building into a trade school. Photo by Starhawk.

Any company that hired him would be performing an illegal act.

And yet it is perfectly legal for a company that might once have had factories in the United States, paying their workers more than minimum wage, providing health benefits and retirement and paid vacations, complying with our environmental laws, to employ Carlos at \$3 or \$4 a day as long he stays in El Salvador. Not only legal—our entire economic and foreign policies are geared toward guaranteeing the freedom of corporations to hire the Carloses of the world at below survival wages rather than fulfilling the annoying expectations of workers in the developed world for decent wages, working conditions and environmental safeguards. That's the true meaning of NAFTA, the North American Free Trade Agreement, supported by Republicans and Democrats alike. These policies benefit someone—I'm not sure who. Not the workers in the maquilas, nor the out-of-work employees of shut-down factories in the north. Perhaps only the 2% of the U.S. population who now own 90% of our

wealth.

The more I talk to Carlos, the more I am reminded of my own grandparents, who were also immigrants from a poor, rural area—the Jewish areas of the Ukraine, who also came to this country speaking a foreign language and clinging to strange customs, who worked in factories at low wages or did odd jobs to survive. I can't help thinking that Carlos has just that combination of intelligence, ambition, hard-working



*Women of Cofradia. Photo by Starhawk.*

determination and a touch of desperation that is often referred to as "the qualities that made this country great." I imagine, given half a chance, that he would prefer

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## *El Salvador Circle of Love*

The Reclaiming Collective's El Salvador Friendship Fund and The International Institute for Co-operation Amongst Peoples invite you to be part of a Circle of Love.

A Circle of Love is 200 people who are willing to pledge \$100 a year for five years to support programs of sustainability and cultural development in El Salvador. You will be contributing to the positive work of healing and transformation among some of the world's poorest people. You will receive a yearly update letter describing the work and future directions.

Examples of the work you will be supporting:

- Youth Leadership Programs in ecology, population, sex education and relationships, identity and history.
- Nina a Nino: Leadership trainings for youth so they can bring techniques of organic agriculture, composting, permaculture and long-term planning to their communities.

- Facilitators for Sustainability: Salaries for indigenous leaders, trained in sustainable agriculture, to travel to outlying communities and teach.

- Wholeness and Wellness: Trainings in nutrition and food preparation for local women.

- Transportation for people to get to trainings.

- Cultural Exchange Programs: In El Salvador, the indigenous culture is almost gone. Ullua, the language of the Lenca people, is no longer spoken. But across the border in Honduras, it still survives as a living tongue. Cultural exchanges between indigenous people of neighboring countries would strengthen local communities and help revive lost traditions and pride.

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## El Salvador

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to train those same qualities on the problems of his own country, and make El Salvador great.

Do we owe him that chance? I think we do. My commitment to the Goddess tradition leads me to know that we are all interconnected, that Carlos' despair is not separate from my own sense of well being. My political understanding tells me that Carlos has already worked to enrich us. Maybe I don't own a maquila, or even own stock in corporations that run them. But have I not profited by buying cheap clothing and inexpensive electronics, without considering where they were made or the conditions of life of those who produced them?

Carlos is 21 years old.

But now Marta is making us all get up and dance. That's the cornerstone of her organizing technique: first we dance, then we work and eat and play, and later we can come together in ceremony feeling as if we'd known each other all our lives.

So a Macarena line snakes around the pyramids to the blaring tones of rock music from a boom box, and later, in the grand plaza, Hermano Daniel sounds the conch shell, the caracole, to the four directions. Ancient spirits, long asleep, sit up and take notice at the familiar sound. I offer Waters of the World, and Joy invokes the elements. Marta asks us to visualize a fire in the center, and in four groups people come forward and warm their hands around invisible flames. Then we dance the spiral, in the center of the grand plaza, chanting "Ella cambia todo lo que toca, y todo lo que toca cambia"—"she changes everything she touches, and everything she touches changes;" and "Si, se puede," "Yes, it's possible, yes we can,"—the slogan of the people of Tepoztlan in Mexico in their ecological struggle.

"Si, se puede..." Yes, I believe it is possible to create a world in which there is room for Carlos' intelligence and energy to improve his life, in which people can grow food for their own families to eat and tiny houses be surrounded by gardens, in which we can learn to support what is best in one another and bridge our barriers by dancing. The obstacles, and the forces ranged against us are great, but so are the gifts we can offer each other.

If we have gifted Marta and the people we've met with some of our tools of magic, they have equally gifted us with the vision of what can be accomplished through love.

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## Iron Pentacle-Seed

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we are trained to do from birth. To give away one's power is to block it, to try to stop its natural flow out of self and into passion.

The aftermath of power is worth talking about. Especially for women, channelling power can be a risky business. When I began priestessing, it seemed that often a few days after a powerful ritual I would find myself right smack dab in the Toxic Pit of Shame. My reaction would be to hide out and hope it passed. It eventually occurred to me to ask my mentor, Hilary (bless her bones), about this syndrome. She said:

"That's the recoil. It's like the kick when you shoot a rifle, when it slams back into your shoulder."

There's nothing more taboo for a woman than reclaiming her power. There are generations and generations of inherited, unspoken warnings echoing in our ears when we do this work, going back all the way to the Burning Times. It's natural for those voices to sometimes rise up after the energy dissipates.

I've come to expect the recoil, and even to allow myself some time to feel shaky after a huge magical working."

### Passion

The word "passion" comes from the Latin words "pati" and "passio," which mean "to suffer" or "to endure." Until the 16th century, the word meant "pain." Eventually, it came to mean "strength of feeling," emotional and sexual.

I like to think of the original meaning of the word "passion." Coming from our power puts us in a territory that we can't control. The full range of emotion is our reward, vivid and rich. The Goddess is a gifted surgeon, but not often much of an anesthesiologist. It's good to remember that pain is part of the territory.

Some other words in the same family are; patient, passive, compassion, sympathy, pathetic, compatible. Originally, the word "patient" meant "capable of suffering." The word "passive" meant "susceptible to suffering." Food for thought.

### References:

Partridge, Eric. *Origins: A Short Etymological Dictionary of Modern English*. New York: Greenwich House, 1983.

Ayto, John. *Dictionary of Word Origins*. New York: Arcade Publishing, 1990.

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