

A special feature from the archives of ReclaimingQuarterly.org

from RQ #102

Fire theme section

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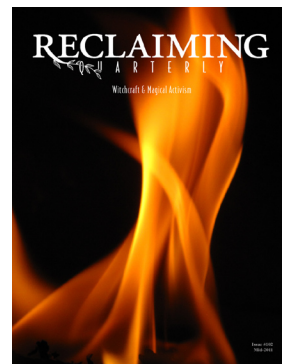
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Athena





Introducing our theme of FIRE

by Luz

Welcome to the third online issue of RQ, following our previous 30 years of publishing in print.

What a difference a year makes, since issue #101 emerged last summer. The world has seen challenges which have altered life as we have lived it. Mirroring that reality, many of the articles we received echoed these times of turbulence by invoking the primal element of FIRE!

We've seen the entire globe reeling from crises that provoked popular protest and revolt in multiple countries. The list of issues seem overwhelming: austerity measures, food shortages, unemployment, lack of healthcare, financial meltdown, disease, poisoned or privatized water, education cuts, toxic environments, economic hardship, natural disasters, displacement, increasing corporate control, and survival continue to play center stage.

Much of Europe has risen up to refuse attempts to remedy problems on the backs of working people. The US and Mexico have seen protests on multiple fronts. Africa, the Saudi peninsula, and the Middle East erupted into flames that rocked entrenched authoritarian leadership that has often served US interests. Bursting into the headlines has been news from Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Algeria, Bahrain, Morocco, Lebanon, Jordan, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Iraq, Iran, and Syria. Some claim that the problems we face stem from breakdowns of the various

economic-political systems at work.

What began in Tunisia with a solitary fruit-seller's hungry, despairing act of self-immolation soon lit the tinder long gathered. "Enough!" shouted millions of voices across class, gender, and occupational lines.

In the US, several state governors sought to pass bills nakedly written to eviscerate basic rights to collectively bargain wages and work conditions. Some believe the core strategy is to turn the country into a conservative bastion. Again, thousands roared, "NO!" Dissenters across continents and oceans alluded to and supported each other's mirrored actions. In Japan, earth moved a population, water swept away ordinary lives, and nuclear fire imploded notions of security and cheap, reliable energy.

Our global family is navigating multiple crises. New worldviews seem to be supplanting the notion that government's responsibility is to ensure everyone's wellbeing by protecting the "commons." It's a scary time. Yet what opportunities might lay hidden beneath such ferocity? Let's consider the context.

Fire, unleashed from a cauldron of pain, fear, and misery. Elemental fire, arising because something must be consumed. Bonds breaking... within the cycle of nuclear fission... and its meltdown... in cultural, political, and socially constructed narratives that stipulate new constraints that impoverish body and spirit. Wikileaks continues to unmask the false narratives meant to enslave us.

Humans have always created rituals to honor and celebrate the staggering beauty of fire's power, its cleansing capacity, and its function in a cycle that pro-

mulgates new growth, however painfully born. Beltane, campfire stories, and Burning Man all immerse us in the metaphorical cauldron for living transformation.

Several writers delved into this theme of fire, offering myriad ways of working with this element in the context of contemporary events. Nighthawk invites us to remember our capacity to be in the sacredness of fire, to walk it, to join with it, to be safe within its reach while holding the focus of our vision. Habondia, too, embodies the wisdom of seeing farther than the immediate fiery challenges in our lives. Slippery Elm calls inspiration into the circle as the remedy to terror, to serve as the transformational vehicle for social change. Andy Paik tells us how to construct a sacred fire cauldron and safely maintain it. Phoenix guides us in receiving the wisdom of fire scryed in the cauldron.

Defense of beach-bonfire rights reminds us of our constitutional right to gather and celebrate our sacred connection when celebrating holy days. The seasons' transitions are well met as we re-enact the phoenix rising from the ashes of everything burned to the ground.

Megan Young shows us how fire offers us the possibility for a new sense of self, danced in ecstasy. Dawnstar speaks of the honor and privilege of tending a ritual fire. Abel Gomez writes of Kali, imbued by a loving devotion that seeks to understand the shadow places, transcend fear, and approach a cosmic consciousness.

*Come dance with us in the fire
and let us together see what holy
things want to be made from it.*

Fire photo on preceding page by
Naemi Castellano



Devotion to the Dark Mother

A Glimpse Into the Mysteries of Maa Kali

by **Abel R. Gomez**

There are many paths to attainment within the Hindu traditions. During my initial stages of training within the SHARANYA temple, I was introduced to both the Tantric (occult) and Bhakti (devotional) forms of practice. While the more esoteric practices certainly felt akin to my practices in the Craft, it was the devotional path that truly moved me.

Devotion is not a major part of the Craft, except in the most abstract forms. In ritual we dance with the gods, sing with them, and weave powerful spirals of ecstasy, but rarely do we offer tokens of gratitude or connection.

It was this deep need for devotion to the mysteries of life that initially attracted me to the Hindu path. Goddess Kali came to me when I was thirteen, during a period of deep introspection and spiritual yearning. Her striking iconography and mythology aroused my spirit and piqued my curiosity. I set out to read everything I could about Her, through books, websites, and conversations with those knowledgeable around me. At the time I was also beginning to learn about the Craft, and the theological similarities to the Goddess-revering paths of Hinduism were uncanny to me.

As I continued to engage with Kali's mysteries, through study and prayer, two identities emerged: personal and transpersonal. I came to know her as a personal goddess, with specific

mythological and ritualistic symbolism, festivals, and offerings. She revealed Herself as Dark Mother, Goddess of the crossroads, of the chthonic realms, and of the shadow places, both in our psyches and in the world, urging humanity to understand and transcend fear. Kali holds the paradox of both loving mother and fierce warrior, guiding us towards the path to illumination and ultimate bliss.



Kali also revealed Herself as Mahakali, the transpersonal realm of experience, the cosmic consciousness embodied. This seems to be a common thread of many esoteric traditions. To me, Mahakali is akin to the Ain Soph Aur of the Qabalistic tradition, the infinite, the ground of being, ultimate reality. She can also be linked to the

Star Goddess/God Herself of the Anderson Feri Tradition of Witchcraft, the manifest divinity in whom we live, move, and have our entire being. In this regard, every prayer or offering of devotion to Her is truly an honoring of the entire cosmos.

RITUALS OF DEVOTION

In Hinduism, devotion typically takes the form of japa (chanting) and puja (ritual worship). Puja often consists of various offerings and prayers to grant the devotee a boon, but on a larger scale, to connect the devotee with the Infinite. Within the deeply symbolic patterns of devotional ritual lie deep universal truths, namely that the Goddess is embodied in all life. Puja allows us to connect with the personal and transpersonal forms of the divine, to experience Kether in Malkuth, as Qabalists say — that is, to experience the sublime in the material world. It becomes the way the Goddess can know Herself, through us, as us.

Just as with rituals in the Craft, puja can be as complex or as simplistic as one chooses. At the SHARANYA temple, the devotional and occult forms of Hindu practice are interwoven during our monthly Kali Puja ceremonies to create a communal experience of deep connection. Puja can fuse together highly complex mythological and ritualistic structures, or it can simply be a heartfelt offering of flowers. What matters most is intentionality — the depth of devotion your heart brings.

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Photo by Luz of mask in Museum of Popular Art, Mexico City



A Short Devotional Ritual to Kali

Gather together:

- incense
- a small bowl with water
- a portion of food
- a small fan
- a candle or lamp
- a bell
- an image of the deity or deities you wish to honor

The bell, used always in the left hand, garners the attention of the deity while offerings are given with the right hand.

Each of these offerings is symbolically aimed at greeting the deity as an honored guest. We welcome Her with the incense, then give it something to drink and eat, respectfully offer it cool air, and finally bid the deity farewell with light.



photos by Luz

Devotion in The World

This is a small example of the myriad forms ritual devotion may take. As one continues on the devotional path, one of the most profound realizations is that every action can become an act of devotion. The popular Hindu saint Ramakrishna realized this while worshipping the image of Maa Kali at the Dakshineswar Kali temple in India. His sense of devotion and love for the Divine Mother expanded as everything he saw became part of Her embodied mystery. He offered bowls of milk to cats and flowers at the feet of prostitutes all in honor of the Mother of the Universe.

This same sense of profound connection is available to any of us willing to offer devotion to that which we love. We can broaden this notion of devotion beyond ritual into the realm of activism, art, gardening, or any other action and dedicate it to the Goddess. From this space our entire lives can become acts of devotion, and with this awareness we can open to deeper connections to the Goddess, and thus a deeper connection to the beauty and mystery of life itself.

Abel R. Gomez is a student, performer, activist, and ritualist ecstatically devoted to Maa Kali. He is active in Bay Area Reclaiming and SHARANYA communities.



To Tend a Rítual Fire....

Story begins on page 32



The fire is laid in the center of the ritual circle at California Witchcamp. Firewood is gathered by a team of volunteers.

The evening's firetender builds the structure. Here, large structural logs and smaller kindling are shaped into a cauldron.

Additional wood is sorted by size and stacked around the periphery, to be fed to the fire during the course of the ritual.

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Images by Dawnstar



Ritual Fire continued

Wood for a long evening of ritual and campfire camaraderie, stacked in neat piles, marks the periphery of the fire circle.

During the ritual, only the firetender steps into the ring. The fire is fed as needed, and a key skill is the ability to move quietly in and out of the circle during the ritual.

*Images by Dawnstar —
story begins on next page*





To Tend a Ritual Fire

Images and text by Dawnstar

Twilight has fallen and drums are beating. A small clearing in the woods is filled with gaily dressed people gathered in anticipation of sharing a night of ritual. I center, breathe deeply, and ground myself in preparation for priestessing the fire. The signal is given. I walk to the center in a semi-trance and bend to the structure before me.

The wood had been lovingly gathering by members of the community. It had taken several hours to gather and several more to construct the structure that would house the spirit of fire and provide, warmth, light, and focus for the ritual.

Many people had helped to create the structure I was about to light. Some had gathered buckets of small twigs that filled in the base of the structure to ensure a good “catch” once a lit match was applied. This wood also provides “flaring” material for the first lighting and provides the necessary quick-burning material needed for the spontaneous fire building and “coning” that would come later in the ritual.

Others had gathered wood in various sizes. This wood was layered smallest to largest in the structure. This gradation would ensure that the fire rapidly spread from the thinner-diameter bottom layers to the thicker-diameter

layers above. Wood was also piled in a ring around the fire grouped by size. This outer ring provided a physical barrier and created a safety zone around the ritual fire when lit. It also kept the materials needed for tending during the ritual close at hand — as much wood as was used to create the main fire structure



would be used to tend the fire during the course of the ritual. All the wood had been carefully selected to ensure it was dry so it would catch easily, and was free of bark and moss, so that it wouldn't smoke.

Holding a box of matches in my hand, I strike one, call to the element of fire and ask fire to join us in the ritual and to aid our work. I put the match to the kindling, then move to the

other side of the structure to repeat the calling.

I step back and watch as the fire spreads quickly, catching first the thin twigs, then the slightly larger sticks, and, finally the larger-diameter wood. I breathe and go deeper into trance as

I watch the fire rise through the structure, eventually reaching the flare material at the top. The fire pauses as it starts to consume the piled twigs and then suddenly it rises well above my head as it springs to life, filling the clearing with a burst of light and a ring of heat.

The ritual starts and I focus on feeling both the energy of the fire and the energy of the ritual. I know when the fire is about to fall. I feel it calling to me when it needs

more wood. It is a physical pull which sometimes I can respond to immediately, or sometimes I must wait to answer depending on what is going on in the ritual. I am in a ritual within the ritual, keeping the energy of the fire in sync with the energy of the ritual.

Sometimes the fire burns softly and gently, sometimes the fire roars above head height. It is a dance within

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Ritual Fire

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the dance and I do my best to provide whatever is needed. The only thing that exists for me in my semi-trance state is the fire and I am in relationship with it. I feed and nourish it and care for it while it is with us.

Eventually the ritual ends and people begin dispersing. Sometimes there is drumming and dancing afterwards and sometimes just quiet contemplation. I continue to tend the fire until the wee hours of the morning. When it is time to end the evening, those remaining in the clearing take hands and ring the fire. We thank the fire for the blessings we have received and for aiding us in our work. When we have bid it hail and farewell, we douse it with water. All is dark and there is a glowing bed of stars at our feet as the embers struggle to remain alive despite the deluge of water. One by one, we put them out and then stir the steaming darkened ash bed to ensure that none were missed. Then we embrace and say good night and I head to my cabin for a few hours of sleep. Tomorrow afternoon we will clean the ashes and repeat the cycle.

I have been a fire tender for California



Witchcamp for over ten years. I apprenticed to the previous fire tender, learning first how to build the special structure needed to support a ritual fire and then how to tend during a ritual.

The first year of my apprenticeship I only built the ritual fire structure. The next year I tended a single ritual fire; the year after that, I tended two fires; the year after that, three; and so on until I was sharing the fire tending equally with my teacher.

At first my tending was clumsy and I was thinking too much about what I was doing. Over time, I began to feel the energy of the fire and to know it as a living, breathing entity to be called intentionally into the ritual to support the work at hand. I fell too deeply into trance in those years and only realized it when I was abruptly thrown out by one of those leading the ritual.

Once I realized what was going on,

I learned to control my trance state and keep it light enough to respond and interact with those leading the ritual but deep enough so that I was still in contact with the spirit of the fire.

I began to tend more fires until my teacher



moved on to other things. I tended alone for a few years and now I am a teacher with an apprentice fire tender. I am doing my best to lead my pupil along the path I took and bring him to spiritual understanding and awakening to the true nature of the ritual fire quickly and purposefully. To this end, I have instituted various “levels” to the apprenticeship. Last year, he achieved the first level and tended his first fire. Next year I will take on an additional apprentice. This new apprentice will spend her first year building and learning about the wood while her older fellow apprentice will move to the next apprenticeship level. My vision is to eventually have four to five tenders all equally capable of tending the ritual fire and who understand its living nature.

For me, tending the ritual fire is a sacred honor and a privilege. My relationship with the ritual fire is deeply, spiritually fulfilling. I am blessed and thankful to be of service to the Goddess in this manner. Blessed be.

Dawnstar is a Reclaiming spiritualist whose passions are the fire and the harp. She occasionally teaches Reclaiming core classes in her community and loves to be outdoors.

Images and text by Dawnstar



FIREFLY

BE THE GADFLY OF THE STATE AND ALSO ITS FIREFLY - LAWRENCE FERLINGHETTI

by Slippery Elm

BOOM! The reverberations of an ear-splitting explosion echo between tall buildings as the oxygen above the town square is snatched up in a fiery plume. Citizens scatter — running frantically in all directions as if the car bomb was a thrown bowling ball splashing into the middle of a school of fish.

A woman cries out desperately above the sirens, shouts, and traffic but her child is nowhere to be found. A restaurant and its adjacent store fronts are on fire, emitting thick clouds of smoke, blackening the sky... It's hard to imagine that just 15 minutes ago, the streets were filled with ordinary people doing ordinary things — shopping, waiting for the bus, walking their dogs.

But that's how terrorists operate: make no moment a safe one, so that the people live in a perpetual state of fear...

Kidnappings, robberies, assassinations, and bombings like the one described above are used by terrorists worldwide as political weapons to assume power over a population, or to attempt to fulfill their political demands. The ability to evoke emotional responses in people is an incredibly powerful mode

of manipulating, communicating to, or transforming a given population. As humans, we have an immense capacity to feel a great variety of different emotions, but like their name suggests — terrorists employ terror or fear as



their weapon of choice.

Terror is generally seen as the most powerful emotion to use when trying to assume power over a population or transform a government. However, contrary to popular belief, inspiration is an emotion just as potent — or even more potent — in bringing about social change. Terror is to a terrorist what inspiration is to an “inspirationist.” Terrorists use terror as a political weapon, “inspirationists” use inspiration as a political remedy. Inspiration is the holy spirit of *awen* or *imbis*. It is the fire in our hearts and souls — it is our desire to get out of bed and greet the

day — our burning passion to make the world healthier place — the lightning bolts of epiphanies — and the buzz of pure creativity. To be inspired is to be in-spirited — to be filled with spirit or energy.

There are many different ways to inspire someone, but I write about what I know best. Being an artist, what follows is a look at some examples of social change through inspiration sparked by art: specifically, the art of storytelling and poetry attributed to bards — the oral poets and word-shamans of yesterday and today.

From the griots of West Africa, to the skalds of Scandinavia, to the troubadours of France, to the fili of Ireland — bards, and their cross-cultural counterparts, were prominent figures in the societies of different cultures around the world. Traditionally, they were the “remembrancers” of their communities — living memory banks of collective history kept alive through the stories they accumulated. They played the role of the celebrant, and also the eulogist — and presided over many important rites of passage. Through the stories and poems they composed and performed, they were essentially the voices of their community, the land, and the ancestors.

Bards also had many magical and shamanic qualities. A good

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FIREFLY

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storyteller has the ability to captivate his or her audience and whisk them on journeys to other worlds and dimensions. A good poet has the ability to connect to the essence of the soul of his or her listeners and communicate ecstatic joys, shocking truths, and profound mysteries — using language of a song-like quality that sends ripples of enchantment through the air. The word “enchant” broken down is en-chant — to sing to or chant to. Many spells include a short verse or chant, which acts as a way of releasing energy and expressing intention. Words are immensely powerful things.

In Celtic Traditions, bards (bard is actually a Welsh word) were known to channel the fiery spirit of inspiration — called *awen* in Welsh and *imbis* in Irish. The Irish seer-poets, the fili, would work themselves into trance-like states — completely seized by the spirit of inspiration — and utter spontaneous verses “off the top of the head.” Brigid, or Brid as she is sometimes called, is the Irish Goddess of poetry and as such is sacred to poets and storytellers. She is associated with well-springs of inspiration and also to the element of Fire. Fire is an element of transformation: it changes everything

it touches. Like fire, inspiration is a powerfully transformative spirit, and a powerfully transformative emotion. Although the bardic traditions described above have roots in ancient times, they continue to evolve and are still prominent today. In fact, many modern bards — including Allen Ginsberg, Eddie Lenihan, and countless others — are responsible for powerful instances of social change and positive transformation during the 20th century, right up to the present.



Allen Ginsberg was a fire. He burned with a passion unrivalled among many of the world’s best poets. His poetry was spontaneous, shocking, musical, celebratory, and so powerfully personal that all humanity could relate to it on some level — therefore making it universal. Ginsberg was a large part of the paradigm shift that took place in “Western Society” during the 1950s, 60s, and 70s. His infamous poem *Howl* and its subsequent court case, challenged, and then changed the established laws regarding obscenity in the USA. He became a counter-cultural

hero through the large publicity the case received, and his poetry appeared in countless alternative magazines. He gave powerful readings at numerous political actions and festivals — including the legendary “Human Be-In” festival in San Francisco. His widespread and passionate advocacy against sexual-repression, militarism, and industrial civilization got him deported from several countries including Cuba and Czechoslovakia in 1965.

The poet and storyteller Eddie

Lenihan is another powerful bard who spoke out against the poisons of the industrial revolution. Dedicated to preserving the old traditions and stories of his native Ireland, Lenihan travels the country learning stories from the old people, and visiting the actual locations where the stories are said to take place. Many of these stories describe interactions with the faeries — the nature spirits of

the Irish landscape. Although they aren’t depicted as fundamentally evil, the consequences for disturbing or disrespecting a place in which the faeries dwell are dire, and often result in illness or death. In 1999, freeway construction in County Clare would have demolished an ancient hawthorn tree that was featured in many of the old stories, had Lenihan not taken action in its defence. Hawthorns are sacred trees to the faery folk and this particular tree happened to be the alleged meeting

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FIREFLY

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place of the faeries of Munster, when they would rally to do battle with the faeries of Connacht. Lenihan launched a campaign to save the tree using his story telling as an essential tool in inspiring and rallying the local community to speak out on behalf of the tree. The campaign made international headlines and eventually the ancient hawthorn tree was incorporated into the design plan for the freeway.

A more recent example of bards using inspiration within the context of social activism is the Mobile Cipher Caravan of Vancouver, British Columbia.

A “cipher” is a hip-hop free-style circle. Even outside of a political context it is an incredibly powerful phenomenon. Free-styling is the art of channelling and subsequently reciting spontaneous rhymes over a beat and is comparable to the trance-like prophetic utterances of the Irish seer-poets of old. In fact, real hip-hop MCs (note: the music marketed as hip-hop on television and the radio does not represent true hip-hop; it is materialistic, violent, misogynistic, lacking in creativity, and highly commercialized, all things that true hip-hop opposes) are essentially modern-day bards. Within the circle of the cipher (circles are powerful symbols in and of themselves!) expression is uninhibited and creative energy crackles among participants. The energy

is so high that it appears the MCs are performing a ritual; and some people might argue that in fact, they are. It’s no surprise that the acronym MC stands for Master of Ceremonies.

In Vancouver, a community of passionate MCs have been using “mobile cipher” tactics as outreach for certain issues affecting their bio-region — including the dangerous shipping of

Inspiration is a powerful force for manifesting social change. Whether it is inspiration from friends and family, inspiration from nature, inspiration from visual art, inspiration from music, or inspiration brought about by the bardic arts — like the poetry and storytelling of bards such as Allen Ginsberg, Eddie Lenihan, and the Mobile Cipher Caravan MCs of Vancouver BC — inspiration often leads to profound paradigm shifts. In this mechanical age of dry-hearts and crusty spirits, inspiration spreads like wild fire — every woman or man you inspire enflames everything he or she touches, and burns brighter and brighter till soon there will be nothing that can extinguish the great inferno

of captivated hearts working in unison to create a better world. In Lawrence Ferlinghetti’s influential work *Poetry As Insurgent Art*, he encourages poets to “Be the gadfly of the state and also its firefly.” As poets we have an obligation to speak out on behalf of our society. As humans we have an obligation to speak out and act on behalf of our world.

Slippery Elm is a writer, poet, and emcee (MC) from Vancouver, BC. He is a co-founder of the Mobile Cipher Caravan and has performed his poetry at numerous political actions, open mics, and poetry jams. Facebook him at: www.facebook.com/SlipperyElm.Music



Tar Sands crude-oil on super-tankers from Vancouver’s harbour to Asia. Speakers and microphones are attached to a modified bicycle to create a “sound-bike.” The sound bike, the MCs, and their accompanying dancers, roam downtown Vancouver performing in the streets and handing out political art to passers-by. The “Caravan” makes a very auditory and visual impression wherever it goes and initiates conversation with many people who would never think to stop and talk to a typical street canvasser. Its positive and celebratory energy is infectious, often causing pedestrians to join in themselves and get on the microphone or dance along.

Looking Forward... Through the Fire

I learned an important awareness while walking on fire many moons ago. One of my spiritual teachers taught us to go into our hearts and become one with the fire. While staying connected at a heart level, she instructed us to look ahead at her, waiting at the end of the path of hot coals.

I walked across twice this way, experiencing the gentle power of letting my heart guide me. The third time across, I looked down. The moment that I did, I felt the heat of the fire on my feet. I had forgotten to continue to look forward. When I again looked forward to the end of the path, I no longer felt the heat of the fire.

For some of us, life is a constant balance of staying connected within and looking forward to what is coming.

by Alexandra Habondia

Alexandra Habondia is an Ordained Priestess, Iseum of Mary Isis. She experienced her first firewalk with Rev. Edwene Gaines, as described here. For her day job she performs alternative firewalking in her financial advisory business.



Fi Fire Scrying

by **Phoenix LeFae**

Scrying is one of the oldest forms of divination. It is done by staring into an object with the intention to gain insight about a question or problem. There are many ways to practice the art of scrying. It can be done with a mirror, in a bowl of water, with a crystal ball, or the most ancient way of scrying — with fire.

To scry with fire you can use a roaring campfire, a small hearth fire, or even a simple candle flame. The size of the fire doesn't matter. What does matter is your focus, intention, and will. It is a magical act and just like any magical act, you get out of it what you put into it.

While scrying you might see images, symbols, words, or get flashes of insight. You might also hear messages, sense an answer, or smell a clue. All of these forms of information reception are valid. Each person will experience scrying in their own way. What is important to remember is that if fire scrying doesn't work for you, don't feel discouraged. Instead, try the following steps with a different form of scrying, perhaps a crystal ball or bowl of water.

So how do you do it? The first step is to have a question or issue that you

want some insight on. Make sure your question is clear and concise. The more vague your question, the more vague your answers will be. Then light a candle and get into sacred space. Take your time in setting your reading place. Remember this is a ritual. When fire scrying it is best to work with no light except for the flame. You might find that you prefer to have soft ambient music playing in the background, or not. Try

more easily. Don't let your eyes go out of focus or cross, just let them relax. Let yourself watch the flame as if watching a performance. Notice the movement, color, and shape of the flame.

As you relax into this process, allow whatever messages you might receive to come through without judgment. You might get an idea about something. You might see a symbol or word in the flame. Whatever it is, take note and keep watching. Don't try to interpret what you see in the moment.

You might want to keep a journal with you to jot down information as it comes. This way you won't be distracted trying to remember what you have seen. Instead you can focus on the fire and continue with your scrying.

When you stop receiving messages this is a sign that your reading is over. Snuff out the

candle and open up your sacred space. Now you can review your messages and see what you might have discovered. For anything unclear follow up with another scrying session at a later time.

Phoenix LeFae: Priestess for hire, writer, and lover of Earth, Sea, and Sky.



it with and without music to see which way suits you better.

Once you have created your space, sit in front of the candle and just watch the flame. Allow your vision to soften and your breathing to become regular. Sometimes focusing your vision on the periphery helps the insights to come

Photo by Naeomi Castellano



Creating a Scrying Cauldron

by Andy Paik

Fire is dangerous.

Keep that in mind when fire scrying. Light your fire in an open area, leave space around it. Indoors is okay, but leave a window open nearby for ventilation. Also be aware that your fire alarm will probably go off if you are indoors and don't turn it off.

Take a large bowl, or a cast-iron cauldron or pot, that won't burn. I use one of those big silvery metal salad bowls. It has taken on a nice burnished, rainbowy look from all the fires. Put the bowl on the floor or on a low altar. Leave at least two feet of room all around it. Put a towel under it if you don't want what is beneath it to be scorched. You can surround it with large rocks to keep it from being knocked over if you are going to have people moving or dancing around it or if your bowl has a round bottom. Make sure that any animals and small children are safely occupied elsewhere.

Pour in a cup of isopropyl alcohol. Light it on fire with a long match or already-lit long candle. The fire won't roar up instantly, but it will do it quickly enough that you will be grateful for the length of the match. Lighters (the short ones) are a good way to get burned. I use one of those long barbecue lighters both for safety and reliability in the often windy conditions of outdoor rituals.

One cup of isopropyl alcohol will get you about 10 minutes of flame. Plenty of time for a good vision. The flame will probably be about two feet high. The higher the alcohol content in the rubbing alcohol the hotter the flame will be.

Ninety percent alcohol fires will leave more ash and are more likely

Fire Scrying Tools

Here is a list of things you will need or may want for the scrying fire:

- A metal bowl
- rubbing alcohol
- a damp towel
- a pitcher of water
- a long candle
- fireplace matches or spark-lighter
- burn cream
- fire extinguisher
- Epsom or other salt
- boric acid

to set off the smoke detector. Start with the seventy percent until you get comfortable with it. The first time, it will look much bigger than you expect. Practice before using it in ritual. Start with small amounts and work up.

Let the flame burn out naturally. If you must stop before the flame is out, extinguish it with the cauldron lid.

Never refill the bowl while the flame is burning! Make sure every last bit of flame is out before adding alcohol. I lit myself on fire once this way. I was careless and did not respect the flame. It reminded me of respect, completely disrupting a Lughnasad ritual in the process.

In case of emergencies, probably a spill, don't panic. Look at the fire to see if it will actually light anything else on fire. Unlike wax/oil fires, you can put rubbing alcohol fires out with water so keep a lot handy. The alcohol will float at first, but then go out. Smothering with a damp towel also works. Just drop the

towel over fire.

Ninety percent alcohol will produce more interesting fires, but seventy percent will hurt less if you are burned. A bottle of burn cream or a fire extinguisher, even though you will probably never use them, will greatly reassure the pyrophobes around you.

When I first started doing scrying bowls, everyone told me I had to put Epsom salt in the alcohol, but no one knew why. Epsom salt makes the flames more even and less wild. When using ninety percent, this can produce the occasional ring effect (a ring effect is like a smoke ring of fire), but overall, the effect of Epsom salt is minimal. Using sea or table salt produces random flashes of gold color late in the burn. Using boric acid instead of a salt, will give a much more pronounced effect turning much of the fire bright green. Epsom salt and rubbing alcohol are both in the pharmacy part of a large grocery/drug store. Boric acid will be by the contact lens stuff (it is a cleaner). Sea salt is by the food.

For the salts, use as much salt as you do alcohol. For the boric acid, put in as much as you have alcohol, then add more until it gets thicker and souplike. Mix the stuff well and let it sit for a while before lighting. Additives usually decrease burning time. None of the additives are good after burning. They will be smelly, crusty, and you will actually have to scrape out some bit of the boric acid. Throw this stuff away after each use.

Andy Paik is a Witch and magician from Los Angeles who is working to master as many different kinds of magic as possible...



Portal of Flames

by Megan Young

When does a fire become more than just a fire? How close can you get to its flames before you get burned?

It was the summer of 2006 and I was regularly attending outdoor dance parties in the wilds of California. It was common to have a bonfire near the dance floor to stay warm and give some light in the depth of the night. I always appreciated the warmth and glow of the fire, but on one magical night in a Southern California forest my relationship with fire radically deepened.

Having recently suffered an injury at the base of my spine, I was in a fair amount of physical pain and feeling generally unbalanced as the night began. The fire was ceremonially lit and the dance floor had begun to fill in. The firelight reflected beautifully on the dancers' faces, illuminating their playful smiles. The music was loud, heavy and heady — not for the faint of heart. I was in the center of the dance floor watching in wonder as the fire sparks animated in front of my eyes. I felt strangely compelled to dance closer to the fire. Large pieces of wood were added to the fire to keep the flames going strong, following the peaks and crescendos in the music.

Several fire tending sticks were laid out around the fire. Before I knew what I was doing, I picked up one of the sticks, held it tightly in both hands, and plunged it into the belly of the fire. The burning wood was thick and heavy, creating a dense, wide fire. More and more wood was added until the coals were

glowing red hot, and bright orange flames leapt fiercely up to the cosmos. It looked like the opening to another world.

I could feel smoke in my eyes. My skin was hot and sticky from the heat. I danced along with the music, never letting go of the stick that anchored me to the center of the fire.

My thoughts began to shift rapidly, becoming increasingly chaotic and random. The last thing I remember seeing (with my eyes) was two of my close girlfriends come to the fire and dance close to me. I felt like I was shapeshifting in and out of my body. I was oscillating through vast waves of emotion. I began to experience immense pleasure. My entire body was tingly, light, and full of joy. Intense waves of pleasure rose up out of my center. I felt it anchored in my lower chakras,

vibrating and waking up all my cells. The pleasure was building and building and eventually climaxed in a whole body orgasm! I had never experienced pleasure so deep.

Then in stark contrast to the bliss of that pleasure, I felt a horrific pain, more terrible than any I had ever felt. A pain that began in the center of my being, sharp, pointed, deep, and stabbing. Pain that consumed my entire being, physically and mentally. Tears streamed down my face, my stomach clenched and back spasmed, yet I couldn't move from the fire.

For what must have been hours I fluxed between these two extremes, traveling higher and higher on waves of pleasure and then crashing back down into agony.

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Portal of Flames

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Gradually, I realized that the sensations I was feeling were not entirely my own. I was aware of a strong presence within me, energy that I identified as an old woman. It was her pain I was feeling, her pleasure. But who was this old woman? And why was she manifesting inside of me?

My thoughts became clear and I realized that the old woman raging and writhing within me was Mother Earth. The fire opened a portal to the center of the Earth, and through the stick I clung to I was channeling the terrible beauty of the entire planet. The pain I experienced was comprised of every violent act committed against her, every forest burned, every waterway polluted, every animal or human killed, every pile of trash buried beneath her surface, every toxic chemical, nuclear bomb, every world war, flowing through my body, with the fire as a clear and open channel.

Oh, but the pleasure! The simple promise of flowers in Spring, the deep blue of the sky, moss on trees in a thousand shades of green, the miracle of motherhood, fresh vegetables, waterfalls, rainbows, salmon shining in rivers, and countless sunsets too



beautiful for words, these wonders and delights flow through me, up out of the fire and straight through my body.

When the impact of my realization sank in I began to weep, feeling humbled and honored to experience something so incredible. I can't say how long I stood at that fire with my hands gripping the fire stick. I don't know if I was moving, dancing, standing up straight, or slouched over. I am not sure if my eyes were open or closed. I wasn't aware of any other people around me throughout this experience and I don't remember hearing any music.

I slowly backed away from the fire and gently set down the fire stick, blinking and doing everything in my power to get grounded.

Fire holds the key to some surprising and powerful mysteries. If we surrender to it we open ourselves to experiencing those mysteries firsthand.

Megan Young is a dancer, dreamer, writer, and facilitator dedicated to exploring liminal, creative spaces and committed to using her voice to empower herself and others. Visit trilliumcantada.blogspot.com



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A Witch's Perspective on the Sacred Fire Walk

by *Judith Stachowski aka Nighthawk*

Photos by Naeomi Castellano

Fire walking has been practiced since ancient times, with the first recorded fire walk in 1200 BC. Shamans and priests as well as common people in cultures all over the world have connected with their Divine beings, performed healing, and celebrated coming of age rituals by fire walking.

In the late 1970s, a man named Tolly Burkan (www.firewalking.com) brought fire walking to the United States after he was taught by a friend who had learned from a Tibetan monk. Burkan began holding public seminars to teach people to overcome their fears.

Fire walking was used as a means to inspire creativity and empower vision in large corporations. Many celebrities such as Dr. Andrew Weil and Anthony Robbins challenged themselves by walking on hot coals. Burkan established a school to teach fire walking instructors who could then hold public fire walks in their communities around the country.

My good friend and soul sister, Dorita, attended a fire walking school called Sundoor (www.sundoor.com) in California run by Tolly Burkan's ex-wife, Peggy Dylan. Dorita had been walking the coals for several years and felt called to become an instructor in order to facilitate fire walks for a community in Pennsylvania.

Every time Dorita told me about walking on fire, I thought she had gone mad. I could not understand why anyone would want to do such a thing! However, I did see a very great and deep change in Dorita which seemed related to her fire walking experiences.

I am a Reclaiming Witch and have attended Vermont Witchcamp several times. I have been a participant and facilitator of small and large rituals and

understand that personal transformation can happen in many different ways. I still resisted walking on hot coals. While it seemed good for my friend Dorita, I never expected to participate myself.

Before Dorita left for her two-week training at Sundoor, she asked me if she could hold her inaugural fire walk at my home. I asked her if I would have to walk the coals if I agreed. I believe she laughed at me! Not only did Dorita want to hold her first fire walk at my home, she wanted me to tend fire along with her husband David. I found it difficult to say "no" to something that meant so much to someone very dear to me. It also seemed to be Dorita's new spiritual path to walk and I would do whatever I could to help her.

I decided to attend a fire walk beforehand so I understood what I was getting into. I signed up to attend a fire walk in Pennsylvania led by Dorita's mentor. This fire walk was held at a tavern/meeting house. The fire was built in the courtyard and the "pre-walk talk" was held in a meeting room. During the class, we were given a corporate-type presentation – how to attain our goals, keep the vision of completing the walk in our minds, and find our passion/acting on our passion. We paired up to talk about our



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Sacred Fire Walk

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fears and goals. Then, we tramped out to the courtyard, where a huge mound of glowing coals greeted us. I couldn't believe that anyone could walk on those coals and certainly didn't think I could do so!

Once the coals were raked out, experienced fire walkers started to walk and dance across as everyone chanted and danced to the drumbeat. I recognized the energy-raising that was occurring and understood that it was an important part of the entire experience.

Yes, I did walk the coals that night, many times. And no, I didn't get burned.

Each time I walk the coals, whether I've been fire tender or participant, it feels like the first time. I feel the fear and anticipation. I feel my mind clearing as I watch others walk across the coals. Then, I know it's my turn to walk and I hold the vision of being on the other side of the coals in my heart.

After providing me with a brief training in tending fire, Dorita held her debut fire walk at my house, in spite of pellet-like snow. Her husband and I tended the fire. Neither of us had trained at Sundoor, although David had experience in walking the fire and had assisted in fire tending for another fire walk. In spite of the cold and snow, many people challenged themselves and experienced the power of walking on

coals. For the first time, I felt the power and passion of the fire as a fire tender.

Magic happens in several different places during a fire walk. It begins, of course, with a group of like-minded people coming together to share the experience. It grows when this group gathers to build and light the fire. Each piece of wood placed on the pile is "named" with an intent or a blessing. Singing and chanting help the magical energy build once the fire is lit. During the seminar, the instructor continues

each fire is distinct. I feel the wonderful energy of the coals moving around the circle of people — those walking on them, those supporting and chanting. I watch the transformation that happens when people walk the coals for the first time — the amazement and joy, the tremendous sense of accomplishment.

The transformations I've experienced and witnessed involve finding inner courage, the connection of a group of people working with one goal, and rediscovering self-love.

The magic of the coals can open people to possibilities in their lives. I have seen children as young as six years old walk the coals and feel the joy of overcoming their fears. I have seen a blind woman walk the coals as she challenged herself to grow. Physically disabled people have walked the coals, finding healing and



the magic by "planting seeds," which the participants can nurture and grow — seeds such as self-love, the ability to overcome fear, and connecting with the Divine. When the coals are ready, the participants drum and chant, which of course raises the energy of everyone, making walking on coals possible.

The magic of the fire reaches out to envelop me each time I tend fire for a fire walk. The intensity of the fire, the way it changes as it burns to coals, the glowing coals in a pile, just waiting to be raked out. I note how different wood gives off different energy and that

personal growth.

The magic of the fire and fire walking helps me to understand my own personal power as well as my vulnerabilities, both of which are very important for me to grow. This has been a means of re-connecting with the Divine and redefining my Spiritual path. I find great blessings in fire walking.

Nighthawk lives in Western New York. She has practiced Witchcraft for fifteen years, most of them in the Reclaiming tradition, and has attended Vermont Witchcamp.

Photos by Naeomi Castellano



Reclaiming Defends Solstice Bonfires

Traditional site for San Francisco Ocean Beach rituals threatened by budget shortfalls

by **George Franklin**

If you've attended a Solstice ritual at San Francisco's Ocean Beach in the past few years, you've had a chance to be part of the "bonfire defense plan."

Why is Reclaiming having to defend our right to hold Solstice bonfires at this traditional location?

Federal park authorities have been attempting for several years to ban bonfires on most of San Francisco's Ocean Beach due to budget shortfalls that affect beach maintenance staffing.

Reclaiming and other groups and individuals who use the beach have attended hearings, written letters, and organized to prevent this drastic change in beach policy, which threatens to eliminate one of the last "commons" spaces in San Francisco.

After the 2006 Summer Solstice bonfire was extinguished by beach police immediately after the circle was opened, local Reclaiming folks met to organize a nonviolent response for future rituals.

The Reclaiming community meeting, working with the San Francisco Ritual Planning Cell, elected to send a letter notifying the authorities of our intent to hold the ritual at our traditional location (*see next page*).

The community meeting also created a "bonfire defense plan" which allows several

different ways of participating:

- Rocks link arms around the bonfire
- Mists link hands and stream through the space
- Trees cluster nearby to chant and sing
- Winds (chosen ahead of time) talk with authorities
- Sheepdogs act as ushers/graces

As with any situation involving possible police intervention, we role-play the plan beforehand, using the occasion to teach songs for the ritual. Up to 200 people at a time have taken part in the festive walk-throughs.

By an interesting coincidence, the beach police have not been seen for several years. The magic just might be working...

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

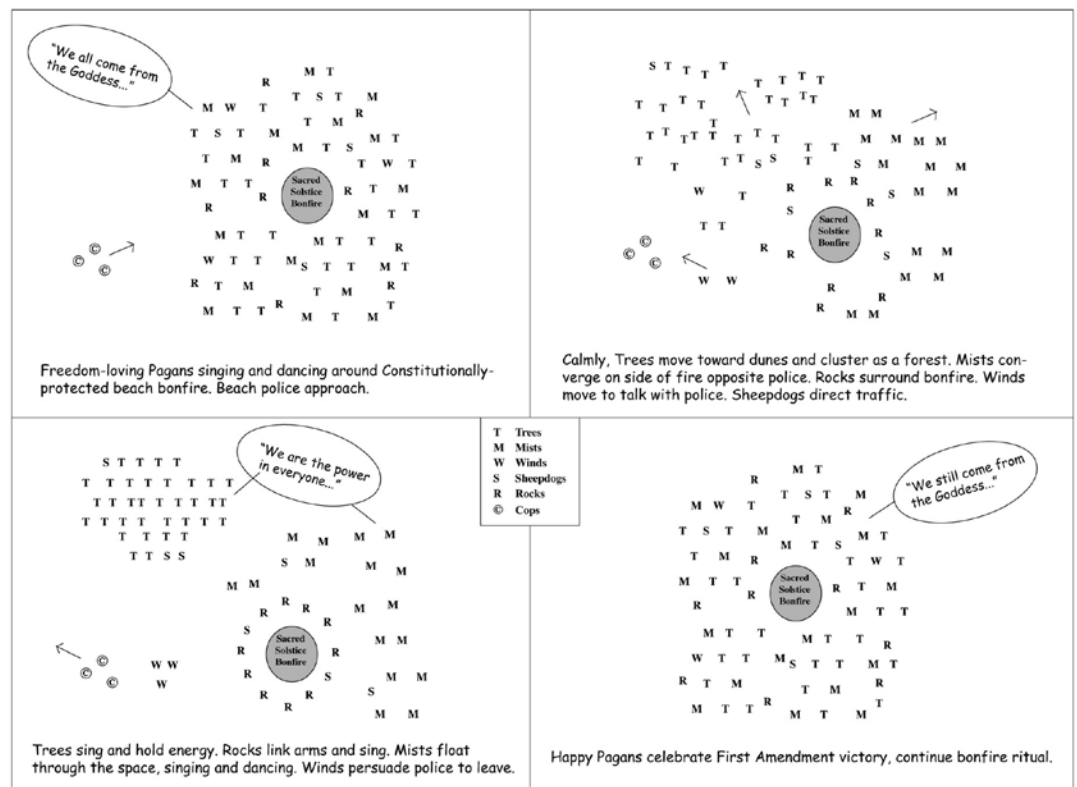
Bay Area Reclaiming rituals are organized by volunteer planning cells. If you have taken Reclaiming core classes and/or attended Witchcamp and been active in Reclaiming for a year and a day, you can help with Reclaiming rituals.

San Francisco: SFRPC@yahoogroups.org

North Bay: northbayreclaiming@yahoo.com

Ritual webpage: reclaiming.org/rituals/

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Reclaiming Defends Solstice Bonfires

Ritual planners send letter to Park Service in support of San Francisco Ocean Beach rituals

Reclaiming has been working to defend its right to hold traditional Ocean Beach Solstice bonfires since 2003. Ten years ago, numerous groups held bonfires on or around Solstice. Now Reclaiming is one of the last. See preceding page.

This letter was written after testimony at a series of public hearings was ignored by decision makers. Statements from a wide variety of beach users favored education rather than restricted use.

No response has been received. — George Franklin/SFRPC

Date: December 13, 2006

From: San Francisco
Reclaiming Ritual
Planning Cell (SFRPC)

To: Brian O'Neil / Golden
Gate National Recreation
Area

We would like to introduce ourselves. We are the Reclaiming Ritual Planning group, and we are a part of Reclaiming, a spiritual tradition in this area for almost 30 years, and a growing international tradition. We are environmentalists with an Earth-based spirituality — our environment is sacred to us, part of the Great Mother. We are non-violent, a family group, and our events are drug and alcohol free.

Members of our group attended several public hearings in 2003-2004, and like most others spoke in favor of education and enforcement of existing laws, and against a bonfire ban.

We have been holding our Summer and Winter Solstice rituals, which involve a fire for warmth, focus, and spiritual meaning, at a southern stretch of Ocean Beach for over 20 years. It is very significant for us to return, year after year, to the same place. We always clean up after ourselves, and our rituals are quiet although they involve song

and acoustic instruments. We have done

internal education and distributed fliers about fire safety (i.e., burning clean wood, dousing fire, etc.) We never burn pallets, treated wood, or other inappropriate materials.

The Winter Solstice is a sacred ceremony involving the cleansing and transforming power of ocean and fire. The ceremony lasts until the last people at the ritual extinguish the fire. Part of our reason for being down near Taraval is a desire not to impact other beach users. Because there is no permit policy, we are writing to inform you of our intention and purpose to build our fire this Winter Solstice, as usual. Reclaiming supports the GGNRA's work of making the beaches safe, beautiful, and ecologically healthy. We think it is important that the GGNRA have the

funding necessary to do this work of taking care of the beaches and their public use, and we hope to support that process. We want to work together with the GGNRA for safe, clean beaches. We imagine that the GGNRA would prefer a different solution than an unpopular, hard to enforce beachfire ban. Such a ban might cost the GGNRA in support from the public on other issues. The beach near Taraval, on Summer and Winter Solstices, is our temple from many years' use and tradition. We have a traditional and First Amendment right to gather on the beach — it is the largest and safest open space in

San Francisco. We look forward to an undisturbed ceremony. If authorities attempt to prevent our celebration, we are also preparing a nonviolent response (*see preceding page*).

If you would like to discuss these matters, please contact us.

*Rose, Nancy, Nolan, Moss, Rock,
George, Ewa, April, Rosa, Rachel*

*(Members of San Francisco Reclaiming
Ritual Planning Cell)*



Ocean Beach in San Francisco before a Solstice ritual. Photo by Otter/RQ.

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Portland Reclaiming is excited to welcome the larger Reclaiming Community to the Pacific Northwest for Dandelion 5.

What is Dandelion?

Like the seeds of the healing Dandelion plant, the Reclaiming tradition has spread all over the world. The Dandelion Gathering is a gathering of the international tribes within the Reclaiming tradition occurring every two to three years. Dandelion has been hosted all over the US: in the Southwest, the Northeast, the Bay Area, the Midwest. We are so excited to announce that for the 5th biannual gathering in 2012, Dandelion will be held in the Northwest US just outside of Portland, Oregon.

Dandelion is an open format event which means that the programming of Dandelion comes together from you, the community of participants. Past gatherings have seen ecstatic, healing, and political rituals, skill-building workshops, hilarious entertainment, networking between groups all over the world, children's programming, social gatherings for teachers and community leaders, and lots of time to meet new folks and connect together as an international community. Dandelion also hosts the BIRCH meeting, the Broader Intra Reclaiming Council Hub, a council who represents many different parts of Reclaiming including witchcamps, guilds, cells, event and action organizers and Reclaiming communities from all over the world. At the meeting this year, we will make some edits to our Principles of Unity to include our multiplicity of gender and reflect our changing culture.

When and Where is Dandelion?

Dandelion 5 will be held August 1 – 5, 2012, in Molalla, Oregon. We will be at the beautiful Camp Adams, Milk Creek Site, located about 45 minutes from the Portland, Oregon, International Airport. For more information on Camp Adams visit <http://campadams.org/>

Registration is now open. Early bird pricing is available through February 15th, 2012 so if you know you are coming, please take advantage of the discount! For full information on rates and contact for volunteer roles, scholarship and accommodations information please see the website. There are many opportunities for being a part of Dandelion and we need YOUR help! We are seeking folks to volunteer with one of the organization cells, offer a workshop at the event, and fundraise in their communities to help send more witches to the gathering. Are you ready to get involved? More information is available on the website. Visit <http://dandeliongathering.org/index.html>

For questions contact: dandelion5.magic@gmail.com

We look forward to working with you and seeing you at Dandelion!

- The Dandelion 5 organizing cell