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from RQ #102

Feature Articles

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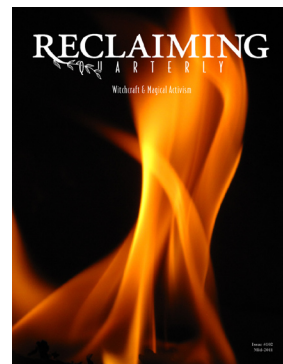
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Athena

Features



photo by Amy Breeds

Ms. MUGWORT'S

QUESTION SYMPOSIUM



A living encyclopedia of questionable advice, avid meddler in human business, and generous provider of single-dose granules of salt for the taking, Ms. Mugwort is RQ's go-to witch for all of those burning questions you just don't know who to ask. Part Mary Poppins and part Wicked Witch of the West, she excels at sweeping manners right under her magic carpet.

Ms. Mugwort's ruminations are transcribed from the original Manx by Arcadia.

Dear Ms. Mugwort:

I have a big cross-country move coming up soon, and enough magical clutter from old and ongoing spells to fill up a whole truck. How do I retain all of the magic when I move? Is there a special way to pack spell materials so the magic doesn't leak out?

-- Roadtrippin' in Oakland

Dear Roadtrippin',

If you are an adept in teleportation, I highly suggest using that method. Otherwise, try this: rid yourself of all of those dusty old candle stubs, paper scraps, dirt clods, and whatever else you're hanging onto that is not a part of a current spell. Ninety-nine percent of Witches find that this solves their problem entirely!

Dear Ms. Mugwort:

Why is it that whenever I go to a ritual where part of the magic involves stopping and staring deeply into the eyes of Witches I don't know, I've just consumed garlic hummus and have "death breath"? On the other hand, why is it that when I remember to brush and floss, I end up paired with the Witch who was obviously just eating a poppy seed bagel? Please help.

--Sure & Unsure in Fremont

Dear Sure & Unsure,

It's important to remember that "death breath" is just a part of your "life breath," and that poppy seeds come from our sacred Mother Earth. But all that said — gross is gross, and even Witches and Pagans know that! As a courtesy to others, you can always try incorporating covert garlic-breath checks into your ritual experience, especially when everyone else is really focusing on learning the words to a new chant. And don't forget — it's always a good idea to contribute foliage to rituals, and what better than the attractive and useful weed plant called mint? Be a handy-dandy Witch and keep the mint alongside your scrying mirror and seize the chance to divine while looking divine!

Dear Ms. Mugwort:

I've been transitioning my feline companion, Bubbles, into the role of familiar, but she doesn't seem to be aware of all of the responsibilities that this entails. She swats at my sage smoke, eats the feathers on my altar, and plays with the string I use in binding spells. I'm afraid that she is going to singe a whisker if she doesn't stop sniffing around my candles and incense! What can I do to make Bubbles into a really reliable familiar? Why doesn't she sit like a good girl and help me with my magic?

--Herding Cats in Sedona, AZ

Dear Herding Cats,

I'm afraid that the answer to your question is one of life's great mysteries: it's because she's a cat. If you want obedience, try a dog. If you want to keep your feathers intact, try a lizard. A sloth is certainly too slow to chase after your binding-spell strings. Consider perhaps that Bubbles weaves chaos magick — a necessary tool in any Witch's repertoire. To get Bubbles to simmer down a bit, try this trick: offer her a small pinch of *Nepeta cataria* (a.k.a. catnip). Goodness knows that Bubbles deserves that much for all of the hard work she is putting in, even if that hard work looks like dozing under the altar during a spell.

Do you have a question for Ms. Mugwort? She looks over letters sent to msmugwort@gmail.com between sips of tea and actively meddling in the business of others. Send her your questions any old time!

Gardnerian Witchcraft

an interview with Deborah Lipp, by Wicked Whimsy

What is the name of your path?

Gardnerian Wicca or Gardnerian Witchcraft.

Is your path pantheistic, polytheistic, nontheistic, or something else entirely?

Gardnerian Wicca, first of all, is orthopraxic, not orthodox. In plain English, that means that the tradition is defined by what you do, not what you believe. There is a wide range of beliefs among those who are Gardnerian, and that's great. By defining ourselves by behavior, we avoid being the Thought Police.

In general, Gardnerians are polytheistic, but that may take any of several shapes. Most Gardnerians are "soft polytheists," meaning we believe in many gods, but that all gods are ultimately One. For myself, I don't believe there is a One god that is distinct and separate from the One that is all life, you, me, my cats, the Atlantic Ocean, and so on. I think some people tend to see "One" as "God," and I don't. I see One as All, the Tao if you will. And within that One, we're all individuals, gods, and people equally.

That said, there's an awful lot I don't understand about metaphysics, despite a lifetime of study.

Gardnerians worship a specific pair of deities, whom we call the God and the Goddess. Some people think that makes us duotheists, but that's not quite true. We don't call Her "the Goddess" because She's the one and only goddess, but because we consider Her name a secret.

The Pagan Paths interview series was designed to help portray paganism not as the monolith it's usually shown as, but as the variety of multifaceted religions & spiritualities that it actually is. Wicked Whimsy is the personal website of Michelle Nickolaisen, dedicated to creating the life you crave, covering topics ranging from style to spirituality to productivity & creativity.



What does your daily (or otherwise regular) practice consist of?

Gardnerians in general meet monthly for full moons (Esbats) and for the eight holidays (Sabbats). Some groups also do new moons. Different groups handle the occasional overlap of holidays and moons differently. In addition, we may meet ad hoc, for example, if there's an emergency healing, or a special occasion, or extra training time, or experimental meetings, or whatever.

Whatever private daily (or otherwise) practice an individual may have is their own choice.

Can you please give a brief overview of your holidays, if they exist? Which one is your favorite?

Our holidays are pretty familiar to most Pagans, but let me take a moment to talk about exoteric and esoteric, public and private, and the famous Gardnerian secrecy.

Gardnerians operate under an oath of secrecy, which we take upon initiation. That doesn't mean we can't talk about our tradition, but there are certain areas around which we tiptoe.

Personally, I believe that all religion has an exoteric and an esoteric aspect. There's the part that faces the world and the part that looks inward. I don't think one is superior to the other. I don't think I'd be the Wiccan and Pagan I am today without the enormous positive input of the exoteric Pagan community, by which I mean the public stuff, the festivals, the sharing, the open rituals, the communication. I think that's been an essential part of my growth and exploration and expansion as a Pagan

Photo by Luz

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Gardnerian Witchcraft

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and Witch.

For me, that public side is complimented by a private side, by the secret, private, intimate, and mystical experience of Gardnerian Witchcraft.

I actually believe that Gerald Gardner always intended a Wiccan practice to include both. He alluded to it in all of his writing: that a coven was something that functioned within a larger Pagan community. I think that's so important.

So if I talk about the holidays: Beltane, Summer Solstice, Lammass, Fall Equinox, Samhain, Yule, Imbolc, and Spring Equinox, I could talk about the public Pagan stuff, and you'd be totally familiar with that.

Meanwhile, I'm also doing private work on the inner, mystical meaning of those holidays. But I don't think that the inner meaning is the "right" one and the public meaning is somehow fake. Rather, I believe they're two sides of the same coin.

All that is the long way around to saying that the inner, private Gardnerian holidays and how they differ from the public Pagan ones is something I'm not prepared to talk about.

Is there a set view of the afterlife, and if so, what is it?

Gardnerians tend to believe in reincarnation: rest in the Summerland and then rebirth in a new body. Certainly our rituals support that belief. However, I did say we're not orthodox and not the Thought Police, so there are definitely some Gardnerians who don't believe in reincarnation or simply aren't sure.

My personal beliefs have been strongly influenced by studying the Seth material.

Do you have a particularly close relationship with one god or goddess? Would you like to share a bit about them?

In addition to the Gardnerian God and Goddess, my personal patron is Kali. Gardnerians don't necessarily have a patron, it's not part of the tradition. I had a vision of Kali many, many years ago that has had a profound impact on me. She is a difficult Goddess, but She chose me and I accept that and love Her.

Do you interact with any spirits or beings, other than your deities?

Oh sure, all the time. That's such an open-ended question! I mean, how do you take a walk on the beach without interacting with the spirit of Ocean? How do you honor your beloved Dead

without interacting with their spirits? The world is full of spirits and beings and we interact with them all the time.

How do you feel about eclectic vs. traditional Wicca?

I celebrate people's ability to choose a path that is right for them. I would personally never be happy with an eclectic path. It's just not my personality.

I have a section in my book, *The Study of Witchcraft*, that discusses eclectic, traditional, and radical Witchcraft, and how they differ. I go over each path's pluses and minuses, and suggest ways they can learn from each other.

Any resources or recommended reading?

Well, I'm a big fan of my own books. Ha, kidding. I have a recommended reading list on my website.

Check out Deborah Lipp's books on Amazon, or visit www.deborahlipp.com

Pagan Paths is a series dedicated to showing that Paganism is not, as it's often portrayed, a monolith, but an umbrella term for a variety of different, living, breathing religions and paths. Read other interviews in this series at www.wicked-whimsey.com

Photo by Luz



An Imbolc Ritual in Kildare

by **Paul McAndrew**

As I arrived in Kildare on the bus from Cork, I could see from the window the beautiful six-foot Brigit's Cross in box hedging growing on the side of the road.

I got off in the town square and saw a huge sculpture of a flaming torch wreathed in oak leaves, and a powerful-looking statue of Brigit. A "Feile Bhride" banner was flying.

I was met by a friend, Paul, who'd travelled up from Cork earlier. Paul and I walked the mile or so out of town down the dark road towards Brigit's Healing Well. As we got close we could see flames along the side of the road. The ritual route was lit with flaming torches.

We got to the well, which was surrounded with flames, and I climbed down the steep bank so I could bless myself with the water. Just past the well a 20-foot circle had been laid out in candle-lanterns. In the centre of the circle was a large three-legged brazier full of fire, surrounded with arrangements of rushes, symbolizing the hearth. There was a crowd of a hundred people of all ages.

One of the nuns welcomed everybody regardless of the reason they had come, and started teaching us various Brigit chants (she called them "chants" not "hymns") in Irish and English. One of them was "Oscailt mo chroí" ("open my heart"). Another had

the words "lead us to a deeper well."

She encouraged the crowd to walk deiseal (Irish for clockwise or 'sunwise') around the circle while we were chanting. We were asked to shout out the names of the places we had travelled from. The nun talked about the tradition of Brigit walking the land and blessing every town, home, and shed on the eve of her feast. She taught us to chant Her name to invite her to the circle. She talked about Brigit being the one who brings Spring and breathes life into the mouth of dead Winter.

A woman then carried a piece of cloth around the circle, holding it out towards the people to bless us. We were told that it was Brigit's mantle and that we should each leave a piece of cloth outside on our window ledge that night which would become Brigit's mantle and could be used for healing throughout the year. A young girl of about ten sang a beautiful song to Brigit.

Then water from the Healing Well was carried around the circle by four women and sprinkled on the crowd. A young woman wove a Brigit's Cross from rushes in the centre of the circle while we chanted about weaving the hopes of our hearts' delight into it. Then one of the nuns walked around the circle, holding up Brigit's Cross and asking for blessings from the Four Directions, including love from the South and strength from the North. We followed Brigit's flame as it was carried away from the circle,

chanting as we walked the torch-lit route to the Garden Shrine. ("Brigit light our path through darkest night and brightest day.")

Many people were carrying lanterns or glass jars with candles in them.

Outside the entrance to the shrine was a large burning brazier. The shrine itself covers about a quarter of an acre, surrounded by trees, with a stream running through it, upright stones, and a statue of Brigit as a strong woman holding a torch. We chanted, "Walk gently on the Earth, we must respect Her, She does not belong to us, our children must inherit Her."

We were invited to shout out our hopes for ourselves and the world. People shouted things like "justice," "peace of mind," "reconnecting with the Earth." People gave each other a sign of peace, hugging or shaking hands with those around us. After the ritual Luka Bloom played his guitar and sang his Imbolc song, "Don't be afraid of the light that shines within you."

The ritual is held every year in Kildare on January 31st. I'd really recommend going!

Paul McAndrew is a 43-year-old anarchist gay Pagan from Yorkshire, England, active in radical politics and in the Pagan community in Cork, Ireland.

Artwork by Naeomi Castellano



CONFESSIONS

OF A PAGAN PRIEST

by Rafael Jesús González

When in my mid-twenties I became a born-again pagan after a lifetime of traditional Christian Catholic upbringing, practice, and study (I intended to become a physician, enter the Franciscan Order, and work as a medical missionary in South America or Africa) I was not prepared in pagan ritual.

But, having been an altar boy and while in the Navy assisted the chaplain at Corona Naval Hospital say mass, I was well grounded in the rituals of the Catholic church, which in reality, are not that very different from most rituals around the world.

The Catholic sacrament of the Eucharist is a true communion, consecration or not, for bread and wine are indeed flesh and blood of the Earth Mother herself. Purification by water, the wafting of holy smoke (frankincense, myrrh, copal, sage, cedar, sweetgrass) go back to the beginnings of our race, as do the chant, sacred objects, ritual garments, and gestures.

From childhood, I had always performed ritual, either mimicked from what I saw at home or at church, or which I invented and improvised. The only difference, I believe, is a matter of focus and belief, from monotheistic myth to the myths of paganism.

In my mid-twenties in college,

I had already read widely enough in literature, history, anthropology, and comparative religions to know, at least in theory, of many different forms of ritual. I took courses in archaeology at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México and was well-grounded in the cosmology and myths of the Meso-American cultures.

The more I studied in monotheistic theology the more untenable it became. I came to suspect that it was not so much that its a priori God had made us in his image but that we had made him in ours.

In the summer of my senior year at

was untouchable by language, and not far away or separate, but present; everything manifests It and It manifests everything. Gods are of a subordinate order. And I became born again a pagan. As I and all children are in their very early years of consciousness before indoctrination takes place.

However, it wasn't until the late 60s, early 70s, about six years later, in the midst of the Vietnam war, that, with my study into the Nahuatl, Maya, Huichol cultures of Mexico, I began to take pagan ritual seriously. I created a sacred text which I made into a little book

of worship. I incorporated what I knew of Nahuatl literature and thought and what I had learned of the Huicholes through reading and in the trips I took to Mexico to collect their art, and tentatively created rites. I began to make ritual clothing, embroidering a denim jacket

with the image of the plumed-serpent, signifying enlightenment in indigenous Mexican belief, and collected and created objects of power.

I performed these rituals in private for myself, or shared them with a few intimate friends. These gradually evolved into healing rituals through

IN A GLOBALIZED WORLD WITH A GROWING
AND MUCH NEEDED GLOBAL PAGANISM,
WE MUST BORROW WHERE WE CAN,
RESPECTFULLY, WITH LOVE AND WITH CARE,
FOR THE EARTH IS ONE WHOLE, AND WE MUST
HEAL IN WHAT WAYS WE CAN.

the University of Texas, El Paso (Texas Western College of the University of Texas then), friends introduced me to sacred peyote. After the vileness of the taste in my mouth and the nausea, the world took on a shine, an ineffable immediacy, an Isness I'd not experienced since a very young child. I experienced communion. And God and I became friends. I knew that the Absolute

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PAGAN PRIEST

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which I guided friends torn by personal trials or by the tormenting exigencies of the cruel, unjust, and unjustifiable war in Vietnam. I performed these rituals in preparation for taking part in demonstrations and acts of civil disobedience, advising conscientious objectors, teach-ins, for my political activism has always been informed by a sense of the sacred.

In 1982, I attended a Medicine Wheel in Cazadero, California conducted by the Chippewa medicine man, Sun Bear. I attended partly because Joan Halifax, whom I had met earlier through a mutual friend, Barbara Myerhoff, a scholar in the Huichol culture, at a symposium on the Huichol at the de Young Museum, was among the presenters.

Sun Bear asked me to lay one of the stones of the axis of the North in the Medicine Wheel which opened me

to participate in pagan rituals more publicly. My conversations with Joan and Sun Bear made me think more deeply about ritual as a more public act, and Sun Bear encouraged me to study and conduct medicine wheels on my own. Returning home, I had vivid dreams in which I saw clearly the design of a ceremonial staff and a talking stick which I knew I had to create.

It was also at this time that I became most active in the anti-nuclear movement. I decided to take a leave of absence from my teaching at Laney College in Oakland, California to work with the Livermore Action Group in Berkeley to organize the first (and only) International Day of Nuclear Disarmament in 1983.

That summer, the University of North Texas had invited my friend Geri Gray to mount an exhibit of her installations and me to give a reading of my poetry. She and I drove there, stopping on the way to attend the Summer Dances of the Hopi on the

Third Mesa.

I took sacred medicine and the kachina dance was a visionary experience in which I came by my medicine name. I had told Geri that I needed raven's wings and claws with which to create the ritual objects I had dreamt and, coming down from the mesa after the dances, she suddenly brought the car to a halt and said, "I have the wings for you." She had spotted a dead crow just off the road, unblemished, without a sign of trauma or a drop of blood. (As soon as I returned home to San Francisco Bay, I fashioned my staff and my talking stick.)

1983 was an intense year in which I was arrested several times for blockading the testing of the MX first-strike missile at Vandenberg Air Force Base, the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, the Federal Building in San Francisco, consulates, armed forces recruitment offices. I attended meetings with anti-nuclear groups

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from the western and southwestern states to coordinate actions. I attended what seemed interminable meetings to organize the International Day of Nuclear Disarmament. Before all these activities, I conducted ritual involving, at the very least, the burning of copal or sage and invoking the four sacred directions.

It was in working to bring about the International Day of Nuclear Disarmament that Starhawk and I met and became friends. We were both adamant that the date set for the day of protest had to be one of universal significance transcending national or ethnic identities, political references, varying religious traditions — it had to be a day holy to the Earth. And so, after interminable discussion, consensus was reached — the day was set for the Summer Solstice 1983.

Very early that day, Lifers, my affinity group, prepared ourselves ritually and marched to the gates of the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory where I, wearing my embroidered ritual denim jacket and ritual mask, invoked the four directions before we all sat in front of the gates

as an act of both civil disobedience and worship. Later after our arrest, in Santa Rita Jail, the five-hundred some odd men in our part of the jail and the five-hundred some-odd women in their section formed our circles to celebrate the solstice and sang to each other across a wide ravine.

Returning home after actions of civil disobedience and being held in jail for varying periods of time, many experienced disorientation and what we termed the “post-action” or “post-jail” blues. I led small medicine wheels for Lifers to center and ground ourselves. These included our families and support groups. Hearing of these, people from Change of Heart cluster began joining us on Mt. Tamalpais where our medicine wheels grew and grew and began to be regularly held at the Equinoxes and Solstices.

This gave rise to the Wakwa Society which for more than a decade afterward organized these seasonal wheels. The largest wheel (more than five hundred attending) undertaken by the Wakwa Society was for the 20th anniversary of Earth Day, held in Golden Gate Park, which I led with Halifu Osumare, a Yoruba-Santeria priestess.

By the early nineties, when I joined Starhawk to lead a series of multi-

cultural rituals for Samhain/Día de Muertos, I was participating in public ritual often to open Men’s conferences, to perform naming ceremonies, marriages, quinceañera celebrations, boys’ puberty rites, healing sessions. (It was at this time that I and three friends founded Xochipilli, a Latino men’s ritual group.) Now, for the past fifteen years, I have conducted the ofrenda ceremonies at the Oakland Museum of California’s yearly Días de Muertos Community Celebration.

So I became a priest after all, albeit a pagan priest, who exercises his priestly duties with borrowed rites, modified and appropriated, if you will, though I have escaped such accusation from Indigenous folk, more direct heirs to pagan traditions and jealous of their heritage. I am sure it is because I am Mexican and Indigenous blood runs in my veins.

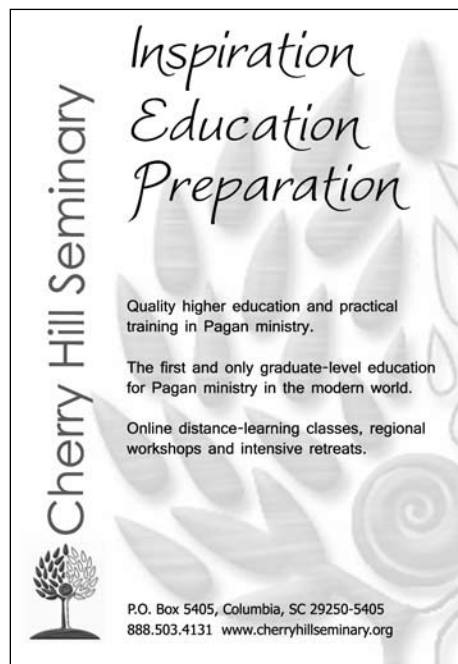
But it can’t be helped. In a globalized world with a growing and much needed global paganism, we must borrow where we can, respectfully, with love and with care, for the Earth is one whole, and we must heal in what ways we can.

Rafael Jesús González, Prof. Emeritus of Creative Writing & Literature, was honored by the City of Berkeley in 2009 for a lifetime of writing & art, teaching, & social activism. His most recent book is La musa lunática/The Lunatic Muse.



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Luna en perigeo después de terremoto

(a mi amigo el Prof. Naoshi Koriyama
y a la gente del Japón después del terremoto
y *tsunami* del 11 de marzo 2011)

Una luna de raro tamaño y belleza
sale arrastrando más altas las mareas.
¿Tal vez como las de Jokusai?
No es necesaria para eso
una luna en perigeo —
la Tierra es lo suficiente poderosa
en su inquietud violenta
para despedazar el suelo,
para sacudir las cazuelas de los océanos,
para batir las aguas
y causar estragos en la tierra
sin ayuda de la luna.

La Madre, los antiguos sabían,
no es siempre amable.

Pero la luna,
protegiendo como pueda a la Tierra
de la lluvia de meteoritos
siempre lo ha sido
aunque nos guste culparle
de nuestra locura.

Ahora la luna se hace grande
como si para consolar
con un poquito más de luz.

Perigee moon after earthquake

(to my friend Prof. Naoshi Koriyama
& the people of Japan after the earthquake
& *tsunami* of March 11, 2011)

A moon of rare size & beauty
rises pulling the tides higher.
Waves perhaps like Hokusai's?
There is no need
of a perigee moon for that —
the Earth is powerful enough
in her violent unrest
to tear apart the ground,
to shake the bowls of the oceans,
& churn the waters,
& wreak devastation on the land
without help from the moon.

The Mother, the ancients knew,
is not always kind.

But the moon,
shielding the Earth as she can
from the rain of meteorites,
has always been,
though we like to blame her
for our madness.

Now the moon grows large
as if to comfort
with a bit more light.

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The Crossroads

or, Why I Practice More Than One Tradition

by *Great Serpent*

The crossroads plays a big part in New Orleans Vodou, which I practice. Legba, the lwa (Vodou spirit) who opens the gate to let the other lwa through, represents the crossroads, the doorway.

Until a few years ago, I was an unspiritual person. I knew nothing about magick, and I hadn't set foot in a church or any other place of worship in years, except at Christmastime to hear organ music and sing Christmas carols. However, I always had an interest in Tarot cards and ghosts since I was a kid.

In recent years, my interest in tarot cards and ghosts widened to a curiosity about different types of magick and a desire to study them. I started out as a Rosicrucian, which I plan to get back into one day, then got interested in Vodou and Reclaiming. At first, I was interested in mysticism. Eventually I got interested in magick. Of course, I don't plan to study every single tradition in the world since one has only so much time, but I do like being well-rounded.

I practice two traditions for self-empowerment. Vodou and Reclaiming have many differences, but one thing they have in common is they teach you how to protect yourself, defend yourself if necessary, and to do things for yourself. They also teach you how to do the same for others. They emphasize community.

All this may sound obvious, but I am amazed how much mainstream society — at least in the United States — teaches us to do the opposite. In mainstream culture, we are taught by a corporate-run media not to think for ourselves, to believe only what pundits tell us, to trust “experts,” and to feel bad about ourselves if we don't fit a demographic or look a certain way. Ads tell us to buy things that will supposedly “fix” us. If there's something “wrong” with us, the only way to fix it is to buy a product they're selling.

My experience with magick — whether it's Vodou, Reclaiming, or any other kind — is that it diagnoses the problem and points to possible solutions. Looking for a job? Want a lover? Cast a spell. Or call and make a sacrifice to an lwa (Vodou spirit).

You may not always get your wish, but at least you're taking action to solve your problem.

Through this process you're also developing a relationship with the unseen. The greater your connection to the invisible is, the more insights into your problem you will have. You may also discover things about your problem you never knew before, and find that it is a symptom of something else. Magick helps you dig deep into the root of a situation, and thus find the proper tools for dealing with it. Magick can give you power, and help you feel stronger.

But perhaps the biggest reason I practice two traditions is because I have often found myself in situations where different cultures, systems, practices, or energies intersect. Some examples:

I was born near the cusp of two astrological signs.

Many people in my father's family were originally from France, Germany, and Alsace-Lorraine, a region warred over by both countries for centuries, and consequently a land of both French and German cultures.

I am originally from Louisville, Kentucky, a city with both Southern and Midwestern



Luz

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The Crossroads

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influences. Historically, Northern and Southern cultures have often met, and clashed, here. Kentucky was also a border state that was neutral — meaning that it was neither pro-Union nor pro-secession — during the Civil War. Many people in Kentucky supported slavery, but the city of Louisville also had many abolitionists. Louisville is called the crossroads for all these reasons.

The crossroads plays a big part in New Orleans Vodou, which I practice. Legba, the lwa who opens the gate to let the other lwa through, represents the crossroads, the doorway. The crossroads marks the border between the visible and invisible worlds, the material and spirit worlds. Before you connect with the other lwa, it makes sense to call Papa Legba first. Establish a relationship with him because the power to open the door to the spirit world, to create a conduit

between the material and spirit worlds, is in his hands. Give him a sacrifice or two. He likes rum and cigars. You can also give him a cane, since he is an elderly man. Because Vodou is practiced differently in Louisiana, parts of Haiti and the Dominican Republic, and Africa, serving Papa Legba and the other lwa may vary between these places.

In Reclaiming, the crossroads also has a presence, although it is not referred to as such. Rather, Reclaiming rituals discuss being “between the worlds.” A Reclaiming ritual starts with the casting of a circle. At the beginning of this casting, someone often says: “The circle is cast. We are between the worlds. And what happens between the worlds changes all the worlds.” After the circle is cast, you are between these worlds until the circle “is open, but not unbroken,” and the ritual ends.

When you are in the crossroads, I find, you are exposed to and learn different things. You learn different perspectives. Consequently, you have



Luz

different experiences, which enrich your life. Practicing different traditions allows me to experience the crossroads in a variety of ways. The more time I spend in the crossroads, the more I can determine the next path I will take.

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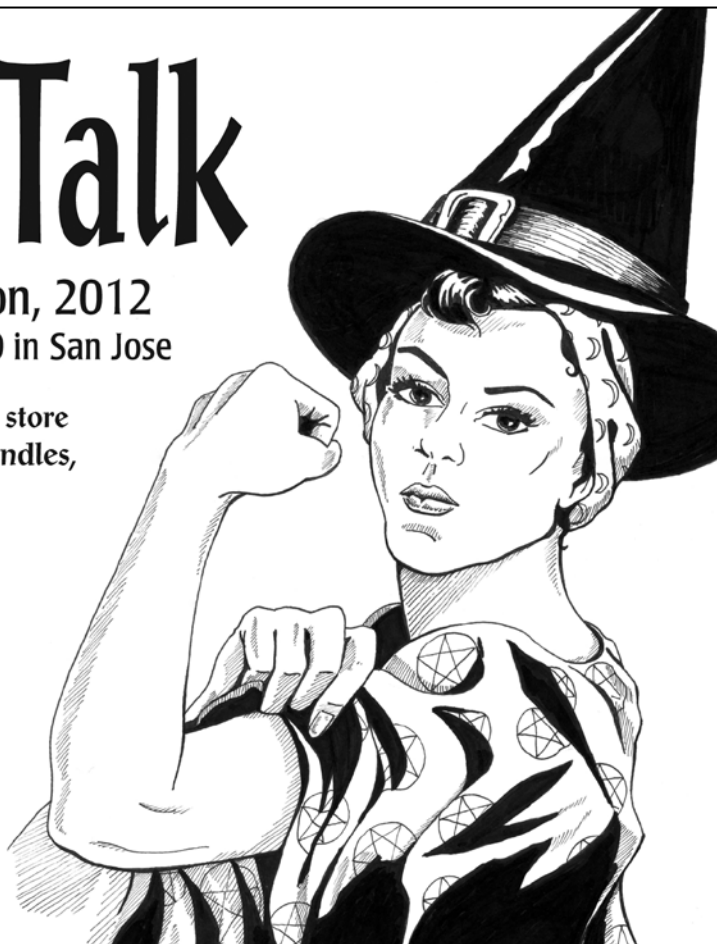


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Myth Running

Magic is the process of conscious manifestation

Photos and text by Luz

THE STRUCTURE OF STORY

I was running late... again. I had sporadically glanced at the clock while getting ready to leave my home, attempting to change my chronic lateness by applying more time-focus. Yet by the time I was ready to drive away, the hour displayed on the car dash seemed unreal.

How did this consistently happen? Finding ways to shorten the drive-time or noticing that my walking in late was not problematic provided an occasional remedy but no resolution. It should only take 20 minutes to make and eat breakfast, 15 to shower and dress, and how much time could it possibly take to pack up and get into the car? My brain fogged up trying to figure it out. It was as if time had disappeared into a black hole.

How familiar does this story feel? Your own context might involve some other seemingly mundane issue, or maybe talking more authentically with loved ones, or creating a sustainable life and world where you feel peaceful, free, and nourished.

We all run patterns involving behaviors, values, beliefs, our sense of who we are, our biological drive for safety and survival, a mindset for how we perceive the world, and our connections that extend beyond ourselves. These patterns mostly run unconsciously. They are best known as “habits.” They’re like standard operating procedures [SOPs] for oneself.

Our unique patterns actually reside in physical structures, in complex combinations of neuro-pathways. The larger and stronger of our brain circuits – those accessed and used more frequently – function as defaults that drive what gets enacted – the SOPs.

We all talk to ourselves. We think certain thoughts, and if we really tune in attentively, we may hear actual words internally. We do this to help map out what we’re doing, what we’re not doing, and why we’re doing or not doing. Some of us also carefully listen to our body, feeling the sensations, experiencing the emotions, and then make cognitive sense of our somatic wisdom.

We all have personal stories. Stories represent the fuller picture of what we tell ourselves and others. *I could never make a living doing X!* They may also be what others tell us, and which we believe. *We must all sacrifice in these hard times.* Some stories just seem to exist in the culture and are assumed to be true. *The UN Security Council has approved a no-fly zone to protect civilians and we must deploy resources to defend it.* Some stories grow large, beyond simple parameters to become a form of personalized or socialized myth, what we are expected to believe, and what the news pundits often call “narratives.”

Let’s clarify our terms for purposes of this article. The great Myths come down from all traditions, offering us nourishing archetypal perspectives by which to review, guide, and enrich our lives. Those Myths are not the subject of this article. While contextual meanings vary, I am using story, myth, narrative, message, and frame as name words that encapsulate and codify ideas, reflecting values and beliefs that drive our actions. Such a container might hold an idea that is harmful to the individual or the collective.

Careful the wish you make
Wishes are children
Careful the path they take
Wishes come true, not free
Careful the spell you cast
Not just on children
Sometimes the spell may last
Past what you can see
And turn against you
Careful the tale you tell
That is the spell
Children will listen

Into the Woods
by Stephen Sondheim

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Myth Running

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Likewise it can hold an idea that can be used to empower or inspire.

When we hear a story and take it in, consciously or unconsciously, we are affected by it in powerful ways. The story does not have to be “true” for it to work its effect. Stories plant values and beliefs inside us. This happens physically. New neural pathways are created in our brain. The more we think about and thereby integrate such values and beliefs, the stronger these physical structures grow and the more these default patterns are used. Myth and story can cripple or grow our capacity to act in our own best interest and with consideration for the web of life on which we all depend.

What myths run you? What myths run people you know?

How often do we inquire into myths and stories to assess if they are actually true? Who benefits when large numbers of people believe a particular frame or narrative? Do we notice how certain stories may limit us, and can we recognize whose strategies those stories might serve?

I believe that we all live by unexamined narratives and myths, likely more than we realize or would want to admit. The price for doing so is enormous. How curious are we willing to be?

DECONSTRUCTING THE STORY

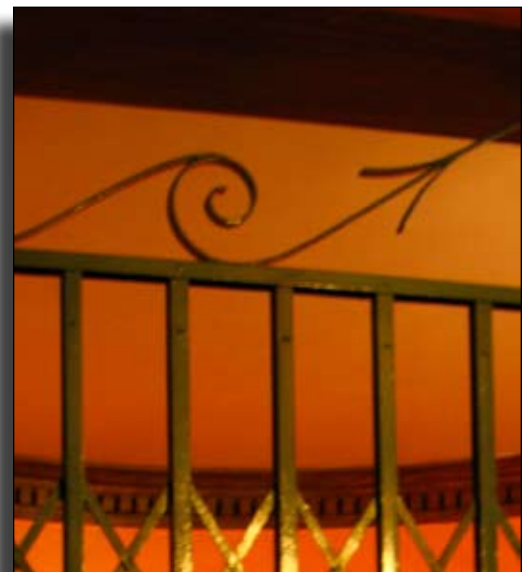
Time-focused does not describe me. My father’s habitual get-there-early mentality maddened me as a teen, especially when the family waited in the car, engine running, while I rushed to get out the door, dropping things in my anxiety. I ran on my adolescent feelings, needs, and cool things happening in my relationships.

As an adult, I can now recognize that I live and work in a society that runs on timeliness. That reality confronts me with choices. If I want credibility from peers and clients or need to be fully present for what happens in a meeting, I need to conform to this ubiquitous expectation. While I acknowledge that my life would benefit from more balanced practices, part of me is discomforted and feels uncertain about making sustainable changes on the time issue.

Let’s excavate this example to understand the deeper dynamics of change and what a crucial role myth plays. Obviously I have pessimistic feelings that may block the possibility of changing what is clearly a long-established habit. I pride myself as someone who values relational aspects of life more than a cultural time priority. The fact that my identity is involved reflects how thoroughly this issue is interwoven with my psyche. Issues that “live” at such a highly organized neurological level signify a major challenge to successful change efforts. That means there is a lot more complexity to navigate.

The fact that “my brain fogged up trying to figure it out” is clear evidence that strong emotions temporarily blocked access to higher cognitive functions. Rather than having hard data, I postulated a theory, “It should only take 20 minutes to...” and in frustration, exclaimed to myself, “How much time could it possibly take to...?” These are slippery notions and not true quantitative measures. Combined with my blaming an external cause, specifically that time had disappeared, these assumptions serve to keep my story intact. Unless deconstructed they deflect any examination of the overarching story and prevent any positive resolution of the problem.

The myth running me has been my belief that I have no power to change this habit. But listening more deeply, my breath catches and tears well up. I have discovered a secret belief. I truly fear that I can never have the life I



Photos by Luz

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Myth Running

continued from preceding page

desire. Living as if this were true, why bother with the small stuff? I remained stuck in a familiar, dysfunctional pattern. While this problem first presented as mundane, it actually masked a deeper core issue. Core problems live everywhere.

What happens when we live as though our assumptions, beliefs, or myths are true? How can we make up what, upon rigorous inquiry, prove to be flimsy or even preposterous stories? What do we lose when we are at the effect of a force outside ourselves? What happens when we internalize other people's proclamations, stories, and admonishments as true words to live by, to fight and die for, to lie for? We see the consequences all around us, in our personal lives, the deep divides of antagonistic opinions, and the social, political, and economic breakdowns occurring in our world now. The power of language and belief play a key role.

TRANSFORMING THE STORY

In the face of consistent incongruity between my "disappearing time" assumption, ludicrous as it was, and what showed up as my real problem, something finally broke down. It's hard to live with cognitive dissonance for very long. I stopped assuming and began to wonder how many minutes it actually took to complete the necessary tasks before leaving the house. So began a powerful and utterly simple experiment. I tracked and wrote down the exact times it took for all the activities in different circumstances over a few days. The combined mathematical results offered irrefutable evidence that my story was false. I was astonished and chagrined. I hadn't "lost" time, but had never calculated the real minutes it took to get everything done. With my former framing of the problem, it was unrealistic to expect that I could ever be on time.

With real data finally in hand, I recognized that I had never used a quantitative process to determine when I needed to begin my departure tasks. I had been chronically overwhelmed by fuzzy thinking generated from my strong emotions about this issue. Perhaps I had been too fearful of discovering the true cause for this habit, later revealed as my secret belief that I would never have the life I truly desired.

I could almost feel my synapses sear as they lit up my brain with liberating new insights. Many issues could be averted if we asked ourselves, what do we really know and what are we assuming, guessing, or making up? Well versed in guiding clients to surface and challenge their assumptions, I had been ensnared by the lack of examining my own until the internal discord became too painful. The emotional power embedded in a dysfunctional belief is strong enough to short-circuit our ability to act in ways that promote our wellbeing. Working with such insights and transforming my secret belief is gradually supporting me to grow a new sense of identity aligned with effective behavior that builds my desired life.

THE STRUCTURE OF REALITY

Leaving home and moving into a university setting allowed me the freedom to engage with new ways of viewing the world. Political narratives became more transparent to me. I came of age during the era when males of various colors were called upon to fight each other in a US-provoked war in Vietnam. My freshman year morphed into full exposure to the fires of political dissent as students at my Jesuit university called a moratorium on institutional classes. Hanging out in the student-run alternative teach-in space, I heard statements at odds with my military

The federal deficit is the problem.
The people united will never be defeated.
Government's job is to protect business.
The US economy is going broke.

Vegetarianism will end hunger.
We must all sacrifice in these hard times.
We cannot afford entitlement programs.
Si, se puede!

We shall overcome — some day.
Nuclear is green, renewable energy.
My people lived here before yours did.
Tax breaks create jobs.

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Myth Running

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family's staunch beliefs. My inner cacophony thundered as loudly as the outside voices:

Stop the war NOW!

We've always had war; we'll always have war.

We cannot kill those people.

We're ridding the world of Communism.

The reason for differing stories relates to the fact that we are meaning-making creatures. To successfully navigate this world, we necessarily engage in deleting, distorting, and generalizing many of the gazillion data bytes that rush upon us every second. We each develop filters that help us avoid being overrun by data that in a nanosecond we must deem irrelevant. Combined with other socializing factors we each create our own unique sense of the world, our "reality" as it were. We filter some data in and filter a great deal out.

As a result, we become unable to perceive outside our own filters. I may not notice what someone else, with a different set of filters about the world, will perceive. Without enlarging our filters, our lives tend to be narrowly defined, putting us at even greater risk for unconscious myth running.

Filters are part of the SOP process. On any particular day I may feel out of sorts. If I typically tend to notice negative things, that habit may soon make me feel much worse. Living with that kind of default filter likely means telling myself an old story that essentially says that the world is a mess or dangerous and nothing is going right in my life. My lived experience, viewed through that negative filter, proves that I'm right, which in turn reinforces those beliefs in a loop that maintains the overall myth running my life. I can also choose to change my story, which takes extra effort and yet makes all the difference.

Words have power. The words we use reflect the way we perceive our world and create a telling map of our inner reality. Words shift the energetic field, and when strung together into combinations of new meaning, namely ideas, they change our world. Humans need biological stability, homeostasis, to survive. Psychologically we need congruence. When we hold a certain idea to be true, the body's system orients itself to perceive the world aligned with that "truth," filtering for those things we "know" to be "true." We act as if this idea were true in the world.

Yet that idea or myth might be constructive, or it might be hurtful and toxic. Toxic beliefs and myths have the power to railroad us into a life we might not have chosen with eyes and heart open. It is in reclaiming our power to undo the straightjacket of imposed myths that we give ourselves the permission to look for the good in the world as well as what needs changing, to perceive and create opportunities, and to follow our deepest longings.

It takes conscious discipline to inquire into myths. To excavate the terrain of a story and glean the real structure is a critical act. Deconstructing is essential, but not enough. We may finally decide what we don't want anymore; but what do we want instead? What kind of future can we cast our sight upon? What is it that causes our spirits to rise up and soar? It is the forward movement of creating new beliefs, new stories, and new myths to nourish us and our dreams that will save us and our world. How will you respond to the call?

As for me... having recognized my secret belief in the course of writing this article has been very powerful. After unconsciously manifesting its disempowering message for many years, I have entered into a process of creating and strengthening new beliefs that inspire me to create a better story, a more positive template, for the life I truly desire. See the Process article that follows for general instructions, along with an example of one way I am proceeding with this work.



Luz

Luz is an artist practicing many disciplines. What moves her spirit these days is the recognition of how powerfully our beliefs constrain or nourish our soul's development and our life's satisfaction. The long journey of writing this article birthed her intention to move this wisdom into the world.

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Process to gently change a belief/myth

by Luz

Recognize ~ that there's a part of you that believes a particular myth which has been running your life in a hurtful way. Determine your openness and readiness to explore it.

Luz – This myth has constrained my life for too long. It's time to really look at it. I'm ready.

Inquire ~ into this situation with fresh eyes. Suspend judgment. Explore the shape of this myth, using a range of intuitive, somatic, and analytical methods of perceiving what it is and how it came to be in your life.

Luz – My dreams are telling me that I don't fully live in my life. I feel worn down from its many challenges. Life has always felt edgy with too much work and too little ease and enjoyment. It seems that I've had to fight for everything I ever got. My parents often told me that life is hard. My dad feared I'd not be able to support myself after I changed my major to theatre. I learned to fear going for what I really loved and came to believe that I cannot have the life I desire.

Appreciate ~ that this belief has served some useful purpose in an earlier phase of your life. The fact that you are now aware of its limitations for your current life is good news. You can now better calibrate how you want to show up for yourself. Let yourself wonder what a part of you might be offering with this myth, in a larger context. Dig under the surface. What is its highest sacred intention for you? There are many behavioral ways to manifest a sacred intention... to "kiss the ground."

Luz – This is a tough question. As a young graduate, I did not yet have enough life exposure to even know what all I might want. I felt overwhelmed by my intense feelings and was pained yet proud by how differently I showed up compared to other people. My life seemed surreal. I wonder if this myth stopped me from making choices before I knew enough to choose well. Perhaps its intention was to protect me through buying me time until I was more experienced and self-aware. Sadly, I overused the myth for too long.

Align ~ yourself with that high sacred intention. Create a temple within which to meet that part of yourself that has believed this particular myth as the way of achieving that sacred intention. Honor that part of you for its past benevolent service.

Luz – I can feel the congruence of the logic inherent in this myth. I do want protection from doing stupid things that are not good for me. An internal pause button can be a good thing! I do appreciate that part of me that took care of me in this way all those years. And I need a different expression of that caring protection in my life now.

Transform ~ Make common cause with that part of you to create new options for achieving that sacred intention by using a new empowering myth/belief. A simple shared commitment can seal the alliance. What new belief would best serve your life now? In what way might you need to update the operating system for your life?

Luz – Wow, an upgrade captures the kind of shift I want! I can agree to being protected by keeping the pause button, but the choosing criteria must be broader, given my greater wisdom now. I want more liberty to exercise greater agency to create the life I want. I feel a need to reassure myself that I deserve this more fulfilling life. A fitting new belief might be something like: I can/will use my wisdom and intuition to create a luscious life that fills me with joy. I'll live with that awhile and tweak it as needed.

Invoke ~ your heart, will, passion, and values. Engage forces to assist you – gods/goddesses, nature, your unconscious, etc. Visualize yourself already having the new empowering belief that truly serves your sacred intention and rebalances your life. State the new belief in one easy sentence, using simple words. In your mind's eye notice yourself behaving in new ways that enact that intention. Use all your sensory channels to make this [future] experience a reality NOW. You are already living it NOW. You're seeing [visual] what it's like to act from this new belief. You're

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Process for changing a myth

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hearing [auditory] what's around you when you act in this new way, and hearing different self-talk. You're feeling [kinesthetic] your new emotions and perhaps physical sensations as you go about living in this new way. You're smelling [olfactory] and tasting [gustatory] the delicious different life you now lead.

Feel all this strongly and vividly. Play it out in your mind's eye, seeing yourself acting in new ways through the coming days and weeks, in specific situations when you anticipate such a new belief will be valuable for you. See it, hear it, feel it, smell it, taste it. Make it totally sensory-based and real for yourself. When you're ready, come back to the room and be in present time, knowing that this new life is already here... in your next breath and all the ones to follow.

Luz – I hold the belief that I can/will use my wisdom and intuition to create a luscious life that fills me with joy. I feel the fire with me. I invoke Isis, the great Goddess of transformation, among other energies. When I actually use this process, I feel the magnetic pull toward that future enriching life. I know that perceiving my new life in such a compelling, tangible way always helps me flow into this new reality. It feels really good.

And is this not magic?! Find the life that is already calling you. Create a belief that engages you to go live that new life. Do it NOW!

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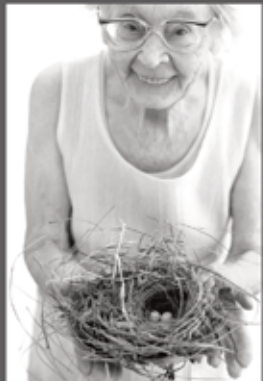
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Meanwhile, you can submit articles, photographs, graphics, mini-reviews, fan mail, chocolate, etc at any time. The sooner you send something, the sooner we can start trying to work it into the next issue.

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For more information, contact George,
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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