



Living the Dream: Letter from the Editor

by Anne Newkirk Niven

*Everything is so uncertain,
All happening to you in a whirl,
that's the beauty and the hurting
of living in a maybe world.*

— “*Maybe World*”
Mary Chapin Carpenter

As I walk down the hill to work early this Memorial Day morning, the sun is just beginning to peek over the hills of the Coast Range. The air, perfectly still, cool and scented with rosemary, is filled with birds: a flock of sparrows dive-bombing an encroaching crow, amber-chested barn swallows curving like arrows, and the long, high vee of migrating geese headed north. It's an idyllic scene, but one which only partially soothes my tattered heart; for this Memorial Day I have more people to remember than I'd really prefer.

Memorial Day, (originally called “Decoration Day”) was created after the U.S. Civil War to commemorate the war dead on both sides, but it now includes remembrance of all our beloved dead. It may seem an odd holiday for late spring, but as I drove past the Odd Fellows cemetery yesterday and noted the rows of graves reverently decorated with fresh flowers, I realized that this toasty-warm, near-summer day of barbecues, picnics, and the Indy 500 is truly our secular Day of the Dead.

The last year has been a pretty heart-wrenching one here in our tiny California village, and frankly, I'd be delighted to offer the Grim Reaper a one-way ticket out of town.

The first death that rocked our town was that of Marc Lappé last Mother's Day at the age of sixty-two. It seemed like a cruel joke to lose Marc to brain cancer, for as a pathologist, expert witness, and health crusader, he spent much of his life fighting against the toxic contamination of our food, bodies, and eco-systems. Marc's illness and death tore a gaping hole in the charter school our three sons attend, where he was a well-loved volunteer, board member, and teacher. A courageous and world-renowned champion for justice, a towering intellect, and a gracious and generous man, Marc was someone that the world could scarcely afford to lose.

The second death was even worse. Doug and Barbara Burkey opened the Point Arena Bakery about a decade ago and their hand-made Parisian pastries and breads became a much-appreciated part of village life. When they closed the bakery and moved away a few years later, we felt their absence keenly. So it was with great excitement that we learned of their daughter Franny's plan to return to Point Arena and continue in the family business. But our joy was short-lived: on the very day in early April that Franny reopened the bakery, her little brother Adrian drove to the windswept dunes of nearby Manchester State Beach, drew a mandala in the sand, stepped into its center and shot himself. Adrian (whom we all knew as “Addy”) was only nineteen years old.

This blow went deeper and sharper than the first and left many of us — especially those of us who are parents — with a sick feeling of anxiety. How could such a brilliant young man end his life before it had even begun? I shuddered inside at the thought of losing a son this way.

Last, but hardly least, was the death of Mike (“Shadow”) Rieke, the close friend and house mate of my neighbor Lauren Sinnott. A virtuoso surfer who mentored and assisted many others in these wild and often-treacherous waters, Shadow drowned for no apparent reason while surfing on a perfect spring day in Arena Cove a few weeks after Addy died. One moment, he was a warm and welcome presence in our lives and the next, at the age of forty-nine, he was gone. This, too seemed a death without purpose, a gentle man swept away in his prime.

What made these deaths so wrenching is that each of them took me by surprise. Like most people, I like a planned, orderly life, one in which I have time to integrate change and smooth out the rough edges before accepting the new. But my life doesn't seem to come in gentle, soothing transitions, instead, it lurches forward in jolts of ecstasy, anxiety, anger, love, lust, shock, and joy all rolled up into a pretty crazy and confusing mix. It's difficult to keep your balance if the waves, the wind, and even the sand under your feet are shifting all the time. How can we possibly find harmony in a world like this?

The only way I know how to keep my feet under me is to consciously, continuously weave myself together with others, like spiders mending an enormous web. Surprisingly, sometimes, it is the most mundane activities that can do the most good.

Like many small towns all over, Memorial Day here is the occasion for that great American tradition, the fund-raising barbecue. For several years I have volunteered at our local incarnation of this icon: the Garcia Fire & Rescue Lamb and Pig Barbecue. It seemed to me as I contemplated this year's event that it might be a bit of a downer, since many of the stalwart volunteers hauling charcoal, slinging baked beans, and selling raffle tickets would be the very same people who were first responders on the scene for every trauma that savaged our hearts this year.

Yet, when I and my two eldest sons (whom I dragooned into duty on the promise of augmenting the "community service hours" they needed for graduation) arrived, the cavernous Veteran's Memorial building was anything but gloomy. We were immediately put to work on the serving line, and spent the next two hours dishing out applesauce, potato salad, greens, ranch dressing, and sourdough bread to our friends, neighbors, and the random knots of tourists who just happened by, attracted by the overflowing parking lot. It was a jovial crowd, filled mostly with spry (or not-so-spry) seniors, and sprinkled liberally with pods of teenagers (nervously checking to see if any of their peers had spotted them), besotted young couples, and parents toting toddlers on their hips while they tried to balance their overloaded plates or chased their squirrely offspring around the building.

The noise was near-deafening: kids squealing, an auctioneer hawking some donation or other over the microphone; pots clattering in the kitchen; and, underneath it all, the buzzing drone of a hundred different conversations happening at the same time. Mark's widow Jacqueline was there, as was Franny Burkey, and many of Shadow's surfing buddies. All of us had been to far too many memorial services in the last year; and yet, here we were, touching, eating, talking, and hugging, occasionally wiping away a tear from our eyes. It was pure cacophony, and yet, it was harmony: a harmony made up of all of us weaving wildly to repair the web of community which fate seemed determined to destroy.

Faith, it is said, is the proof of things not seen. All of us were there that day, eating, cooking, talking because we had faith; not religious faith, as such, but faith nonetheless — faith that what we feel when we connect is real; faith that life and love are not futile or fantastical, and faith that when we look into each other's eyes, the person who looks back at us is infinitely precious to the universe, just as we are. I could not see the Goddess that afternoon on the serving line, but it was crystal clear to me that She was there, just as surely as if She had appeared to us in a pillar of shimmering light.

The answer, it now seems to me, is that we find harmony in precisely the moments which we are confronted with all the evidence to support despair — and choose to embrace hope instead.

May the Goddess bring harmony to us all. Blessed be,



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Editorial Notes

We encourage all Goddess-friendly women to submit to us. You do *not* need to be a published author to write for *SageWoman*. Most of our articles come from our readers!

SageWoman accepts non-fiction submissions from women only, while *PanGaia*, *The Blessed Bee*, and *newWitch* accept both fiction and non-fiction from all genders.

Please submit *SageWoman* articles directly to our new Managing Editor Cristina Eisenberg; via email (preferred) to: meditor@sagewoman.com. By postal mail, send submissions to our main address: SageWoman, P. O. Box 641, Point Arena, CA 95468.

#72, "Visions of Goddess: Warrior" Deadline Aug. 1, '06

This, the first aspect of the Goddess, is often called "Maiden" and embodies raw, unbridled energy. In this issue, we name her "warrior" and salute both her power and her gifts of energy and new life in women of all ages. Please share your stories, poems, and rituals about this aspect of the Goddess and yourself.

#73, "Visions of Goddess: Mother" Deadline Nov. 1, '06

Motherhood is a state of mind and spirit whether we give birth to physical offspring through our bodies or not. This issue is intended to explore and celebrate the many ways we all experience the relationship between "Mother" and "Child." Please tell us about your experience of yourself — or the Goddess, or both — as Mother.

Coming in 2007 and beyond

- #74: *Visions of Goddess — Queen*
- #75: *Visions of Goddess — Priestess*
- #76: *Surrender & Awakening*
- #77: *The Stars*
- #78: *The Wheel of the Year*