



## Living the Dream: Letter from the Editor

by Anne Newkirk Niven

*“Surrender, Dorothy!”*

— Written above the Emerald City  
by the Wicked Witch of the West,  
*The Wizard of Oz*

*“Never give up, never surrender!”*

— Cmdr. Peter Quincy Taggart,  
*Galaxy Quest*

I’ve strived most of my life *not* to be a quitter, and built my ego around a self-image of a scrappy, never-say-die fighter. I projected this can-do attitude whenever possible; when complimented on an accomplishment, my retort was a snappy (and, as I now observe, self-deprecating) “We try!” Growing up in a family dominated by endless conflict and overshadows by my mother’s slow but inexorable descent into agoraphobia, I was determined not to be one of “those people” who let life beat them down.

Besides, being a fighter was all I knew; I didn’t know how to stop working, stop striving, stop with the “keep-on-keeping-on” mantra. My fighter-self had saved my life as a child; against many difficulties she stiffened my spine, straightened my gait, and held up my head. But then came pregnancy, a growing family, and my own bouts with depression, anxiety, and panic attacks. Despite my best efforts; a series of nurturing, but relatively short-lived counseling relationships; and the best herbal (and pharmaceutical) remedies money could buy, I saw myself sliding steadily towards the abyss that had claimed my mother.

Last year at this time, I was very, very unhappy. I had developed a paralyzing dependency on my husband Alan and could not let him out of my sight for no more than a few minutes before panic symptoms set in. My illness, together with power imbalances between us that dated all the way back to the beginnings of our relationship, were steadily eroding the foundations of our marriage. Our eldest son, Arthur, was about to enter college and seemed none too happy about it. (I found this incomprehensible, since I’d spent my entire high school career salivating at the prospect of leaving home.)

Late last August, as I stood talking with my sister Sandra outside the quaint little motel in which our family was staying during Arthur’s college orientation, I broke down in tears. “I don’t know how much longer I can do this,” I sobbed, my heart breaking. I just wanted to rest, to nestle, to stop feeling so afraid.

Part of my problem stemmed from being bored to tears with Point Arena. All our efforts to move — trips to Scotland, New Zealand, Australia and even an expensive, but abortive attempt to emigrate to Canada — had come to naught. As Sandra bid me a worried farewell that evening, I tried, yet again, to prop myself up. I went inside the motel and promptly got into an argument over which of the dozen or so houses that the nice real estate lady had suggested to us that afternoon we would visit the next morning.

The whole topic of moving was beginning to get me down, particularly the subject of returning to the Pacific Northwest. I’d been jonesing to move back to Portland ever since I left after completing college in the early ’80s, but it seemed that my triple-Earth-sign darling simply couldn’t be budged.

Not that I didn’t have good friends and a supportive community on the South Coast. It just wasn’t *home*, and I was beginning to feel more than a little root-bound. But our attempts as a family to move had consistently raised, then dashed, my hopes; heck, I’d personally ix-nayed our investigations of Tacoma, Port Townsend, and Olympia as well as Monterey and Santa Cruz, so I was hardly blameless in the “yes-we-are-going-to-move — oops, no-we-aren’t” tango that we seemed stuck in. In short, I felt trapped between my own needs and those of my true one love — and choosing between them was destroying me.

The next morning, I left the two younger boys sleeping in the motel room while Alan and I checked the last item off our “to-do” list: looking at real estate. The first four houses did nothing for us; each one seemed too small, too precious, too — well, too *something* — to even consider. Then we drove up to the last house on the list, the one with the world’s ugliest sales photo: a rusty white flagpole mid-frame dominating an overgrown, dirt-green painted ranch house. Ugh. Why were we even looking at this monstrosity?

When we got out of the car I could see that the siting of the house was beautiful, but the unkempt tangle of vegetation in the front yard still put me off. We opened the front door to find an expanse of dark paneling leading into a sunken living room. It had a fireplace and floor-to-ceiling windows facing an oak and rhododendron laden forest. I noted how dark the hallway and living room were, and said to the agent, "This house would be a masterpiece in the right hands — but it's not for us." What I hadn't noticed was that Alan was snapping pictures like a man possessed. While I was busy denigrating the house — I had already mentally named it "The Bat Cave" — he had fallen mightily in love.

As we toured the house, I noted that it had plenty of room for our family of five and a perfect upstairs-downstairs live-and-work environment. But in my head, I didn't want our next — final? Since it had been so hard to move once, would it ever happen again? — home to be a daylight ranch in a suburb. I wanted a classic three-story Victorian in the heart of the city loaded with filigreed gingerbread, leaded glass windows and built-in bookshelves. I knew what my dream house looked like — and this wasn't it.

But I did agree to get our sons' opinions. That was a bit of a cheat on my part — I didn't think they'd like the house — but the minute we brought them in, they loved it. On the drive back to California, later that day, we debated: did we *really* want to move to that house, in that town? I wasn't sure.

But then I had an epiphany: Alan couldn't just be running *away* from something (like I was) — he had to be moving *towards* something. If I really wanted to move, I had to say "yes" to the Bat Cave.

So I surrendered: I said, "Yes, I can give up my preconceptions; yes, I can open my heart to something I hadn't planned for, and hadn't imagined. Yes, let's buy this house." By the time we reached Point Arena, we were ready to make an offer.

That one act of "letting go and letting Goddess" (as they say) started a snowball of surrender. Once I said "yes" (the Goddess made it clear that She approved of our choice) all that I could do for the next six months was hang on for the ride. Things actually got rougher from there, and are only now starting to look up: there were months of delays and false starts that endangered the sale; something like sixteen grueling 800 mile trips up-and-down Highway 101; and, most devastating of all, the chaos made it almost impossible to publish issues, which led to almost six months without income (ack!) But by deciding to ride — rather than resist — the wave of change that the Goddess had sent us, I opened myself to a whole new life.

That surrender, that opening up led to others: to Alan driving back to Oregon from California alone without me freaking out; to taking up Aikido, and bicycling and gardening, pursuits I hadn't entertained before I moved.

Last weekend, my sister visited again; she told me that I looked softer around the eyes, and rounder all over. The house? She dubbed it "The Tree House" for its intimate connection with the oak, redwood, and rhododendron, and we spent most of our weekend just relaxing on my back porch. I agreed: that name beats "The Bat Cave" any day.

I'm glad to be home at last.



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## Editorial Notes

We encourage all Goddess-loving women to write for *SageWoman*. Most of our articles come from our readers! *SageWoman* accepts non-fiction submissions from women only, while *PanGaia* and *newWitch* accept both fiction and non-fiction from all genders. Our new magazine *Crone: Women Coming of Age* will debut in Autumn 2008 and will accept material from women 49+ years of age. To submit to *Crone*, please use *SageWoman* contact information below; put "for *Crone*" in your subject header or on your manuscript if submitting by mail.

Please submit *SageWoman* articles directly to Anne Newkirk Niven; via email (preferred) to: editor2@sagewoman.com. By postal mail, send submissions to our main address: SageWoman, P. O. Box 687, Forest Grove, OR 97116.

### #77, "New Beginnings" Deadline Jan. 1, 2009

It's difficult to integrate something brand new; there are risks, as well as opportunities everytime we step outside our comfort zone. But our need for growth, for adventure, even for life itself, at times demands we leave the familiar behind. Please share with us your experiences of stepping into the new.

### #78, "Longing and Desire" Deadline April. 1, 2009

Life sometimes holds something (or someone) we want just out of reach; the resulting passion can result in transformation — or destruction. Tell us your stories of the gap between potential and consummation; did the Goddess help you bridge it, let go of your desire, or something else, perhaps completely unexpected?

### Coming soon

#79: *Finding Our Balance*  
#80: *Mother Gaia*