

SageWoman

Celebrating the Goddess in Every Woman



Herbal Goddess

**Celtic Traditional Plant Magic · A Sisterhood of Healers
Meet the Nordic Healing Goddess "Eir" · A Passion for Plants
Seduced by the Greenwood · Moon-Centered Herbalism**



Living the Dream: Letter from the Editor

by Anne Newkirk Niven

Healing is an art, not a science. For countless generations we carried the wisdom and magic of healing within ourselves. Working with herbs is one of the steps towards rediscovering that tradition, and to reclaiming our place as wise women.

Rosemary Gladstar,
Herbal Healing for Women

I was about twelve when I first considered taking my healthcare into my own hands. In the early 1970s, medicine was considered an occult discipline: a field of hidden, expert knowledge presided over by a cadre of omniscient (and always male) initiates. But when my father was inexplicably stricken with Bell's palsy, the first crack in that illusion appeared. While my mother and I painstakingly combed the onionskin-thin pages of the heavy red hardback *Physician's Desk Reference* for information on the bewildering series of ineffectual drugs prescribed by our physician, I remember having a heretical thought: maybe the doctors didn't know how to fix my father.

During the following decade, this heretical thought was confirmed as I watched my dad slowly fade from beefy red vitality into a grey, shrunken shell of himself. My mother's obsession with his dizzying array of ailments was one of the few ways she demonstrated her love for my father, but her inability to slow his descent into disability (and finally, premature death at age fifty) was hampered by her layperson's lack of knowledge and utter lack of agency to influence his care.

I was appalled by the way in which information about my father's condition was parcelled out to us on a "need-to-know" basis. I vowed to do better and confidently signed up to major in pre-med as an undergraduate. But my hopes were dashed in my first semester by my utter bewilderment when faced with organic chemistry. I soon switched majors (first to political science and then to religion) and regretfully consigned the field of medicine to the white-coated professionals.

Years passed, but I never completely lost my interest in the healing arts. Concentrating on spirituality (first in training to be a Methodist pastor and then pursuing consecration as a priestess of the Goddess) became my way of channeling my desire to bring healing into the world and my overwhelming need to "make a difference."

During my first year in Point Arena, I heard about Rosemary Gladstar's California School of Herbal Studies and signed up to take a one-day class with the practical title of Herbal Cold Care. On an El Nino rain-drenched December morning, I drove the hundred-plus winding miles down Highway One to find Rosemary's hidden nest tucked off the highway between Guerneville and Forestville.

I don't recall many specifics of that class, but I hold my impressions of Rosemary's wise and wonderful demeanor in cherished memory. She was down-to-earth, approachable, and eager to share her knowledge: the polar opposite of the stiff, guarded, and off-putting approach of every doctor I had ever met.

Enchanted, I took another class from Rosemary, and even briefly considered the idea of pursuing a career as a herbalist. But I was fresh out of graduate school at the time and already up to my eye teeth in educational debt, so I pushed the idea to the back of my mind. Before long I was married, and shortly after that, pregnant with our first child. Traveling long-distances and taking time away from family (not to mention paid work) seemed self-indulgent, risky, and impractical. (Instead, I became the publisher of this magazine.)

We were too poor to afford health insurance but too proud (and ignorant) to apply for Medi-Cal, so we improvised. I devoured every book on herbal pregnancy that I could find, planned to give birth at home, and paid the "all-included" fee for a nurse midwife. Fortunately all three of our sons had uncomplicated homebirths presided over by amazing midwives Carla Stange and Suzun Wells. (A wonderful set of birthing stories from their practice can be found at www.mendocinomidwife.com/birthtales.html.)

Giving birth at home with minimal medical intervention was very empowering, and reinforced my burgeoning confidence in my ability to provide healing to our growing family. Shortly thereafter, we were fortunate enough to discover Diane Harris, a local family practice physician. Unlike any other doctor I have been a patient of before or since, Diane treated our ideas with respect, and she was our family's partner in health for almost a decade until she moved her practice.

That period was the pinnacle of cooperation in our family's healthcare. I used herbal teas, tinctures, and other holistic remedies on a regular basis, but deferred to Diane's wisdom when push came to shove. Together we got through a whirlwind of medical crises: newborn jaundice, asthma, febrile seizures, a broken arm, tick bites, not one but two emergency appendectomies, and all the interminable sore throats, tummy aches, colds, and flus normal to the raising of three active young boys.

Even my disconcerting bout with Bell's palsy didn't shake my self-image as a healthy person. I chose to incorporate alternative healing during that experience by seeing a friend who did a form of energy healing; a few years later during the worst of my battle with panic attacks, I received great comfort and healing from the reiki treatments administered by another friend. But after Diane left for Mendocino (and we moved to Oregon, for that matter) things changed.

Happily, our children have grown up healthy and strong. But just as I reached middle age and my familial health issues started to emerge, my access to medical care has faltered. Being diagnosed with diabetes (and losing our health insurance soon thereafter) set in motion a cascade of events that left me without a doctor just when I needed advice and support. Last spring I signed up for a free clinical trial of diabetes treatments through the Oregon Health Science University, but six months later I was released from the study when it became obvious that the assigned protocol was making my glucose control worse rather than better.

After spending a few miserable days floundering about in a miasma of depression, I remembered the crucial lesson that Rosemary Gladstar had imparted all those years ago: *you are your own best healer*. I decided that I needed to decide for myself what was best for my health — and go out and get it.

The internet yielded a dizzying array of healing modalities including plant medicines from both Ayurvedic and Western systems. I switched to a very low-carbohydrate diet, began testing my blood sugar multiple times a day, and put more exercise and several plant medicines into my regime.

I noticed beneficial changes in my glucose levels right away, but within a few weeks it became obvious that these efforts alone weren't going to achieve my goals. So I dug deeper: reading best-practice protocols and professional articles on diabetes care, I discovered that several older forms of insulin were available inexpensively and *without a prescription* in my state. So, taking a cue from the gutsy attitude of lay healers everywhere, I bought a vial of intermediate-acting insulin and a package of syringes from WalMart.

I'll admit, I was trembling as I sat on my bed with that little bottle in my hand. I knew that what I was contemplating was radical, even dangerous. But the time had come to decide if I could trust my own judgement. I took a deep breath, held it, and injected a wee little dram of insulin into my abdomen.

That was about three months ago, and I've been using insulin (along with my previous regime) ever since. I finally checked in with a doctor, and test results confirmed that my self-management efforts are keeping my blood sugars under excellent control.

While my solution isn't for everyone (I can't recommend it to *anyone*) my journey has brought me back to a place of empowerment and balance with my own body. I am once again engaged in my own healing, of body, mind, and spirit.

Peace and joy to all,



ANNE NEWKIRK NIVEN is the Editor of SageWoman, Witches&Pagans, and Crone magazines. She and her family make their home in Forest Grove, Oregon.

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; *Witches&Pagans* accepts both fiction and non-fiction from all genders; and *Crone: Women Coming of Age* accepts material from women 49 years and up. *SageWoman* publishes primarily first-person prose written to our announced themes.

The most reliable way to reach us online is to use the contact form at www.bbcontact.com to ask for our current editorial email or to query about a potential article. You can also call 888-724-3966, or write via postal mail to: SageWoman, P. O. Box 687, Forest Grove, OR 97116.

Next issue #86 "Renewal & Rebirth" Deadline has passed.

#87 "Sacred Landscapes" Deadline April 1, 2014

Some places are just *special* — landscapes that make us sigh with relief, uncurl our tensions, and open up to the Goddess. In this issue, please tell us about the place(s) that you find magical — whether they are on land, sea, or air. Stories of travel to exotic locations are welcome, but we'd also love to hear about how you find sacred environs where you live.

#88 "Serenity" Deadline July 1, 2014

It's been said that we live in an "Age of Anxiety" and with the multitude of rapid-fire change and "always on" stimulation, it's no wonder. Please share your stories of finding peace — or at least, equanimity — in your life. Daily rituals, big and small, are especially invited.

Coming Soon:

#89: *Roots & Wings*

#90: *Telling Our Stories*

#91: *The Magic of Trees*



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