

SageWoman

Celebrating the Goddess in Every Woman

Renewal & Rebirth

Safe in Freya's Arms • The Healing Cloak of Womanhood
At Hestia's Hearth • On the Beach with Yemaya
Walking the Spiral Path • Kali Maa: Dancing with the Dark

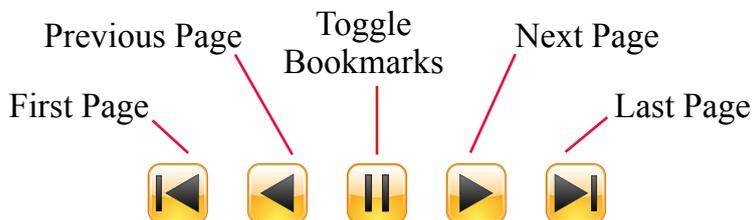
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Living the Dream: Letter from the Editor

by Anne Newkirk Niven

*I only pray at night —
when the world disappears
put away and out of sight —
I confront my fears.
I am proud, I am strong,
I'm endowed just as long
as it's light.
I only pray at night.*

John Fulbright,
"I only pray at night"
From the Ground Up

While I am thrilled to midwife the stories of others, I often feel insecure when discussing my own healing. I should know better: if there's one thing I've learned from *SageWoman*, it's that sharing our stories is one of our most empowering gifts. So here goes.

My childhood trauma still defines me in many ways, but sharing those details again seems like repeating a worn-out tale. Suffice it to say my family culture included both mental illness and domestic violence, and the responsibilities of an adult were balanced on my thin shoulders from an early age.

Church was our only approved social connection and I soaked up the unconditional love that I found there like a drought-stressed plant. The God of liberal, Protestant Christianity of late 20th century didn't shame or condemn me, and I was happiest when I believed I was serving Him.

I did have enough self-reflection to know that there was something terribly wrong with me: the dark hound of depression that dogged my every step and the panic attacks that woke me in the middle of the night proved that.

Like many young adults, I blamed my parents for my pain. Longing for college as if I was going to be released from prison, I assumed that putting distance between me and them would release my spirit to soar. Going away to college did alleviate much of my distress, but dark shadows lurked just below the surface. Fearful of a call from home that portended disaster, I could be triggered into a panic attack by the sound of the pay phone ringing down the hall, and a bad grade or a relationship breakup could make me suicidal.

After graduation, I spent a torturous year living back home with my parents. Once again I turned to God, and decided to attend seminary in California. Then, the surprise: during my first year of seminary I discovered the Goddess. I quickly became a born-again Pagan: here was the bountiful Mother that I had always needed! However, code-switching from Team Jesus to Goddess spirituality didn't change my mental habits: I still believed that my service to Deity would lead to the solace I sought.

For a brief period, it appeared that my devotion to the Goddess had paid off, albeit in an uncomfortably tragic way: within three years of my conversion, both of my parents died (of natural causes.) I was grief-stricken, but also breathed a sigh of guilty relief.

I pressed ahead with my life of freedom and independence. Within a year of settling my parent's estate, I was married, and in another year I was pregnant with our first son. *Shadows of the past buried: happily-ever-after-life, here I come.* Or so I fantasized.

But my parents' departure from my life wasn't the anodyne I had imagined. My worry habit simply switched targets from my parents to my husband and children, and my depression rebounded with a vengeance. To my dismay, I discovered that faith in the Goddess was no more of a "get-out-of-depression-free" card than belief in G-O-D or His Kid had been. For a time I wondered if I'd made a terrible mistake: perhaps Jehovah was the only god who could fix me. Or worse yet, was irredeemably broken, with no hope in this world or any other?

What saved me at that moment wasn't faith, but love: I couldn't bear the thought of leaving my children motherless. Nor could I continue to live in unbearable pain, infecting my family worrying about my mental illness. I simply *had* to get well, if for no other reason than to break the cycle.

The rest of the story is somewhat anti-climatic. Over time, I developed a regime of self-care, medical (and alternative) treatments, and therapy. I also re-energized my relationship with the Goddess, in large part through my work with *SageWoman*. Today, I am in remission and relatively stable in my recovery, which is an amazing blessing.

Another of my blessings (trust me, these topics *do* connect) is strawberry-picking season. I first picked berries when I was only twelve. It was my first opportunity to be trusted on my own for a few hours, and I've associated picking (and eating) those fragile summer berries with freedom ever since. So Sunday I headed over to the local farm in my annual pilgrimage.

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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* publishes primarily first-person prose written by woman to our announced themes.

Visit www.SageWoman.com for writing guidelines, subscriptions and blog links. You can also call 888-724-3966, or write via postal mail to: SageWoman, P. O. Box 687, Forest Grove, OR 97116.

Next issue #87 "Sacred Lands" Deadline is past.

#88 "Serenity" Deadline October 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, serenity and the centered place from which to act. Daily rituals, big and small, are especially invited.

Coming Soon:

#90: *Roots & Wings*

#91: *The Magic of Trees*

When I arrived at Tom's Berries, I checked in with the young woman working at the fruit stand who was to walk me out to the designated fields. Berry-picking is a cherished summer outing for many local families, and I immediately noticed one field awash with children running up and down the rows under the wary eyes of their parents. I thought that surely this field would be our destination.

But instead, my guide stopped abruptly in front of what looked to be a barren field. "We've got two varieties of strawberries right now," she explained. "That one," she said, gesturing towards the field swarming with children, "is our Albion strawberry field. They are large, sweet, and \$1.60 a pound." Then she pointed at the area directly in front of us. "In this field we have some Tillamook berries. They are small, and you'll have to search for them, but there's plenty. They are \$1 a pound." With that, she turned and walked away, leaving me to my decision.

I looked down at the field in front of me. First, I noticed the weeds: tall fescue grass waving wheaty seed-heads next to clumps of white-flowered wild radish. Then I knelt, and saw the mounds of cranesbill geranium, its bright green foliage contrasting sharply with the magenta stems. It was only when I put my head right down on the ground that I spotted the tiny strawberry plants nestled under the cranesbill; each fruit about the size of my thumbnail, and flecked with gray, fine-grained dust.

It wasn't much of a choice: a field of glossy, fragrant plants versus a neglected stretch of dusty ground. But something about those reclusive berries appealed to my inner forager. They were survivors, and I whimsically imagined that they would enjoy being harvested by a kindred spirit. I picked and tasted one, and it exploded in my mouth with the tart sweetness that only a perfect strawberry can deliver.

So I settled down and began picking. Instead of straddling the rows and picking from above, I laid on my side, searching for berries from a bug's eye view and picking from the ground up. I worked there in peace and solitude for over an hour: every other group that was given the tour chose to pick from the bountiful plot next door. So it was just me, the wildflowers, berries, and a few brilliant-hued lady beetles. I finally stopped — tired, dirty, and filled with joy — when I had picked two gallons.

As I turned in my berries for weighing, I asked the farm-stand lady for the story of the straggly field. She told me that the plants there were considered too old to bear fruit and were scheduled to be plowed under and replanted at the end of the season. No one had expected anything to happen there this year. But — watered by the rain and protected from pests only by the weeds that proliferated in the absence of tilling — they had blossomed and fruited against all odds.

That afternoon as I drove home, I felt the unmistakable hand of the Goddess on my shoulder. I realized that the resilient strawberry field reflected the process that so many of us experience in our lives. Our healing doesn't necessarily come in a sudden overwhelming burst of revelation, but through simple, down-to-earth persistence, learning to depend on the quiet rain of the Goddess, growing and bearing fruit where no one even expects us to survive.

In this issue, I have gathered stories of renewal, recovery, and rebirth that spoke to my heart. I hope you find your own heart opened, nourished, and well-filled by them as well.

Namaste,



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