



Living the Dream: Letter from the Editor

by Anne Newkirk Niven

*"No one knows where they belong
The search just goes on and on and on
For every choice that ends up wrong
Another one's right."*

— *"Late for Your Life"*
Mary Chapin Carpenter

It's a couple of days before Halloween here in Point Arena, and our little piece of the coast is bathed in that amber sunlight that doesn't seem to exist anywhere else but Northern California. The streets are still dry and dusty and the long thin strands of bleached pale grass rattle anxiously in the mercurial wind. You can practically taste it in the air: everything, everyone, is on edge, waiting. It is literally the calm before the storm: we are all waiting for the rain.

Up north, somewhere between Eureka and Portland, the Jet Stream has begun to do its winter work: the Pacific winds are barrelling in from the ocean bringing the clouds and cold and precipitation that marks the coda of summer. But here at the far southern edge of the temperate rain-forest, the monsoon season always takes its sweet time to begin. I'm torn between enjoying these last days of a lazy Indian summer and longing for the sound of raindrops hitting my windows. Among other things, the beginning of the monsoons means I'll be able to take as many baths as I want without worrying about the well going dry. It's a great time for Samhain: truly a Season of the Dead, for nothing will grow here now until the rains arrive.

We set the clocks back last night, giving back the hour of post-sunset daylight we stole last spring. In a single day we flipped from late, long sunlit evenings to the chill black nights of winter. Of course, the days have been growing shorter since the end of June, but somehow the night when Daylight Savings Time is taken away in one fell swoop always seems like the penultimate move into the Dark Side of the year to me.

In a few days, we'll be crazy busy popping forty pounds of popcorn for the trick-or-treaters. We decided years ago to give up on candy, 'cuz we never could seem to anticipate how many kids would show up and we always either ended up with bags of sugary temptation to deal with for weeks, or ran dry before the streets emptied out for the evening. Popcorn is almost infinitely expandable if you keep someone working the old cast-iron pot on the stove. Besides, it smells great, and the kids love it — especially the lucky ones who get bags filled with slightly buttery, salty popcorn that's still *warm*.

I admit it: I like the goofy, slightly scary, carnival atmosphere of secular Halloween better than the somber rituals of a traditional Pagan Samhain. It's been many years since I went to a formal Samhain ritual. I find them emotionally exhausting: truth to tell, this time of year, when I am often working overtime to keep my head above water emotionally, is really no time for me to be breaking bread with other people's beloved dead.

But there is one thing I *do* like about Samhain: it gives me an excellent reason to step aside from the day-to-day ruckus and reflect on the passing of the year. My birthday is in October, too, so I've been reflective this time of year for as long as I can remember. It seems to me that Samhain Night, especially around midnight, truly *is* a moment between the worlds: a pause at the cusp of winter before the rush of the holidays descends upon us. Some years I welcome my beloved dead to my hearth, and some years I don't, but I always take a moment for reflection on the brevity and fragility of life.

Soon, it will be Thanksgiving — a holiday celebrated in early October in Canada where, by this season next year, I am likely to be living. Our family's application for Canadian residency — after more than a year-and-a-day stuck in a seemingly infinite queue — finally moved ahead last month, a development that took so long to manifest that I had pretty much given up on the whole idea. To my surprise, the news that our application was likely to be approved and the move could go forward hit us like the proverbial ton of bricks. Suddenly, the idea of picking up everything we own and moving ourselves a thousand miles north is becoming tangibly real.*

**Two days after Thanksgiving, Alan got "cold feet" — and we decided to withdraw our application. The reasons were too lengthy to discuss here, but they will no doubt be the subject of a future editorial.*

Change *is* coming to our lives, and there's not a darn thing we can do about it. Even if we stay right here in Point Arena, time has been slowly entwining its tendrils into the very foundations of our lives. Our eldest son, Arthur, is now a senior in high school (how did *that* happen?) and must, by necessity, leave Point Arena if he wishes to attend university — there's no college within a hundred miles. We watch, waiting to see what will draw him out of our home into the world, realizing that our second and third sons will follow him in only a few short years.

The changes that are flexing in our lives are neither good nor evil, but simply elemental: time moves on, children grow up, parents grow old, and people die. Both my husband and I now wear bifocals, and although we take a vigorous hike in the coastal hills every day, we are nonetheless feeling our age in ways that we just didn't do a year ago.

We're making the best of things, though: yesterday our entire family — plus a teenage friend of our sons we dragooned into service — spent three hours picking up litter along a two-mile stretch of Highway One. It was tough work: brambles, blackberries, and random strands of barbed wire clawed at our ankles; traffic sped by in packs, forcing us to step off the narrow shoulder into the ditch; and you wouldn't believe how heavy a bag full of empty beer bottles and discarded cigarette cartons — plus the occasional hubcap or license plate — can get.

It was dirty, exhausting work — and it felt great. Even our youngest — who was finally old enough to come along — admitted that he felt like we had accomplished something, even if the work was, in his words, “really annoying.” (I also bet that none of our sons will ever toss a beer bottle out of a moving vehicle!)

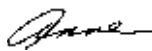
Having finished our work, we drove back home in chatty conversation, comparing who found the weirdest artifact; covered with grime, the whole lot of us was ready for our “once-a-week” baths, and we were pretty darn pooped. But we were also genuinely happy, and at ease with one another. We had that glow which comes from hard work done for a common goal; in fact, one might be tempted to say that we were feeling joyful. I know that, watching my boys and husband slurping down the frosty blueberry smoothies I had made as soon as we got home, that I can't really get any happier than I was at just that moment.

That's typical of joy: it creeps up on you when you are busy doing something else. Joy isn't a quality that can be achieved by pursuit: it catches you by surprise. The key is in being open to the experience when it shows up at your door.

Joy comes looking for me (and you) every day: I look up for a moment while washing the dishes, and see a hummingbird dancing outside my window like an animated rainbow. I can stop what I am doing and look, and accept a deep moment of bliss; or I can turn away, unmoved, or, even worse, never notice the window or the hummingbird at all. The Goddess leaves moments of joy like this scattered all around the world; the choice is mine whether to lean down and pick them up.

May you and yours, find your bliss this holiday season.

Blessings,



Anne Newkirk Niven is the Editor-in-Chief of SageWoman, PanGaia, and newWitch. She lives with her husband Alan and their three sons, Arthur, Aidan, and Andrew, in Point Arena, California.

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*, *The Blessed Bee*, and *newWitch* accept both fiction and non-fiction from all genders.

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 641, Point Arena, CA 95468.

#73, “Visions of Goddess: Mother” Extended Deadline Feb. 1, '07

Motherhood is a state of mind and spirit whether we give birth to physical offspring 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.

#73, “Visions of Goddess: Queen” Deadline May 1, '07

There comes a time in each woman's life when she asks, “Is this all I am? The roles I play, the goals I set, the relationships I have?” Although many are now exploring the role of “Queen” as relating to a specific time of life — that age roughly marked by menopause and bounded on either side by the “Mother” and the “Crone” respectively — the Queen is a part of all women's lives. Please explore the Queen you have known, loved, struggled with — and the Queen you are seeking to become.

Coming soon

#75: *Visions of Goddess* — Priestess

#76: *Surrender & Awakening*

#77: *The Stars*

#78: *The Wheel of the Year*