



DIANA'S GROVE

Between The Worlds Patterns of Possibility

Diana's Grove Mystery School

February 2004

Newsletter Volume 7

Number 2

Death

The sickle swings. Can you hear it? Can you hear the reaper's scythe? It is far away. The reaper is on the other side of the grain field. Rhythmic swings, the scythe cuts. Heavy in the reaper's hand, the weight of the blade makes the work lighter. Swish, swish, swish...death's steady gait liberates the grain. Between where I stand and where death does his work, a ripe field shimmers in the golden light. The field teems with life. Birds gather to eat the fallen grain. Insects buzz, their conversation is lazy and unhurried. Can't they hear the sickle? Don't they know their time is coming? I will run away. I will find a place to hide.

Death does not speed his pace to catch me. He doesn't slow it in response to my desire to live, to live forever. Swish, swish, swish...Death does his work. Liberating. He frees the grain from the stalk. He frees the stalk from the ground. All that falls will rise again.



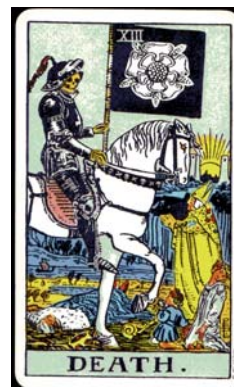
The thirteenth card in the Tarot takes the name Death. In the Crowley-Harris-Thoth deck, Death is the skeletal figure who swings the scythe. Just bones, only bones, the essential structure within form, what remains when everything is gone...that's death. Symbols of renewal lay at his feet - the snake, the lily, the Scorpion, a bulb - the keeper of tomorrow's blossom. A phoenix rises from his head. The scythe cuts the strings. What ties you to life? What ties you to time? To place? To hope? To vision? Who are you - no strings attached?

In the Rider-Waite-Smith deck, Death is the rider on the white horse. It isn't that he doesn't listen, but what he hears doesn't stop him. Death is the great equalizer. As blind as Justice, he cannot be stopped by money, age, beauty or spiritual connection - a whisper in the ear of the right deity. Death does not

negotiate. He cannot be flattered or bribed. He spares neither the innocent nor the pious.

A river runs through this card. Could it be the River Styx, the river that separates the land of the living from the land of the dead? The two towers that are in the Moon Card are in the background but, in this image, the sun, not the moon, is rising between them. The skeletal death figure carries a black banner imprinted with a white flower, fully open, a five-petaled rose. This flower and the rising sun represent the birth that is present at the time of death.

This card, Death, is in the middle of the process known as the Major Arcana. He isn't the end. I have always found that puzzling and informative. This card represents death, but not dying. He represents loss, the kind of loss that takes us to our bones. Those kinds of losses are a part of every life...we lose a job, a home, a relationship, an identity...sometimes we lose them all; all of the things that make us safe, give our life meaning and tell us who and



what we are...or were. Sometimes that kind of bone-finding loss comes when someone we love dies. Always - it comes always when someone we love dies. But it comes in other ways as well. As the Hanged One pointed out, with every choice...

...a reality dies; a reality is born - but not until March. Not until we find the bones and rise from their bare and timeless truth. That truth - form dies; all forms die. We are more than, and other than, the form that holds us. Thirteen is just past the center. It isn't the end of the process. The bones are bare, but they are strong, and timeless, and enduring. There are many deaths before we die.

Let Go, Let Death

by Canyon

What if I just let go?

What if I just released my grip and fell? The stalker waits, I know, scythe swinging. I am afraid...but not that Death will take my life; that's not Death's job description. Death will take me down to the bones of my life, the essence; down to what I need...only what I need.

That sounds positive but can I trust Death's discernment? That's a scythe, after all, not a scalpel. Such a blade can't possibly leave much behind. Will what remains be enough? I've always thought of extra padding as a good thing, whether on the body or in the budget. Protection, *lagniappe*, a little something extra for a rainy day; we all need some reserves for the lean years, don't we? And who can tell when that bag of 15 different lengths of phone cords will be needed? Surely it will come in handy some day....

Some of us are keepers; we save and store things in life, packed away safe and ready for any future need. I freely admit that I am one. I'm a keeper. I keep paid bills and bank statements and business records for five years, neatly labeled and filed. The IRS will be satisfied if I am ever audited. And I never lack for a container when I need one; my stores of empty boxes and empty bags are abundant. Paper or plastic? I have plenty of both. But I also keep clothes that I haven't worn for years, which don't fit and no longer match my fashion sense. In my basement, in my closets, in my dresser, on my bookshelves...my world is full of stuff that I haven't touched or used in years and may never need or want again. Dusty boxes unmarked by the fingerprints of now, do they occupy the spaces sought by what could be?

That this pattern goes beyond my environment is predictable. My brain, too, is full to its last crevasse with stored information. My mind carries much that is useful – a large vocabulary, memories both pleasant and painful, a vast body of professional knowledge stored from 27 years in my field, neatly labeled and filed. And...I still know my phone number from my last residence, which I left more than two years ago. I remember my street address from my first apartment in Bangor, lived in for only six months and abandoned in 1980. I can still reel off the names of the six siblings of my best friend from 10th grade, but I haven't seen or talked to her in over 30 years. What flashes of

insight, what bright new ideas drift by, disregarded, because they see no room at this mental inn?

Oh, and then there's my heart; it, too, holds so much from the past. I would not want Death's scythe to cut away my deep love for my friend Sara, although she has been dead for almost 10 years now. But must I still carry the pain of insults from the taunts of childhood's playgrounds? And this file folder filled with stories of betrayals large and small – how many more times do I need to sort through these, re-reading and re-affirming my righteousness? Could my cup be filled to overflowing with fresh feelings if these dregs were emptied?

My body is a storehouse, too. I carry over 100 extra pounds, even after releasing...no, losing 30. Those pounds were not released to Death's curved blade. I forced them off by the power of my will and, even now, keep perfect control over whether I keep or lose what remains. I have long thought of my generously padded body as a form of protection, a talisman that wards off the pain and terror that were childhood associates for sexual feelings. This heavy amulet stopped working years ago. Do I really need to keep walking through my days carrying the equivalent of three preschoolers? What strength and power could be mine if I set them down? How many more days, even years, could I eat...a surprise banquet served at what might have been the end of my life?

So much...I have stored so much stuff, around me, within me, on the frame of my essential bones.

What if I just let go?

What if I just released my grip and fell into Death's bony arms? I would feel safer if I could first see Death's end design...is it artful? Is Death a sculptor whose deft slices release the beauty of a form hidden within a cluttering matrix? I have seen chainsaws sculpt wood and ice into objects of beauty and charm. Marble and granite sculptors begin with large chisels and hammers to find exquisite form hidden in the rock. Why not trust my life to a scythe? Why not?

Okay, then. Here I go...my fingers are uncurling...ah! I am not taken, but make my choice. See you in Art's cauldron....

The Death of Ego

by star

The Hanged One asked me to hang out for a while on the World Tree. He asked me to see life, time, and fate from a different perspective. He flipped me upside down and suddenly everything was dissimilar, unfamiliar. The vision that I acquired betrayed what seemed to be everything I had known and held dear. That betrayal made me look again, re-spect, what I thought I had seen before. As I contemplated the nature of that betrayal, I wondered, "Who is actually betrayed here?" Further reflection helped me see that it is my ego that is betrayed, and not my Self. When someone I have been helping or teaching finds her own "sea legs," when a friend's life takes a different turn and he is no longer in my life in the same capacity, or when I realize that a value I have been standing on is something I now find inappropriate, I can feel betrayed. But it is really my sense of ego, of importance and fulfillment, that is betrayed.

My ego has a desperate fear of non-existence. That fear is the one thing that keeps me most tied to the safe and comfortable, or at least familiar, places in my life. When I say *ego* I am not talking about that arrogant part of me that makes me egotistic, or that psychic part of me that Freud explored...the ego, the id, and the super ego. I'm not even sure I know what that means. What I *am* talking about when I say *ego* is the piece of my knowing that tells me that I am separate from all of you, that I exist in space and time, that I have a past, a present and a future. It is the part of me that wears clothes...and masks. It is the part of me that thinks it needs to be *something*. It's the part of me that tells stories so that I can know who I am, who you are, what happened yesterday, my place in the world, and what I hope, or maybe fear, will happen tomorrow. And...it's that part of me that keeps me from being the all that I am.

The *all that I am*. What is that? Eastern religion might call it the void; physicists might agree and say that I am mostly just empty space. Some might even call it transcendence. I call it dissolution: when every fiber of my being is no longer my being, but the universal Being. It is in those moments that I check my ego at the door. It is in those moments that I can exist as the pure spirit that I inevitably am...nothing to define me except the spaciousness that I feel when I am in my center. No stories. No ego.

I have heard it told that we need that ego. I argue that myself. I say, "How can I have a relationship to my life if I don't tell stories about it? After all, isn't that why I incarnated – to have experiences, to feel the broken heart of true love gone awry, to know that I am me and you are you so that *we* can relate to *each other*,

to feel the sunlight and the rain?" These are things I struggle with, answers I do not have. What I do know is that darn Death card asks me *what is essential?* and I find myself standing in front of a closet full of dreams, deciding what to wear.

The stories in that closet hold me in so many ways. They keep me feeling in response to them, and confirm my weaknesses, my strengths, my friends and my foes. They confirm my past and create my future with an assurance that a place for my past will be held. They tell me what to expect and what to fear, what to look forward to and when *not* to hope. They keep me dancing in the safe embrace of my ego, skirting the edges of the all that I am.

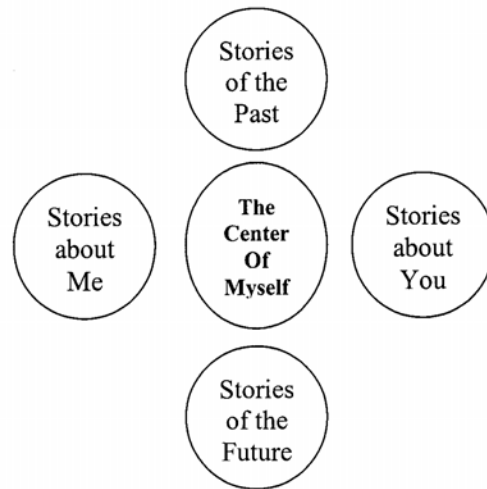
It is said that once you stand for something, you can no longer stand for everything. Quantum physics proposes that a 'thing' is not a 'thing' until we define it as such. Until we limit objects by saying "tree, dog, person, chair," they exist as swirling, ambiguous potential...pure energy. When something is nothing, it has the possibility of being anything. I wonder whether that's what I am when I stop identifying myself with my stories. That's the part that scares my ego, scares it so much that I run back to that closet and quickly find my favorite, comfortable sweater.

So here's a handy little trick I have learned. I ask myself, "And what would it feel like if I *didn't* tell this story?" Whatever that story may be...maybe it's the story of my life's purpose. Maybe it's the story of what I need from you; that I am OK if you will tell me I am. Maybe it's the story of my childhood, the one that carries forward into my future and what I expect from people. There is a plethora of stories that I use to walk through the world; they hang in the closet as I contemplate which one looks right with these shoes. At any moment, I can slip the current story on or off, like my favorite pair of faded old blue jeans...you know, the pair with all the holes. I can slip them down over my thighs and step out of those jeans, those stories. I can take off all those comfortable, familiar garments and stand naked with mySelf. *That* is what my ego is worried I will do.

There is a tool I have learned that helps me step out of those stories and into my center. My version of this tool is made of laminated disks. When I lay out those disks, my ego knows it is in trouble. I get up out of my chair and stand fully in the story I am telling. I feel it...I feel it on my skin, and on my soul. Then I step out of it and into the center of my existence...into a place where there are no stories, not even the ones I am telling that are true. Just because I choose to *not*

define myself with a story doesn't mean the story isn't true. I step to the center, a place of pure being where I am not defined, the place of utter innocence and total spaciousness where everything is new, everything is happening for the first time. There is no fetid air to rebreathe here.

Here is a diagram of that mandala...you can make your own. Color in little circles. Decorate them with your stories, your symbols, or just write them on separate pieces of paper and lay them out. The next time you find yourself in a story – a story of your pain, your past, your greatness, your future hopes and fears, or what you think or feel about another – I invite you to try this exercise and see how it feels for you. How does it feel to walk away from that closet of dreams, of responsibilities, of misunderstandings and desire, be naked with your Self? How does it feel if you *don't* tell the story?



Musings from Moon Shadows

by Jane Holt

"...death speaks loud and sure. 'Let the unimportant things fall away. Find the bones. What really matters?'"

What really matters to me, what is truly essential, is so important that I am afraid to ask for it. In fact, I am afraid to even tell myself what it is. I am afraid that, as soon as I say *this is what I want*, any hope of ever getting it will vanish. I have kept what really matters to me a secret since I was a child. I was told then that it was childish and I needed to grow up. I put myself away and got on with growing up, learning to be an adult, learning to think as those around me thought. I learned to care about what other people cared about.

When I was young I learned that if I wanted something I probably wouldn't get it. I was told that this is the way life is. People rarely get what they want. Life is about compromising.

I learned that it was too hard and too sad to really want something in particular. It is better to want a stuffed animal than a particular stuffed animal. I learned to be cautious with what I wanted, even with myself. And, today, I never trust that I will get what I want, especially if it is important to me. When I ask for something, I hold back a small piece of myself. I hold back enough of myself that I won't be heart broken if what I want doesn't happen. Each time I say *this really matters* or *I really want this in my life* I'm aware that I'm not really committed to what I'm saying. I'm

willing to walk the edge, often teetering back and forth, unstable and anxious, but I'm not willing to jump off.

That jump looks so high to the nine-year-old child who lives in my heart. Like the first time I sat on the edge of the high dive trying to will myself to let go and push off. My adult self, the one who lives in my brain, wants to know what is going to happen before I commit. The nine-year-old and my adult self sit here together looking over the edge. We've been sitting here a long time. I just noticed that the longer I sit here, the higher the cliff becomes. There is so much tension between my yearning for a different view of life and way of living and my need for the security of what I already know. Perhaps if I focused on the bones rather than the jump...?

What really matters? What is truly essential? I have to step back one question. For whom am I asking these questions? To whom does it really matter? Cautiously I peel off the layers: parents, siblings, teachers, neighbors, friends and intimate relationships, professions and life roles. I've borrowed from all of them. What is left is myself. I have actively avoided answering this question for many years. If I didn't know what really mattered to me, what was truly important for me, I wouldn't be disappointed if I couldn't have it. I won't have to be sad about not getting it and I won't have to worry about not being good enough to have it.

What is *it*? What are the bare bones, what really matters? What is essential to my being? Love. Love and connection. I want to feel connected to and comfortable with myself. I want to feel as if I belong. I want to be connected with the world that surrounds me, with the people and the land and divinity. Not just connected...I want to know that I am an integral and important part of life. I want to know that I matter. I want to be loved. I want to love. I want to really believe, deep down in the very marrow of my bones, that all of life is a manifestation of divinity. I want to live that belief. I want to treat myself and every other person with the same respect and awe I offer to soaring eagles and tiny spring flowers.

That's what I want. It feels so huge, so overwhelmingly large, wonderful, important and

unattainable. And it really isn't, is it? All I have to do is honestly commit myself to it. All I have to do is commit myself to living my vision. All I have to do is decide that this is how I will live. I want to belong in this vision. No, I want to *be* this vision.

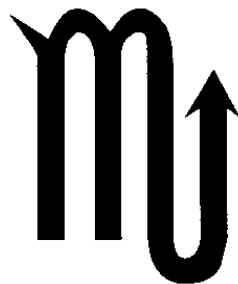
Ok, I've said it. I've said it out aloud to a hundred and some people. (I believe that I am hidden because I can't see your faces as I say this. I'm not.) But, more importantly, I've said this to myself. Now what happens? The earth has not opened up and swallowed me. That is a good start. So this is what I want, these are the bare bones of what really matters to me. Now what? What do I do next? Am I waiting again on another cliff or hanging on another tree? No...it feels more like free-fall.

What Lies Beneath

by Teri Parsley-Starnes

I like the idea that each card in the Major Arcana is a rite of passage through which I am journeying. I am learning so much from each archetype as I encounter it, spend time with it, and integrate it more fully into my life. This month, we consider Death, the 13th archetype in this journey. Regardless of whether we were in Mystery School last year, the mystery is that we have all gone through those previous rites of passage, represented by the preceding 12 cards, so that we are now ready to stand before this one. It is interesting that it takes this long to really be ready for what Death wants to tell us. And interesting, again, that there is a lot more to experience after our passage through Death. What is the necessary awareness that Death wants to give each of us now? Perhaps the sign of Scorpio, which corresponds to this card, tells us.

I am going to die. No matter how much I consciously accept this fact, I am always surprised by my gut reaction when I am viscerally reminded of my own mortality. Surely, it must be some cosmic joke that all this is temporary. Yet if it is temporary, does anything lie beneath it? Is there an ultimate reality that I'm missing while I am blissfully thinking that I am immortal? Scorpio consciousness dwells within the absolute certainty that there *is* something that lies beneath. There is an ultimate reality that lives in the shadows of our denial of death. Many of us spend our time above this dark world, in our daylight lives, giving



only occasional thought to the tremors coming from below. Scorpio does not. Scorpio relentlessly turns its gaze to the depths, looking for what is hidden, what is vital, what gives ultimate meaning. Because of this quality, one of the words most often used to describe this sign is intense. I think because of our cultural denial of death, Scorpio often carries the extra baggage of our projections. We can easily mistrust those who remind us of our deaths. That mistrust can lead to Scorpio responding with more mistrust, suspicion and covert actions. These are some of the shadows of the shadows of Scorpio. But of all the signs, I would miss Scorpio the most, if it slunk away, unloved. Without Scorpio, I wouldn't be prepared for what comes after Death.

Astrologers say that Scorpio is a fixed water sign. The idea of fixity is an important one here. There are three water signs in the zodiac, Cancer, Scorpio, and Pisces. The thing that differentiates the water signs from each other is their modality. Cancer is cardinal (initiating energy); Scorpio is fixed (holding energy); and Pisces is mutable (shape-shifting energy). I think of the element and modality of each sign as its genetic code, the thing that really defines what the sign is all about. Scorpio reminds me of all the fixed emotions I have ever had – the feelings I have held for far too long but have been unable to release. There is a Scorpic process at work here. It may be

impossible for me to transform my emotional states, until I have held them for a long time, really felt them, stared them in the eyes, seen what lies beneath them. One of my favorite images for Scorpio, as well as for Pluto (its ruling planet) and the 8th house (its natural home), is of a volcano. This volcano is holding emotional energy, cooking it, until it must be released. In its highest expression, Scorpio seeks to unveil and release fixed emotions while, at the same time, acknowledging the necessity to hold them and not turn away. Steven Forrest writes in his book, *The Inner Sky*, that Scorpio must "create a perfect alignment between his feelings and his actions," so "he must destroy whatever walls prevent those feelings from entering consciousness." Can we act as authentic beings if we deny the full force of our emotions? Scorpio says we cannot and...sometimes we must act as a destroyer of the things that keep us from knowing our feelings. I see Death's scythe swinging.

I have a little Scorpio in my own chart – actually, a lot. Here is how an astrologer determines whether someone has a sign's signature in their chart. There are several things to consider. For example, you might have a planet in that sign, or a planet in that sign's natural house. We count the natural houses from Aries in the first house on through the zodiac, so Scorpio's natural house is the 8th. You might have the sign on an important angle in the chart. Another possibility is that the sign's ruling planet might be on an important angle or in aspect to other planets in

your chart. I know this might seem complicated but the main point is that we can have a strong signature of a sign, without having a planet in that sign. In my case, I do have a planet in Scorpio; it's Saturn. I also have other Scorpio signatures – the Moon opposite Pluto, and Jupiter and Uranus in the 8th house. My Scorpio challenge lately has been obsessive thought patterns. I am really good at holding emotions for a long time! The rite of passage that the Death card offers me is to know how to stay with my emotions long enough to see them without illusion and, at the same time, know when to surrender to the scythe that cuts them away.

In *The Book of Shadows*, Cynthia quotes her teacher, Patricia Sun: "There are only six signs, six signs with two opposite expressions, polar points of the same principle." The sign opposite Scorpio is Taurus, the fixed earth sign of Beltane, the season of rebirth. Death and Birth seem like opposites; what do they hold in common? That is one of those questions that holds a lifetime of answers. I know they both need each other. From the compost of my released and dead emotions, I grow my values and swell into my power. As what I value becomes stuck or stagnant, the volcanic process of release moves me into new emotional fluidity. The give and take between Scorpio and Taurus allows me to trust that there is something beyond Death and that Death is my friend when I need to let go. There is explicit redemption in this process of death and rebirth. There is a rite of passage.

My Favorite Places

by Jane Holt

I am contemplating the mystery of winter. Winter weather can be anything here at the Grove. It can be 70 degrees or mists that hide the hills and coat the trees. It can be deep snow or sunny days with the clearest blue skies I have ever seen.

The mystery of winter – that moment just before the sap begins to turn outward. At the Grove, it happens sometime in February. The heat of the sun warms the ground, trees stop holding their breaths; they stop sucking in and in and in. There is a moment between inhale and exhale, a moment between the inward pull and the outward release. It is that moment, the moment between Life's need for defense against winter and the beginning of relaxation, the start of a new cycle. There is a moment between cycles, a transition point, a pause between the action of pulling in and the action of letting go. The trees know that moment. The woody vines know, the seeds waiting in the ground know. They know when it happens. It



doesn't happen for everyone at the same time. It happens when the moment is right, right for each life to breathe out.

Romantic mists and sunny skies notwithstanding, there is a moment between the inhale and the exhale. There is a moment when each life decides it is time to release all that it has been holding for safe keeping. There is a moment before the adventure begins again. Each day I stand on the land and ask *is this the day?* Is this the moment when Winter's grasp gives up its hold and releases life to venture out

again? Each day I look for a sign that it has already happened. Spring begins early here. The first signs are so small and yet so reassuring. Each day I have the privilege of seeing life's cycles dance their steps. Late winter is like an Easter egg hunt; what glorious thing will I find today, what smells, what happenings; what is releasing today?

Epiphany Passages: Being Alive

by Lorely Lather

Without a doubt, I would say my greatest epiphany occurred one morning while I watched my clothes dry on the line, waving gently in the breeze. This epiphany was the action of essential reality cutting through to physical reality, bypassing the social and mythical realities entirely. I was flooded with a profound awareness of my body's aliveness. The experience was beyond words, although I am daring to attempt to put words to it in this story.

I believe Starhawk would say this awareness came directly to "Younger Self" and "Talking Self" fumbled with words to describe it. James Redfield, in *The Celestine Prophecy*, described it as the third insight – understanding viscerally that we are energy, taking form as human. Robert Keck, in *Sacred Eyes*, describes it as a near-death experience which initiates maturity. In my case, it took a spiritual journey through physical death to arrive at this epiphany while watching my laundry.

It happened in this way. I was partnered to a man for 19 years. The first 9 of those years he was a fiery Irishman. The next 10 he was ill. The last two we lived with the constant knowledge that he would die soon. It was a maturing process for us both. We quit fighting with each other and we grew deeply honest. He had come from an abusive home and constantly worried that I would leave him; I assured him throughout the 19 years that I was committed to him and would stay until the end. His journey was to learn to trust; my journey was to learn to love deeply a life beyond my own. While our honesty and trust was increased by his initial illness, it intensified greatly during the last two years. We simply had to drop our masks, for both of us to survive. It was the last two and one-half months of our deathbed vigil that climaxed our growth.

He was dying of liver failure but this story is not a medical analysis, and I resent the coldness of medical jargon in describing the death process, so I will only tell you sufficient information to help you

understand the concluding months. The liver cleans toxins from the body. As his liver failed, he slipped into a coma. As he slept, his liver caught up somewhat, cleaning toxins out of him and allowing him to wake up.

When the vigil started in early August, I awoke him by coaxing him to eat ice chips. When he woke up, he said, "You promised, no food." "But, this is just ice chips," I countered. Yet, I set in place a pattern in which he would awaken, we would give him food and water, which increased his toxins, and his overwhelmed liver would take him back into sleep. The pattern went on for two months.

Perhaps I should not have given him those first ice chips but the urge to keep him alive was irresistible. I wanted to savor every bit of his life; I wanted to see and talk to him one more time. Each time he awoke, I felt his love and trust again. His waking moments, at first, were tremendously healing. He told the hospice worker and me what he had seen on the other side. All masks of anger and criticism were gone now; indeed, his eyes followed me everywhere and he expressed innocent child-like happiness to be awake and with people. I felt fully present in his life-concluding process and healed by the warmth of our verbal and nonverbal exchanges.

By early October, his waking moments were fewer, he no longer spoke, and he recognized only my voice. I did not know what to do; I had always thought he would conclude his life and his dying with his own decision, but he could not. One night, I read his Power of Attorney paper again. He had assigned me to make decisions and he had clearly written "No food or water." Perhaps I'd done wrong in early August, I thought. Then, at the bottom of the sheet, I saw a paragraph, I was supposed to have signed, accepting responsibility for his life. I had never signed it.

The next morning I was at my counselor's office, Power of Attorney in hand. "I know what I need to do,"

I told her. With a cigarette lighter burning to make it ceremonial, I signed the statement accepting responsibility for his life, and inherently, for mine. I returned home resolved to conclude the process. I was to be the archetypal Dark Mother, the midwife of death, although I did not know those words at this point in my life. I only had clarity on my focused responsibility for peaceful conclusion. I stopped the food and water.

A week later, he still lingered. But he had not spoken nor seemed awake for days. He had noticeably decreased in body size and changed in appearance to look very aged. His body's major effort was breathing. Each inhalation and exhalation took his total body strength. Although peaceful and without apparent pain, breathing became his central activity. His deep heavy breaths seemed to draw energy from the entire bedroom and any that dared to enter there. Visitors did not linger, but I drew ever closer. I wanted to be there. The very last evening, the nurses declared him close, but I sent everyone home, saying, "We'll make it through the night."

At first, it was a restless night. But after awhile, I fell into a deep sleep by deliberately aligning my breathing with his slow heavy in-and-out effort. It was irresistible. I slept with him. Many times, "I slept with him (or her)" indicates "I was sexual with him (or her)." Here, I mean it more deeply. My breathing through that night supported his; his breathing drew me into his realm. In some sense, we merged as energetic beings. I believe I came as close as a healthy human can to touching death. I shared this final intimate experience with my partner. I midwived his death. I slept with him.

After daylight, I awoke. The entire bedroom seemed to be breathing. I broke myself away from it to go to the kitchen and then returned to sit in a small chair next to his bed. He looked so peaceful; after all the years of his various struggles, he looked so peaceful. I took his hand; it was incredibly cold. I paused, quiet for a while; but then thought I should speak.

My voice competed with the room's breathing. "If it is time for you to go, it's all right," I heard my voice saying. My voice caused the breathing to falter. Less

of his body participated. The breathing moved to involve only his lungs, then only his throat. Within moments, he took his last breath, and there was deep silence. I looked at the clock. Just as in birth, it seemed important to hang a time on death. It was Saturday, October 10, 1992, 7:20 AM.

My friend came to the door, but I instructed her to go call the others. "Tell them it is over," I said. I remained in the room, still holding his hand. It was over. The energy, which was his life, was gone. I felt the power of completion, the power of ending, the power of death. I felt deep overwhelming peace. Time passed in this state of great completion. When next I thought to look at the clock it was 8:10; only then did I cry. I cried because I knew I had to leave this sacred space to face the day.

The next few days were hectic and exhausting. It was early Tuesday when my brother and his wife finally left. I was alone so, as a way to return to normalcy, I did laundry. When I finished, I sat on the back step watching the clothes on the line – the last two sheets from his bed, the small number of clothes I'd worn that week. My eyes fixed on the last two sheets and I remembered the overwhelming peace.

Then, from deep inside my body came a glow; warmth seemed to grow there and extend into my limbs, causing a tingling on my skin. Every cell in my body seemed to glow. I watched the sheets and felt my vision grow brighter, colors intensified. A great weight seemed to lift from me and I felt newness, lightness. My heart seemed to beat with greater strength; my breathing was full and deep. Finally, my mind attempted to take control of this wordless event, which was overtaking me as I watched my clothes. By viscerally remembering the utter depletion of energy in death, I was remembering the thrilling vibration of energy in my body. By remembering death, I was experiencing aliveness. My mind struggled frantically with words and managed to put forth only these few: I am alive. I am alive! It took experiencing death and reflecting upon it to bring me to this awakening. I am forever thankful that he trusted me and shared death's intimacy with me. I am also thankful that I had the courage to be fully present with him in his death. This remains my greatest epiphany.

River Currents

by River

Welcome once again to River Currents! This monthly column is devoted to the nuances of ritual arts, inspired by the lessons of the archetypes we're working with this year.

I had the pleasure of attending the Tarot intensive at Diana's Grove a couple of years ago. As participants, we received both the gift and the challenge to draw one Major Arcana card and then embody that archetype for the entire week. I drew the Death card and spent the whole event getting down to the bones of what that archetype really meant to me. The message I kept hearing throughout the week was "Abandon Attachment." (Death, as I discovered, gets to the point very quickly.)

Now, I'll admit, this is one of my most formidable growing edges. I am very attached to attachment! When I invest a good deal of my time and energy in a project, it's very difficult for me to let go of the result. During my Rites of Passage year, our team motto was "Act with all your heart and give the outcome to the Gods." That motto has turned into a challenge that I expect will follow me throughout my lifetime. Ritual is the stage on which I see that challenge played out most often.

It never ceases to amaze me just how powerful it can be to enter mythic space...and ritual is entirely done in mythic space. My senses are enhanced. My world seems to grow larger, my skin tingles, and my heart beats differently. I've entered an opportunity to create the story of my life. But when I enter mythic space, there is always the possibility that I will place more importance on the two minutes of an invocation than I will on the entire rest of my day. That's where releasing attachment to outcome can be the most powerful tool in my priestess toolbox.

I can count on one hand the number of times a ritual or workshop has gone exactly the way that I planned or intended. It just doesn't happen that often. I know this...and, yet, I also know how many times I berate myself for forgetting one single word or concept that I wanted to be sure to bring across. But if I have enough confidence in my ability to hold tight to intention, my commitment to developing and fine tuning my ritual skills, and my dedication to the Cornerstone of Thinking Well of Self, then I know it's not the end of the world. Easier said than done, perhaps, but a worthy striving.

How do I know when to abandon my attachment, when something needs to shift? Lots of practice! I find it requires me to enter into ritual with eyes open, and to learn how to hold "dual awareness." Simply put, that means I need to focus on the group of participants and the ritual logistics, as well as have my own experience. Or, better yet, I can't be so absorbed in what's going on with me and my reactions that I lose sight of the group. That means keeping my eyes open while I lead a trance, or while I drum and sing. It means paying attention to my co-facilitators. It means being able to communicate in the moment if I feel something isn't right or needs to shift a bit.

I'd like to take this concept of releasing attachment one step further to include roles in ritual. What happens when, in the process of releasing attachment to outcome, the logistics of a ritual suddenly change...and your role is completely left out because it no longer serves the needs of the group? What happens when the weather changes your beautiful outdoor setting (which you originally assumed was essential to the success of your ritual) to a soggy, miserable mess and you have to shift indoors?

I can remember one particular ritual, in which I was taking a significant role, when Nature interfered with our ritual plans (how dare She!). I had worked on this role for days. The ritual was to happen outside in the creek and, when it rained so hard that I couldn't see my hand in front of my face, it really threw me for a loop. I was miserable for the next twenty-four hours. I did eventually get to step into that role and the message that came to me during the ritual was about releasing attachment. I don't think for a second that the thunderstorm was a message to me from the universe but it certainly made for a fine metaphor, and I was humbled by the experience.

Cynthia often talks about the Death card as an Ego death, rather than an actual physical death. I like this concept in theory but, even after my thunderstorm experience, I find it difficult in practice. It could just be my humanity. I want to embrace this paradigm shift in my ritual planning. What would happen if I chose my roles in ritual based on community needs and service as opposed to my "affinity" to one particular piece? For instance, if you couldn't tell by my name, I love the element of Water. I can relate to the depths, the release, dissolution, healing.... I'm a Cancer. I have

lots of blue in my wardrobe...so I tend to jump at the chance to do a Water invocation. But what happens when I pay attention to my gifts and my ability to serve community, rather than my desire to show off my new blue velvet robe? What if Air really needs to have a singer and that's one of my gifts? Or Earth really needs a drummer? Regardless of my attachment to Water, which is the higher need?

I'm not trying to say that choosing a ritual role based on desire keeps you from serving the needs of the group – far from it! Sometimes that connection to a particular element, deity or skill can help facilitate a powerful community ritual experience. The person who has dedicated his life to Zeus and happens to have a t-shirt with the god's signature lightning bolt on

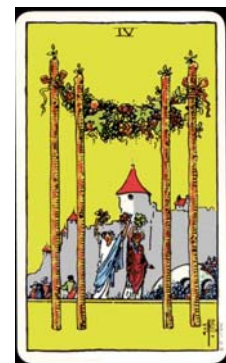
it might just be the best person for the job. There's a great deal to be said for the vibrancy that comes with a deep personal connection. But, when given the opportunity to choose roles or plan ritual, I invite you to think about the place where your gifts will best serve the ultimate intention and will give the participants the best experience possible.

"Art imitates life" and that's the whole intention when it comes to Ritual Arts. When you truly release attachment to the outcome and act with all your heart, how does laying that pattern affect you outside of ritual? Can this concept serve us in family or work life? I certainly have some ideas...but I'm not attached to any of them.

The Minor Mysteries

by Canyon

Why a four? And why a three last month? These Minor Arcanas – "minor mysteries" like abundance, sorrow, virtue and peace – will speak to you through the newsletter this year, in numerological connection to the month's theme. The Hanged One last month, as the 12th Major Arcana, brought us a connection to the nurturing, abundant quality of The Empress, who is the 3rd Major Arcana and archetype for all the threes. Why? Because the digits in 12 add up to three, as in $1 + 2 = 3$. All of the 3s in the Minor Arcana are in The Hanged One's constellation, or family, of cards. When the 12 comes into your life, all her relatives move in, too. That includes the Empress and 21, The World ($21 = 2 + 1 = 3$). So, as Death, the 13th Major Arcana, moves into your spare bedroom this month, you'll need to roll out the extra sleeping bags for The Emperor (Death's $13 = 1 + 3 = 4$) and all the Minor Arcana 4s....



The Cycle Continues

by The Four of Swords

I am known as Truce in the Crowley-Harris deck and, in every Tarot deck, I am known as The Four of Swords. What do you see when you look into this snapshot of my life? Lady Frieda Harris' album shows four sleek, straight, unblemished blades – my thoughts, perfectly balanced in symmetry above the glorious lotus of my self, which is fully open and, yet, continuing to open.

My blades – my thoughts – these swords are well forged; ideas ready to defend the self in conflict. No nicks are visible along their slender, almost fragile-looking foils, no sign of wear dulls their keen edges. The swords' grips reveal how I grasp my thoughts, how I "get a handle" on them. Each bears an elemental image – air fire, water, or earth. I grasp the generous resources of my mind as a connection to the whole of life. Earth provides the iron, the *mettle* –

the courage or resolve – from which thoughts and conflicts are forged. Air blows *inspire-ation* into the Fire of my passion, my spirit, heating those conflicts to a glowing, red fervor. Water tempers them; gentle and fierce emotions adjust them, bringing flexibility, and this more agile blade brings greater strength to my initial resolve. Wide auras of glowing green light



protect my blades; sheaths of regeneration and protection.

Imagine you could look at my image from the side, rather than from this aerial view envisioned by Aleister Crowley and captured by Lady Harris. The fully open, yet continually opening lotus of my self is the base of a pyramid. The blades of my mind, sheathed in their auras of regeneration, rise

above me as the walls of that pyramid, a temple of protection to shield that vulnerable self. The halo that surrounds this central image is my state of mind. Bright yellow and red crystalline constellations, in a pattern of elegant and perfect symmetry, glow against a backdrop of relaxing blue. My state of mind is clear and open, receptive. The stress and fear of past battles are laid to rest.

Now, for another perspective on truce, I invite you to look at the photo of me in the Rider-Waite-Smith album. The battles of *Was*, before this snapshot of *Is*, are over. The four blades of conflict, forged by my mind and spirit, have been cleaned and repaired. Three hang ready for the battles that *Shall Be*; one is close to hand at my bedside, ready if the battle comes sooner than expected. I am the knight who rests in preparation for the battles that will follow this moment called *now*. I lie in meditation within the protective temple of a church, a sanctuary. I am fully open...and continue to open. I have stilled my thoughts to receive the wisdom that flows from the Divine, to hear the understanding within my heart and soul.

Both of these photos, so different from each other, tell the same story. As a four, I belong to Death and to The Emperor. I belong to form, to essence, to the bones around which life is fleshed. My message is that the essence of life is struggle. Growth comes from strife. A restful, easy, conflict-free life brings fewer lessons than one shaped by scuffle and brawl. But conflict strengthens you only if you sometimes

disengage from it. I am Truce and my lesson is this: truce isn't peace; it's a brief cessation of battle...which will surely resume. My message is that all things do eventually die...but not every battle kills us.

A life lived well is a cycle – times of challenges met and bravely fought and times of truce, of integration. When have you surrendered to the illusion that a skirmish won would yield eternal peace? Have you ever been certain that the struggle itself was eternal?

I urge you to believe that life is neither all peaceful nor all battle. I invite you to try on my illusion of necessary polarities that we roll through in a never-ending cycle. Slip into the cloak of my Nietzschean philosophy for a while: if we thought all we had was struggle, we would invent peace to balance it; if we thought all we had was peace, we would create conflict. We need both.



As you brandish your blade through your next skirmish, embrace the possibility that, whether you lay down your sword in surrender or raise it in triumph, life's struggle isn't over. But don't, then, just leap forward into the next conflict, the next challenge. Take time to renew yourself. Call a truce so that you may meditate on and integrate the lessons of the battle past. Truce is part of the cycle...the part that prepares you to resume the struggle that is the essence of your life, your growth.

The lyrics to one of last year's Mystery School chants tell us that "The cycle continues; it never ends." Yes, your life will, one day, end. But that time does not belong to Death; as his messenger, I must affirm that. Death owns the times of truce, which cut away the unnecessary stories of valor and victory, defeat and despair. Death says, "As you raise your swords for battle, my invisible, silent blade begins to cut the threads that connect you to the irrelevant. At the end of conflict, I invite you to rest in the bones of essential wisdom. Then you will be ready to raise your foil again...for the cycle continues. Even after my sister, the World Dancer, takes you through the portal she guards, through the eye of the Universe, my cycle of life – conflict and truce, struggle and renewal – will continue...and continue...and continue...."

Interview with a Mystery - Linda Slanker

by sisalfish

Linda Slanker's home is only 150 miles from the Grove, in Rocky Mount, Missouri; but this Texan was surprised to catch up with Linda while she was on vacation on Padre Island, Texas. Linda is a first year Mystery.

You and your husband ride Harley-Davidson motorcycles. Are you big into leather?

Yes, and yes. I mean, you have to dress the part. When I fish for bass, I dress for fishing. When I ride, I wear my leathers. It's fun to step out of the usual box and dress for what I'm doing. And it's practical, too – when I had my Harley wreck, I crushed my leg, but didn't have a scratch on me.

Crushed leg; sounds like the Awakener really got hold of you on that one.

So much changed from that experience. It happened in September of 1999. I was riding by myself, on my way to Alabama to visit my daughter. It was raining, the road was bad, I was alone. I rounded a corner and there was a policeman, redirecting traffic away from an accident that had occurred ahead. I lost control. The bike crushed my lower right leg. Luckily, the policeman was there to help, and a kind man in a truck stopped and stayed with me 'til the ambulance came.

And what changes came about as a result?

I was flat on my back for six months, my husband taking complete care of me 24 hours a day. Three surgeries. And through all this, people just kept saying the most amazing and inane things. Like: "Oh, well, I'm sure it happened for the best." And I'm, like, for the best? What are you talking about! Look at me lying here! Or they'd say, "I'm sure God has a plan, this is part of God's will," and I'd think what the heck kind of God would be out to get me that way?

It all really started me thinking about words, and what I want to say. I want what I say to be meaningful, not a bunch of platitudes or clichés. I want what I say to mean something, and I don't want to waste time listening to what's not meaningful, either.

You must love the Mystery email lines.

I do. I'm so excited about the level of depth, the searching. These seem like people who are also on a journey, and that is exciting to me, to have connection with people like that.

You've only been what you consider pagan for a year.

Yes, though I've been searching all my life, and

especially since the accident. I've done a lot of work as a recovering alcoholic, in AA, for the past 21 years. That's where I met my husband, at AA. And AA invited me to examine my spirituality, and that got me started.

But, you know, I found myself wanting to get away from dogma, from the narrow dogma of the religion I was kind of half-heartedly raised in, and from the dogma of AA too. It was useful to me, but there came a point where I felt like I'd grown past it. I was looking for freedom. I wanted to stop going along with what this book or that person said I should shape my life around. I was looking for a way to reinvent myself. I felt there were multiple realities, and I didn't want to limit myself to one. We all have to keep reinventing ourselves, right? We're all that chrysalis the packet spoke of. I want to become that chrysalis again and again. To reach a new height where I feel better, and calmer, and free of the fears I was raised with.

So, if you started searching, what was it you found?

I was visiting Europe, and visiting these wonderful sites like Stonehenge and thinking: why am I still defining my spirituality through what others say? Why aren't I giving it the time and attention to find what's right for me?

And then two years ago I found Joseph Campbell, and I started reading everything he ever wrote. But I still didn't fully make the connection to paganism until a book I found about a year ago, Lillith McLelland's *Out of the Shadows*, a book on Wicca. It started me reading books on paganism and non-traditional culture. Then I got into a conversation with Lorely Lather, who's in my book group, and she's the one who introduced me to Mystery School. And here I am.

A lot of people on the Mystery line fell in love with your mornings, your description of them.

I do have good mornings, I think. I retired at 53 from my job as a computer technician and network administrator for the state.

I get up around four or five; get coffee, go back to bed and drink it and do my thinking and my meditating. I just sit in the dark and think for a few hours. The dogs want out, and then they want in, and then they want back out again. My husband sleeps till eight or nine, so after a while I wander out to the hot tub to watch the sun come up, and it's quiet over the lake. Except the dogs are still wanting in, and out, and then in

again. I just saw so many people my age growing older, and really getting deeper and deeper into *things*. Buying more and more things, tying themselves to working. I decided I had enough things, and I'd rather have my mornings with my dogs and

the hot tub. Joseph Campbell talks about following your bliss, as a way to peace. That's all I'm trying to do.

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Dog of the Month - Penny

Penny needs a home! For many dogs, the Grove is



an ideal place to live. Life in a pack is a return to the good ol' days when dogs were dogs. But, for some dogs, life in the pack is like being condemned to eternal high school. Life in the pack is great if you're the top dog or the best buddy of the top dog. If you're the bottom dog, it is not so great. In a pack, dogs that

are easily intimidated become the victims of harassment. Penny is timid by nature. Her life at the

Grove has made her more cautious. Penny is a dog who is afraid of dogs. She is seeking a quiet home with only a few animal companions. She would not do well in a home with children.

She is beautiful. She has the exotic eyes of an Egyptian goddess and gazelle-like grace. She is very affectionate. Penny is just over a year old. She has been spayed and is in excellent health. She has been at the Grove since April. Our belief is that she was raised with people who filled her food bowl but offered her very little positive human contact. She adapts well to travel, change and new people, if she meets them one at a time. If you are interested in Penny or know of someone seeking a very affectionate dog who is eager to be devoted, contact us - dogs@Dianasgrove.com.

Moving Images

by Dan Wilson

Ray Lawrence's "Bliss" (1985), based on Peter Carey's novel of the same name, is about an advertising executive named Harry Joy. Harry loves to tell stories. He's happy with the world and his place in it. He adores his wife Bettina and their two children, runs a successful advertising agency, and is unaware of the fact that he's about to die. Harry sees his death as though it's someone else's. He watches from outside his body but, when he realizes that he doesn't want to die, in a calm, clear space, he finds his way back into his body. He'd been dead for four minutes, and will never be the same again.

As Harry recovers from his heart attack and subsequent surgery, he conducts tests to determine whether he's gone mad or he's gone to hell. He suspects that he's no longer living with his real family, but clever imitations placed there to torment him. He's haunted by strange and disturbing dreams, and details about his life have changed from what he remembers. His wife is having an affair with Harry's partner, and the two are planning to leave and start

their own ad agency in New York. His son is selling cocaine, and his daughter is buying those drugs with sexual favors.

He decides that the only way out of his hell is to be good. He cleans the house, shines his family's shoes, and begins firing his agency's largest clients because they manufacture carcinogens. He also decides to escape his family and move into a hotel, where he meets and falls in love with Honey Barbara, who validates his theory in a discussion of Karma. His family and business partner are convinced that he's gone mad, and decide to institutionalize him.

Harry buys his way out of the institution by selling his half of the agency to his wife, and he promises Honey Barbara that he's going to move to the bush with her. However, Bettina blackmails him into selling advertising to petrochemical companies. The ad agency is doing well, Harry and Bettina are making loads of money, and Honey Barbara watches with despair as Harry is quickly devoured by the world he

inhabited prior to his first death. She leaves him, convinced there's no way to save him.

Shortly thereafter, Bettina is diagnosed with cancer from prolonged exposure to petrol fumes. She realizes that Harry was right all along – petrochemicals do cause cancer – and kills herself, along with the agency's petrol clients, using a pair of super-sized Molotov cocktails. Finally freed from Bettina, Harry moves to the bush to look for Honey Barbara, but she's not convinced that he's any different and refuses to have anything to do with him.

Despite that, Harry's accepted into Honey Barbara's community, and he chooses the task of planting trees – a love letter to Honey Barbara that will take years to arrive. Honey Barbara loves honey, but every April, her bees produce awful honey. One day, she notices that it's not too bad. In fact, it's pretty good. And when she goes out to the forest to see why, she realizes that all the trees Harry's been planting over the years have been carefully selected to blossom in April, giving her bees a decent source from which to make

honey. She finally forgives Harry and the two spend the rest of their lives happily ever after.

Harry Joy was fortunate to experience more than one death. He was able to realize that death is not the ultimate end, but merely a chance for a new beginning. He found the strong, timeless and enduring bones in his life. Ultimately, Harry Joy used his first death to strip away the non-essential, to re-evaluate his motives and his lifestyle, to define, for him, those enduring bones of his existence. Although, at first, circumstances prevented him from living the way he felt he needed to, he eventually was able to make the necessary changes to live authentically with his beliefs. Honey Barbara recognized that, was able to forgive him, and they were happy together for the rest of their lives. Because of those decisions, he dies his final death at peace and, not wishing to return to his body this second time, he spreads himself thinner and thinner, until he's made himself as thin as a gas. He sighs, and the trees are not too busy to take this sigh back in through their leaves.

Skippy Speaks - Simple Essences are the Best Bones

Ok, here's the truth...we dogs, we don't spend much time thinking about death or even Death. We're just not wired for it. I've always suspected those Scorpio people of stealing our wiring for discussions about death and such. After all, they are the only ones who regularly indulge in death as a dinner conversation topic. I wouldn't recommend them as dinner partners during joyous celebrations. I have sat through many such conversations here at the Grove. How they turn a birthday celebration into an intense discussion on various levels of death is beyond me. But, back to myself.... Beyond the minor handicap of not really knowing much about it, I do, of course, have a thing or two to say on the topic.

My editors have just informed me that it is very bad form to tell my audience that I don't know anything about a topic but I'm going to discuss it anyway. My response to that kind of advice is *cat box*. You might understand that expression better if I said *hog wash*. I rarely use *hog wash* because I have no idea what it means. *Cat box*, on the other hand, is, I believe, appropriately expressive. As I was saying, *cat box* to that bad advice from my editors. I believe you, my dear and intelligent readers, are discerning enough to notice very

quickly if I were to attempt to give you unfounded information or advice. I am widely read and only present papers in this journal on subjects that I am certain will be educational and informative to the readers. I believe that over the years you lucky readers have received information and insight that you could acquire no other way. And I am offended, for my reader's sake, that my editors think I could bamboozle any of you with nonsense. Tip the cat box over, that's what I say to those editors. I know exactly what I'm doing and I have a couple of important things to say on this topic.

Now Skipphooly, on the other hand, she who chases the Fool through the Tarot, is more than willing to give any information, no matter how inaccurate or down-right wrong, to keep that poor Fool on his path. I mean, do you know any other dog that has chased even one poor innocent over a cliff, let alone, well, who knows how many? Don't get me wrong, I deeply like and admire Skipphooly (it is important to have these types of feelings for one's own alter-ego), but I know she has her own ultimate mission, which is different from my ultimate mission, which is, besides indulging in run-on sentences, of course, guiding

and protecting you Mysteries. It is a mission I take seriously...unlike the run-on sentences with which I humor myself, knowing that they drive my editors to pull out their hair.

I was talking about Skipphooly, wasn't I? Skipphooly did have a good piece of advice about Death. When I asked her why she was keeping her distance, she said, "With Death, distance is a matter of discretion, not to mention common sense...unless you are looking for a totally new experience." Apparently Skipphooly isn't looking for new adventures right now. I have to get out my binoculars to see her.

But not me, Skippena, Warrior Princess Extraordinaire, Shaman of the Evorg, who holds Doctorates in some very interesting subjects. Indiana Jones has nothing on me; I am ready for anything...most especially anything that has to do with bones. Bones are one of my specialty.

What I could tell you about bones would...well, I realize I need to be circumspect. You humans are a bit squeamish about bones. But I have something very important to share with you: discussing bones at the same time you are talking about letting go and releasing is a very bad thing. Bad juju, anti-canine, unacceptable, will make you grow warts on you toes, bad luck for 20 years, shouldn't ever be done, and just plain wrong. I mean, you just can't do it without bringing down the worst-possible consequences. I mean really bad things could happen. Never, ever let go of a bone. Unless it is to a much bigger and hungrier dog (or human) or...
...to me. Always release bones to me. I will make sure they are well taken care of.

Which brings me to the second important thing I have to tell you. Finding what really matters is easy. In fact, for those of us more highly evolved beings, like dogs, we do it naturally. We don't even have to think about it...although occasionally we might growl over it. It is a mystery why this is such an intense and difficult process for you humans. Here is what you need to do: cut out all the unimportant thoughts in your head, which by the

way is about 99%, and listen to your body. What makes you comfortable and happy? A full belly? A

soft place to lie in the sun? A friend to romp with? There are a few more difficult questions, such as which side do you want the warmth of the sun on, back or belly, but these can be solved with a few turns until you find just the right position. And, when you get really good at these basics, you can move into the more advanced questions of life, such as do I want to drink this clean, full bowl of water or do I want to play in it? A really tough question that stumps some of the most advanced is what is the best way to dry my coat when I've just come in from the rain?

But, really, most of these questions are simple. They don't take much thought...just ask any dog, who will be happy to tell you that thinking is a gross impediment to finding the essence of anything. Most Wise Men and Women will tell you the same thing. Cats, on the other hand, are not so forthcoming. They are a bit more reluctant to share what they know. You will probably have to spend several months in adoration and homage before your cats share all their secrets. We dogs, on the other hand, being *Man's Best Friend* (oh, relax, it's just a manner of speaking) share enthusiastically. Mind you, we don't share our bones happily, but we will share how happy those bones make us. We are willing to share your bed with you, just as we are willing to share the mud we wallowed in and the game we are playing, which is much more fun if we are wrapped around your legs as we play. But don't go and get the idea that the essence of life according to the Canine Gospel is about sharing. No, no, and absolutely not.

No, the essence of life for us dogs is being comfortable; well fed, warm, with our own person to scratch our ears and rub our bellies. Simple isn't it?



Ashes and Sparks

by Shaun Moffit

In the morning, the late winter light
scores the floor with long solid lines
fixed to the carpet and pointing toward the center
of the room until their death at noon
when the house loses its shadows.

In that darkness, what can I make
from the memories of light?

I can have the conversation--the one that's been stalking
my brain, the one where I have the dialogue with myself,
which is impossible – like having a monologue with another.
I could walk one block down the road and say to her,
Let's talk about rituals. I'm uncomfortable with the way
they are going. Let's talk about shaming, about inclusion
and about knowing where we are trying to go.

In the darkness, what can I make
from the memories of light?

I can complete the project – that story haunting me,
zooming quicksilver behind me and sometimes above me,
too fast to make into words – or is it my mind whizzing
and if I slowed down and breathed, the phantom would too,
slide into a partner for Lamaze on the birthing bed,
hold my hand and become more than visual – tactile
and auditory – to embody the story so I can write it now.

In the darkness, what can I make
from the memories of light?

I can fulfill the promise – this one a promise to myself,
not to another. This one the promise of getting it right,
of sitting in the boat with this sailing mate and working together,
raising the sails in unison, lowering them and rowing
in a way that gets me where I want to go instead of into
the eye of the storm, to float on the waters and trust them
to take me through the deep and to fully know it this time.

In the darkness, I can coax the flame,
aware of the sparks instead of the ashes.