

## Quantum Consciousness and Sacred Cows: an Interview with Phyllis Curott

*Phyllis Curott is an attorney and the author of Book of Shadows and Witch Crafting: a Spiritual Guide to Making Magic. She was named one of "the Ten Gutsiest Women of the Year" by Jane mag - azine in 1999 and was a finalist for the "Walter Cronkite Faith and Freedom Award" in 2000. A Priestess for more than twenty years and founder of the Temple of Ara, she has been widely pro - filed in the media, lectures frequently around the globe, and is widely respected for her work promoting civil rights and religious freedom. She is currently working on her third book. CUUPS NEWS spoke with her at her home in New York City.*

**In your first book, Book of Shadows, you talk about how you made the leap from being an Ivy League-educated New York City Attorney to a Wiccan High Priestess?**

I made it by following my heart. I had lived virtually my entire life from childhood until my adult years in my head. It was a real leap of faith to follow my heart. The story was kind of amazing, and while it's amazing in a certain sense, it isn't unique. So many people write to me and say they had similar experiences. I think

my discovery was that the world is full of magic, and it's full of magic because it's alive. It's not dead inanimate matter. It's a numinous consciousness, and we're a part of that consciousness. There were very remarkable experiences that I had: synchronicities, certain dreams that came true, and sudden sensitivity.



At the time I didn't know it, but now I understand it as a shamanic break where essentially a door opens between the worlds and the sacred came to me, and I had the good sense to pay attention. Most people would have shut it down. They would have said this is nuts, I'm under too much pressure from law school or whatever...but I sensed this numinous quality and I responded to it and the universe essentially led me. It took me by the hand and led me on this amazing adventure...to this coven, which was a place I had never in a million years dreamed I would end up. And that's where I found myself, and the one thing I knew about witches was their association with magic.

**You talk about Quantum consciousness in your latest book Witch Crafting. That seems to me a wonderful way to explain magic in the world.**

By the time I found the craft, I had done a lot of reading in quantum physics. I have always been a hyper rationalist, and I

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## Presidents Column

Dear Friends,

I am a weaver, both artistically and magically. I spend my days thinking about overall global patterns and how to make them manifest with the tools of my craft. I examine the relationship between warp and weft, between color and symbol, between rhythmic movements and deep silences. I have been gifted by the goddess

with the ability to look at many and disparate fibers and found objects and see how they can be woven into a beautiful whole. It is not surprising therefore, that when I searched for a way to

explain what I see happening at CUUPS at this point in time, that I should work with weaving as a metaphor.

In the mid-1980s, a small group of women and men envisioned a beautiful new fabric within the UUA. They envisioned an altar cloth that would provide a secure and comforting home for pagans within their parent organization. They perceived a fabric that would encourage networking and outreach within the pagan community, provide educational and ritual materials for UU pagans and the broader pagan community. This fabric would support us as

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still am. Though now I walk the path of the heart. That's what is so great about this spirituality. You don't have to give up your intelligence in order to follow this path. One of the things that I love most about it is that the explanations that are available to us through quantum physics line up very neatly with the explanation of reality that shamans and practitioners of indigenous religions and witches or wiccans or neo-pagans have always had. That's amazing. It's an amazing thing to have a spirituality that's not at war with science. In fact, what you find is this marriage of physics and meta-physics. That's really empowering. Neo-paganism, to use the broadest term, has two things in common: 1. Immanent divinity—that the divine is present in the world and in ourselves, and 2. That because the divine is present that the earth itself is sacred. That's the embodiment of divinity. One of the great misunderstandings is that we work with supernatural power. We don't. We work with the laws of nature. And the laws of nature are not just those of Newton's physics—you know gravity and time and space, but of quantum physics as well. Newton's physics explains a part of reality, and we need that. That's how your tape recorder is working and how people can read your newsletter. But it's like a box within a sphere. And that greater reality—that greater sphere is quantum physics. And it's fascinating because it's an explanation of reality at its most minute level of organization—the sub-atomic particle, and at it's the greatest level—the idea of the unified field theory. Quantum physicists are very conservative, they are hesitant to describe reality in the same vocabulary that we use, but they are describing the same reality.

### How do you describe it?

That everything is energy and everything is interconnected in this field of energy. Everything is energy and everything is connected. That is immanent divinity. What makes our spiritual perspective unique is that we experience the truth of that statement that everything is energy and everything is connected. And when we experience that quantum energy field, what we discover is that it is numinous; it's sacred, and it's alive. It's conscious. It's interactive. It's holy. It's divine. It is the divine web of life in which we are all connected. And that's where magic comes from. Magic is everything that flows. It's what occurs once we realize that the divine is "in-dwelling," and we're connected to it, and everything is connected through it.

### So how does magic work?

Perhaps nothing is more significant to magic than the fact that at the sub-atomic level, experiments are directly affected by the expectation of the observer. In other words, our consciousness influences matter and will determine what matter will do—at the most subtle, yet most profound level. That's a critical foundation stone of what we have traditionally thought of as "magic." And it's remarkable. And when you begin to see that there are these laws of nature that explain how magical principles could in fact be real—that they do indeed work—then you realize that yesterday's magic is today's science.

One of the things that we have seen is that people who are prayed for, who are ill, and (this is critical) who don't know they are being prayed for have a higher recovery rate than people in the control group who are not prayed for. And that's magic. Traditionally, indigenous cultures have always done healing work with energy to heal other people. And when we bring the scientific method to bear we discover that there's truth to these practices. That they're not "primitive" as they've been dismissed. They are in fact sacred technology. They are the technology of the

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human spirit. We are just beginning to re-discover it.

### What do you think is the biggest challenge to the pagan community today?

I think that the most significant challenge, and what spurred me to write both books, is the fact that we are growing exponentially. We are doubling in size about every 18 months. That's extraordinary. We're probably at about four and a half to five million people at this point. I get that figure from interesting studies done at some universities and, interestingly enough, it's also based on a statistical model that comes from the large bookstore chains.

The growth has been spurred to some extent by the increased visibility of the community in conferences, bookstores and workshops, and in publishing. The growth is wonderful, but one of the problems I have seen, is that there has been a certain hardening of our arteries, which to me is premature. Along with all this growth we have begun to develop our own kind of dogma.

### What do you mean by hardening of our arteries?

It's the repetition of ideas without any thinking through of what is being said or what is meant by what's being said. And, in fact, what's happened is we've dragged a lot of very patriarchal ideas about the nature of reality and divinity into our contemporary pagan spirituality. And a lot of it is unconscious—it's just a part of the dogma. People say these things without thinking them through or they do certain things without looking at what they're doing. When you begin to look at them, you begin to see how they're not appropriate for an earth-based religion whose central spiritual tenant is immanent divinity. And that to me is the biggest problem we face right now. The combination of the explosion in size that is accompanied by our own kind of unconscious dogmatism. And for us to truly become the spiritual alternative—the life restoring, magic making, divine revealing spirituality that we really are, we have to have an understanding of what our principles are. We have to have the experience of those principles. They

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have to be liberated from the dogma of the religions and the culture that we are trying to heal—the world we are trying to transform. It's natural for us to have all kinds of unconscious assumptions. We all mostly come from other religions. So it's natural for us to have those assumptions and to be influenced by them

### **What kinds of assumptions?**

Well, I'm getting a reputation for killing sacred cows, but here goes. The number one example of dogma is that witches believe in the threefold law. That's why we don't hex or harm or do baneful magic or use the power that we've learned to manipulate or control other people. And that's supposed to be the ethics of paganism, or at least of Wicca. And you'll hear people say also we believe "An you harm none, do what you will." When you stop and ask, "But why? Why not harm someone?" the answer most people will give you is because of the threefold law. And that is not ethics; and it's totally inappropriate to an indigenous, shamanic, earth-based, pagan spirituality of immanent divinity.

### **That's quite a sacred cow. Why do you think it's not appropriate?**

Because when you say, "Witches believe in the threefold law" what you're really saying is I won't do harm to somebody because if I do it will come back to me three times over. That's not ethics. That's expediency. That's a rule. It's a law. It's saying, I'll behave, because if I don't something worse will happen to me. In other words, I'll be punished. So your behavior is motivated by the fear of punishment, by the fear of something terrible happening to you. That's not ethics. In fact, that's based on the old biblical model of "thou shalt not." If you break one of God's laws you will be punished. You'll go to hell. You'll be miserable. And that, in turn, is based on the idea that God isn't present in the world. The biblical model that we've all grown up with is that God created the world, and human beings. We misbehaved.... and got thrown out of paradise.

### **And we're still trying to get back to paradise...**

Yes, and we get back by denying the earthly plane which is sinful and fallen from grace like us. And to keep us from going completely "Lord of the Flies" which is what you do when you get kicked out of paradise, God has given us a rulebook. Well, I'm living in New York City. And I live every day with the proof that those rules haven't worked. They haven't worked because when people live for thousands of years believing that God isn't present in the world, they go insane. And rules are not going to prevent that madness, that wound, from corrupting their spirit. And that's what has happened.

And to create a rule that says "I will because if I don't I will be punished" is totally in keeping with the biblical model. It's not appropriate for a spirituality that experiences the divine as indwelling—that experiences the divine as everywhere present in the world.

### **So what is appropriate?**

I've spent a lot time ruminating on this, and I went to nature,



because nature is my spiritual teacher. And I realized that evil doesn't exist in nature. It's the unique creation of human beings. Which is what I think happens when they've gone mad because of being separated from their creator. But when you are in nature, you don't find evil. A tiger might eat you for dinner, but that doesn't mean a tiger is evil. You don't find warlords, you don't find terrorists, you don't find insane imperialists. You don't find the depravity that's unique to humans. What you find are very profound principles.

### **So what does it mean to live in a sacred world? What does that mean for our daily lives?**

If I am living in a world that's truly sacred, how am I going to behave? The answer is simple. And when something is simple in philosophy you know that you're generally on the right track. It's this. "Pagans and witches seek to live in a sacred manner, because we live in a sacred world." And that's an ethical precept. And that's a precept that is appropriate for our spirituality and is appropriate because it is totally in line with the central tenets of our religion. That the divine is present in the world, and is present within us.

So to me the three-fold law is a perfect example of how we've unconsciously carried over this erroneous worldview into contemporary Wicca. And I'll know that I've done my job when I hear someone ask, "What are the ethics of your spirituality" and someone says, "We seek to live in a sacred manner, because we live in a sacred world." It's what Native Americans refer to as "right relationship."

### **Do you have another example of inappropriate dogma?**

Yes. No matter what tradition you are from, when people invoke the four directions, they tend to stand up straight and they tend to lift their arms and they tend to look skyward as they are honoring the four directions. And it dawned on me kind of late how ridiculous it was to be looking into the sky as I'm invoking earth. The earth is not in the sky; it's beneath my feet. And people say, "well we're invoking the spirit," but the spirit is still not in the sky. When people do that, that's another unconscious remnant of this idea that the divine is out there somewhere. The idea that God is out there in his heaven—somewhere. And the divine is not "out there." The divine is beneath our feet, and in the food that we eat, the trees and the plants and the animals. That's the power of earth in us. That's an example of our practice that's unconscious. It reflects a cosmology that's alien to ours.

My biggest concern is that as we go into the future, we need to do it consciously, not unconsciously. We need to understand our cosmology, our theology, and our worldview. And, we have to have practices that resonate with the most important part of our spirituality—the in-dwelling divinity.

### **If we can be more conscious about this, can this help with the fact that we live in a land with a new Department of Homeland Security, and the threats to our first amendment rights?**

Ah, the curse of living in interesting times. But seriously, what we're dealing with in terms of Islamic fundamentalist culture is

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almost exactly similar to fundamentalist Christian Culture five or six hundred years ago. But now with the technology of this century, we're dealing with, ironically, three religions that are at each other's throats and could destroy the world. And they're all religions of the Bible. The political implications of living in this country right now are disastrous. I'm a civil liberties lawyer, and I see what's happening and it's terrifying. The great tragedy is that our liberties are being lost not by invasion but because we are abdicating them out of fear. We want to be protected, so we will give up the very things that have made this country great, and unique, and extraordinary. We're on the verge of losing the very things that give us our true strength. All fundamentalism is in essence fascism. It's not religious. It's political. It's a very dangerous time.

**What can we do about it?**

Back to quantum physics and the laws of nature. Think of the 100-monkey principle. And it applies in social organizations and it applies in physics as well. It applies in what we think of as inorganic matter. And that is, at a certain point, there is a sufficient size of crystals or an energy pattern or a group of animals or a group of people—to make change happen. It has reached a kind of critical mass. The vibration, the belief system, the practice, whatever it is—is on a large enough scale that it begins to influence those around the group. In other words, at a certain point, a minority has the capacity to have tremendous impact on the large whole, the greater body. And that's my hope. Twenty-five years ago, it was inconceivable that this was going to be the fastest growing religion in the United States, but it is. It's not fundamentalism. Every year, fewer Bibles are sold. And every year more Wiccan books are sold. We're growing, and they're shrinking, and the reality is that at a certain point our size will be sufficient that the values that are at our core will surface into mainstream

culture just as we're surfacing into mainstream culture. And we'll begin to have an influence, and we'll begin to transform things. And as we consciously and collectively direct our energy to that transformation by using our spiritual practices, we can accelerate that process of change. And I think that we have the very tools that are most needed right now to heal the wounds that are bringing us to disaster.

The other law of nature that I love is Darwin. Species evolve because their survival depends upon it. Our survival depends upon our ability to evolve. I live my life committed to that process of transformation. And if we all do that, and we live visibly, where our influence has impact on the world around us, I think we have the power together, collectively to transform this time of death to a time of rebirth. That's what our spirituality is about. It's about understanding cycles, about understanding that a period of death is followed by a period of rebirth. We can be the agents of that rebirth.

*CUUPS NEWS would like to thank Phyllis for taking time out of her busy schedule to talk with us. We look forward to her next book. On a personal note, I have been lucky enough to interview her several times on the radio and now for this newsletter. She is always a delight and an inspiration.*

*Lydia Smith*

Books by Phyllis Currott:

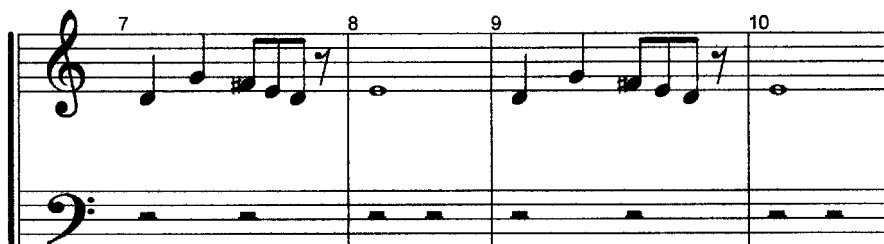
*Book of Shadows*. 1998. Broadway Books.

*Witch Crafting: a spiritual guide to making magic*. 2001. Broadway Books.

<http://www.bookofshadows.net>



In the darkest winter night    Therein lie-eyes the spark    Spark that burns just like the sun



Bringing ba-ack the light    Bringing ba-ack the light  
Last time--add: On this Solstice Night



# Holly King - Winter Solstice

## A Yule Passion Play

*This was presented at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Boulder by their CUUPS chapter, B-CUUPS, last Winter Solstice. The author is Steve Storm.*

### Premise and Major Points

The ritual exists in three layers. The outermost layer is the acknowledgement that this takes place within a Unitarian Universalist framework. This transitions to a Pagan/Wiccan context through the concept of story telling as a mode of religious expression. The second layer is the “first story”, which is actually an explanation and demonstration of several key concepts of Wicca. These include: shared visualization, the elements of circle casting, the personification of Deity, the sharing of experience, and the undoing of all the circle preparations. The third layer is a telling/enactment of a Wiccan “myth” that deals with the changing of the seasons. This becomes the “second story”. It introduces the concept of the changing but ever present Goddess, and touches on the concept of the dying and reborn God. It is presented as “folk” theater, what would be, in Christian terms, a “Passion Play”. The characteristics of the two deities are visually emphasized by having several people take the throne in succession as Goddess, and by having the High Priest and the Gatekeeper change roles after the second story has been told. After closing the Wiccan portion, the ritual ends up back at the first layer of Unitarian Universalism, with an invitation for one and all to return if they so wish. The overall tone is solemn and serious with occasional dips into the broadest of humor. (This is a mix that reflects some of the roots of folk religion and also reflects the individual style of the local CUUPS chapter.) There is also singing and some dancing to allow participants and visitors an opportunity to become part of the experience. The greatest challenges to those with a first time experience with Wicca may be the personification of Deity and the use of swords. The first point is explained and then demonstrated in a way that avoids the concept of “possession”. The second point is explained prior to circle casting and then again defused during the battle sequence by the use of extremely obvious fake wooden swords. Except for a few moments of poetic expression, the dialogue is kept simple and direct in order to speak deeply to first time visitors while still evoking traditional emotional responses from long time practitioners of Wicca. It is our hope that the ritual will be both enjoyable and meaningful to the attendees. This is what we mean when we describe Wicca as a “celebratory religion”.

### SETUP

Two thrones are set up side by side, Moon crown on right



hand throne, Holly and Oak Crowns on left hand throne. Tucked behind thrones are swords for Oak King and Holly King. Nearby is a small table with elements and HPS sword. Area in center is kept open for maximum freedom of movement during battle sequence. In another area of the circle is placed the Narrator's chair with reading stand. (Before intro, Lydia teaches chants and songs to early arrivals.)

### INTRODUCTION

HPS: And now, I think we are ready to begin.

NARRATOR: Hello, and welcome to the Winter Solstice Celebration here at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Boulder, hosted by us, the Boulder Chapter of Unitarian Universalist Pagans. My name is Steve Storm and along with my wife Shari, I am privileged to lead the Boulder Chapter of Unitarian Universalist Pagans, known as BCUUPS. We want to thank all of you for showing up and being a part of our celebration. We want to thank the church, and especially Reverend Jacqueline Ziegler, for “encouraging” us to hold this celebration. Sometimes, we pagans are shy about sharing our traditions.

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They are not always well accepted or understood. But it is a Unitarian Universalist trait to encourage people to explore and share their spiritual paths. This church takes that trait very seriously. In our own shy way, we are proud to be a part of that very important trait.

So, what could we do to celebrate the Winter Solstice? We could build a snowman. There's a winter tradition for you. We could gather around a bright burning fireside.. On some winter days, that would be really appealing. And think about it, it would be part of a very long tradition, people gathered around a fire to escape the bitter cold. In places where it does get cold, that particular celebration has been around longer than any religious ceremony I can think of.

That's one of things we like to do in BCUUPs, revive old, old traditions. The other thing we like to do is make things up brand new. And there is a way to do both at once, it is called "story telling". The very oldest religious traditions are filled with stories: stories about how this or that got started, stories about heroes and great battles, stories with deep morals and meanings, stories about deities and cosmic cycles, stories about everyday people doing everyday things, stories about talking animals and magic fruit and even stories about stories themselves.

That is what we will do today, tell a story or two. Maybe you'll learn something. Maybe you'll experience something. Maybe you'll just spend a pleasant time with good people. All of these are worthwhile goals. Let's tell stories.

I have two stories to tell you. The first one is more of an explanation than a story, but since it is about something that has happened over and over and over again, it takes on the nature of one of those old, epic myths. I call this story, "What witches do."

When we were asked to do this celebration, we were asked to be honest about what we, as Pagans, do. Since most of us are Wiccan, which is a fancy word for modern day witches, we thought we would share how we celebrate our rituals. In one of the oldest of story telling traditions, my friends here will provide the actions and I will provide the narrative. Don't expect fancy sets and flashy special effects. That's Broadway. This is folk theater, the really, really old stuff, the stuff that tells stories that start long before "once upon a time."

So here goes.

Among the Wicca, we have the notion that all places are sacred, especially if there are trees or rocks or water or bugs around. Have we got any of those around here? Well, it doesn't have to be bugs, any living creatures will do. If that is true, then any place can be a place for our rituals, can be a sacred space, like a church or a temple or a mosque or a synagogue. All it takes is a little preparation.

Think of it as building a church wherever you go. And what do you need when you first build a church? Is it lumber? No, you can build churches without wood. Is it stone? No. Is it blocks of

sun baked bricks like my children recently showed me at Mesa Verde? No. It is nothing like that. In order to build a church, to make a sacred space, first you need people. That's where all of you come in. And it cannot be just any kind of people. It has to be people united by a vision, linked by a common goal, bound together in some spiritual manner. In Wicca, we do that with a

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brief guided meditation as will be given by our High Priestess, Lydia.

I'd like to give you a brief aside about the titles "High Priestess" and "High Priest". It is the belief within Wicca that all Wiccans are Priests and Priestesses, because each and every one of us has the ability to connect directly with the Divine. High Priest and High Priestess, lofty though the titles seem, are only those chosen to lead a specific group or ritual. Today, it is Lydia and Breck. The next time you visit us, it might be someone else. If you come and join our group, it could be you. But I digress. (to HPS) My Lady, if you please.....

#### GROUNDING

HPS: Relax. Wiggle around if you need to, get it all done with now. (everybody wiggles) Good, now wiggle a little slower. A little slower. Now just barely move. Now, sit still, nothing but listening and breathing. Breathe a little deeper. Slowly, gently. Without looking around, let yourself become aware of all the other people, sitting still, breathing deeply, slowly, gently. As we become more and more still and relaxed, we become more and more like a grove of trees, still, and relaxed, strong in our relaxation. As you sit, strong as a tree, draw your awareness into yourself, deep into your body, deep down into one single spot somewhere in the middle of yourself. Concentrate on that spot. Focus it. Then move it around, just a little. Move around inside yourself, a little spot of attention and focus. Let it drift down, down lower in you body, until it meets the earth below you. Now, take that little spot of attention and focus and let it sink into the Earth. Go down just a little way, until your attention is surrounded by cool moist soil. This is water, water like a tree drinks, water that gives the tree yet another part of its strength. Drink in a little of that energy, that cool soothing water energy. Then sink a little further, past the soil, past the layers of dirt and sand and gravel and deeper and deeper until you feel that spot of awareness is surrounded by strong hard rock, the very bones of

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Mother Earth. Here is the strength that holds up the trees and all other living things. Take a little of that hard, hard strength into yourself. Now drop down again, deeper and deeper and deeper still. Below all the layers of rock you will find a molten core at the center of the Earth, the very essence of heat and Fire. You will not be burned. The you that is down there is just a little spot of attention and focus, free to experience this amazing source of energy and power. Draw a little, just a little, of that raw power at the center of our planet. Now rise up, up and up, out of the molten core and back into the layers of rock. Keep on rising, until you feel the moist cool soil again. Then rise up further, back into your body. Here, feel yourself breathing, slow and steady, like a tree breathing in a summer breeze. That is the energy of Air. Bring some of that essence of Air into your attention, just like you are breathing air into your body. Let your attention spread out just a little, let it fill your body. Let it spread out. Let yourself be aware of the people around you. Each of them, in their own way, has taken the same fantastic travels that you have, feeling the various strengths and energies of the world. Each of them has shared a vision with you, has been united with you in that experience, each of them has bound with you in the same spirit journey.

**NARRATOR:** It is the way of the Wicca, when bound together like this to greet each other softly, with joy and mutual respect. The words that are spoken are an echo of the ones the High Priestess uses. Be ready to say them after she does.

**HPS:** Merry Meet!

**ALL:** Merry Meet.

**NARRATOR:** Now that we have people who are ready to be part of a church, a part of our worship space, we need to clean and purify the space. We also need one other step. After we clean out the space, we need to add something in. If you were to empty a vase of old dried up flowers, you'd add new ones. If you were to empty an aquarium of old stale water, you'd add fresh water for your fish to enjoy. It's just like that, only completely different. We purify the space with the elements of Earth and Water. We get rid of all the negative yucky stuff we just don't want. Someone grumbling because they just got a parking ticket, that's gotta go. All the leftovers from the workday's hassles, get 'em outta here. Anything that would interfere in any way with you being here totally with us, is gone with just a chant and a sprinkle. Then we add pure clean energy with the elements of Fire and Air in the form of incense smoke. With that energy, new and refreshing, we can do whatever we want, whatever we as a group want to dedicate our little church to. I myself prefer lots and lots of incense smoke, but we'll see what today's officiants prefer. If they do use a lot of smoke, like I would, and if you are somewhat allergic to scented smoke, then please, try not to breathe in too deeply. It won't help your enjoyment of the ceremony if you trigger an asthma attack or something.

#### CENSING AND ASPERGING

(HPS and HP bless elements. HPS invites ALL to join chant. HP and HPS Asperge and Cense circle.)

#### CIRCLE CASTING

**NARRATOR:** Now we're ready to build our church, our temple, our place of joyful worship. We do not build it with bricks or stones or planks of lumber. We build it with ideas and symbols and visualization. We do it with focused attention. As a tool to focus our attention we sue the point of a consecrated sword. (HPS brandishes sword.) This particular sword is not for battle. It cuts nothing thicker than air and lies. Its point becomes a place of sharpened focus and attention. As our High Priestess travels once around the circle, let your attention follow that point on the end of the sword. Envision, if you will, that it draws an invisible wall between this place and all other places. It also draws an invisible wall between this time and all other times, so that our gathering together becomes a unique event, separate from all events. Even if we do this exact same ceremony in this exact same place at exactly the same time next year with exactly the same people and exactly the same words, it will be a different event. Each circle we draw, each church we build is special and unique unto itself. We ask that you concentrate along with us and help us make this circle special.

**HPS:** (Walks circle)

This is a time different from all other times.

This is a place different from all other places.

We are in the world, but removed from the world.

The circle has been cast.

**NARRATOR:** This is now our sacred space, where ideas and symbols have a reality of their own. The words we say and the actions we perform all have meaning and significance. Even the jokes we joke and the smiles we smile have their special import. In acknowledgement of this, we ask that you recognize the boundaries of our circle and stay here in sacred space with us, not crossing that invisible boundary. However, there are children here, and many other reasons that may come up that require leaving our space for a while. For that, we have a Gatekeeper. (Indicate Gatekeeper) He will open an invisible hole in our invisible wall and let you either out or in as needed.

It is the custom within Wicca to set wards, or guardians, around our circle, each one at each of the four directions. It is often the practice of our group to allow our children, or our newcomers, or just those young at heart, to call those guardians.

#### CALLING QUARTERS

**HPS:** Let the Guardians of the quarters be called, starting in the East. (Standard Quarter calls.)

#### GODDESS

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NARRATOR: Among the Wicca, we have the concept of The Goddess and The God. It can be difficult to express what we mean by these. It is easy to fall into the standard stereotypes of what is male and what is female, and those tributes are a part of what we mean. But there is more there, much more. There is the notion that we, as humans, perceive the universe in polarities: night and day, hot and cold, left and right and so on and so forth. There is the underlying truth that these perceived opposites are merely points along a spectrum. Between hot and cold, there are many degrees of warm and cool. Between night and day there are twilight and dawn. Between red and purple there are all the colors of the rainbow.

With all of this in mind, we choose to perceive the Divine in reflection of our own physical forms, male and female. Also, we choose to honor that perception of the Divine by taking it into ourselves, by becoming God and Goddess. It is a portion of our religion that many others have difficulty or discomfort with. We acknowledge that and give all others the freedom to do or think as they will. Often, we omit it from our ceremonies we share with others, but today, here with friends, we offer it as one of our most sacred religious rites.

(Turns to HPS) Lydia, on behalf of all who are here, I ask you to set aside your mortal self, for a short while. I ask you, with full knowledge of what I ask, to be the Goddess.

GODDESS: Because you ask, and because of Love, I am the Goddess. (receives Moon Crown).

GOD (Holly King)

(HPS turns to HP) Breck, on behalf of all who are here, I ask you to set aside your mortal self, for a short while. I ask you, with full knowledge of what I ask, to be the God.

HOLLY KING: Because you ask, because it is You who ask, and because of Love, I am the God. (receives Holly Crown)

GODDESS: I crown you as Holly King, symbol of the Seasons of Cold, whose rule has started with the Summer Solstice and come to its peak now at Winter. As you have done before, come and sit by my side.

SECOND GOD (Oak King)

GATEKEEPER: (steps forward) Wait!! There must be a challenge!

GODDESS: He is right. It is that time. (turns to challenger) Before you can issue this challenge, you too, must be crowned. Come here. (challenger approaches throne) Sean, on behalf of all who are here, I ask you to set aside your mortal self, for a short while. I ask you, with full knowledge of what I ask, to be yet another aspect of the God.

OAK KING: Because you ask, because it is You who ask, and because of Love, I am the God. (receives Oak Crown).

GODDESS: I crown you as Oak King, symbol of the Seasons of Warmth, whose rule will be defined later, if at all.

## STORY 2 - Oak King Vs Holly King

NARRATOR: This brings us to our second story. (GODDESS takes Her throne. HOLLY KING stands at her left. OAK KING stands to right of empty throne.) It deals with the cycles and changes that we see in nature; that we see within ourselves. It goes back to the concepts we have for the God and the Goddess. We believe that all things are changing all the time, but that there are two types of change. One is cyclical. We ascribe that to the Goddess, and, as the most obvious example of cyclical change, we use the Moon as Her symbol. It constantly changes appearance, and yet remains the same underneath that appearance of change. Its changes are constant and predictable. That is how we see the Goddess, ever changing yet constant. (change GODDESS to Shari.) She moves from aspect to aspect: maiden, mother, crone, Amazon warrior, caring teacher, modern businesswoman, inspiring leader, aspiring student; all the women you have ever known or heard about, and yet, She is one thing. She is the Goddess. She is Eternal.

In this story, the God has many attributes as well, but He shares one with us. He is mortal. He ages as the seasons change. He reflects that deep truth about ourselves; that He will have His time, and then that time will pass. Nothing that exists on this world, not even the mountains, will live forever. But many things will last because they exist in generations, a long succession of life after life after life. It is part of nature, to be seen everywhere you look. In creatures that have the concept of leadership, it can be seen in the succession of leadership. A wolf pack will, sooner or later, adopt a new leader. The lead elk of a small herd will someday be supplanted by some young buck. Even in human leadership, there is always a challenge from the young generation to the older generation. And so, in our story, there is a challenge at the Divine level. The Holly King, who knows the strength and value of darkness and rest, has aged. The Oak King, who knows the strength and value of light and growth, is young and full of new-found vitality. The challenge is inevitable. (Both KINGS whip out their swords from behind the throne.)

OAK KING: That's right, old man, I challenge you.

HOLLY KING: You do, young whelp? What prize do you hope to gain with this challenge?

OAK KING: The right to sit by Her side.

HOLLY KING: Ah-h, the very best prize of all. So be it.

NARRATOR: And so, the competition begins. (OAK KING and HOLLY KING take out swords and place them side by side to compare their lengths.)

GODDESS: No, no, this is not going to be THAT kind of male competition. (Both GODS lower swords, look sheepish and face the GODDESS) I know why you fight, perhaps better than you do yourselves. I know what rushes through your blood, what  
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moves in your hearts and spirits. Oak King, do you remember how you came to sit by my side?

HOLLY KING: Yes, my lady.

GODDESS: Holly King, do you know what you risk in order to sit at my side?

OAK KING: My lady, the prize is worth whatever risk there is.

GODDESS: In other words, you don't know yet. Holly King, is he right? Is the prize worth the risk?

HOLLY KING: Yes my lady, that has been, is and always will be the truth.

GODDESS: Then, both of you, do what you must do. (Both GODS bow to GODDESS, then to each other.)

surpass you. (Strikes)

HOLLY KING: You haven't proven that yet. (Strikes)

OAK KING: You have weakened. Why do you fight when you know you must lose?

HOLLY KING: It is the way of Nature, to follow instincts, to do what has been done. I speak with the voice of all the yesterdays that ever were. That which is alive, will always strive. (Strikes)

OAK KING: It is the way of Humans, to transcend instincts, to do what has never been done. I speak with the voice of all the tomorrows that will ever be. That which is aware, will always care. (Strikes and swords lock)

HOLLY KING: Do you really believe that?

OAK KING: Yes!

HOLLY KING: Then perhaps you are ready. (Throws down sword)

OAK KING: (Hesitates, then looks upset. Turns to GODDESS.)

GODDESS: I repeat: Do what you must do.

(OAK KING places sword point to chest of HOLLY KING. HOLLY KING slowly descends while sword point remains at his chest. HOLLY KING ends up lying flat on

It is the way of Nature, to follow instincts, to do what has been done. I speak with the voice of all the yesterdays that ever were. That which is alive, will always strive.

NARRATOR: And so, they go at it, in time honored fashion. (Both GODS begin circling each other with an occasional feint.) In the ways of humans ever since swords were invented, they wield those swords. Before there were swords, there were sticks. Before that, there were wolves, and lions, elks and countless others. It was a test of physical dominance, because that was what mattered, because that was what benefited the pack, the herd, the pride, the tribe, the village, the kingdom. (Change GODDESS to Artemis) But what happens when you move on beyond physical strength as the measure of what is important? What happens when the age old battle occurs within sacred space, here in the world of symbols and ideas?

GODDESS: I repeat: Do what you must do.

OAK KING: I am the force of change. (Strikes)

HOLLY KING: How do you think I got here? (Strikes)

OAK KING: I am the new generation. (Strikes)

HOLLY KING: And I am the generation who taught you. (Strikes)

OAK KING: And I have moved beyond what you have taught to

his back.)

GODDESS: Give him back his sword. (OAK KING places sword in HOLLY KING's hands in standard burial position.) Now, come sit by my side. (OAK KING takes seat in empty throne.)

NARRATOR: This is but one half of the story. The Holly King knew the other half, and now the Oak King begins to know: Here and now, at Winter, at the height of His power, the Holly King must hand over His reign to the Oak King. Six months from now, at the height of His power, the Oak King must do the same and the Holly King will rule again. Over and over and over and over, it happens without end. That long infinity, stretching both ways in time, that is our story. (Change GODDESS to Lydia.) I have heard this story many times. I have heard it told many ways. Each time it is told in a different way. In some traditions, the sword is passed in great ceremony, with gentle and honorable exit for the passing God. In some traditions, the swords are real and the sparks fly. In some traditions, the words are far fancier than those we have used today. Each time it is told differently, but always the result is the same. The wheel of the year turns. The generations move from one to another. All things of this world age and pass on, and above them, the moon constant-

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ly changes, yet stays the same.

GODDESS: (goes to fallen HOLLY KING) I am the Goddess. Listen to me. You are no longer the Holly King. You are my beloved child, Breck. Arise and know this. (He sits up) All those who would, here in the land of symbols and ideas, give their lives to tell my stories, they have my special blessings. (Helps him stand up and gives kiss.)

GATEKEEPER: Thank you, my Lady. (He takes his place. GODDESS returns to throne.)

#### CELEBRATION

NARRATOR: That is end of our second story, even though it really has no end at all. But our first story continues. (Change GODDESS.) The elements of ritual and celebration are more than just listening to a good story. We take the opportunity to share with one another, to share food, to share company, to share song and dance, and while doing all that, to let the energies of our story sink in and become a part of us. To emphasize the importance of sharing food, we ask that our living God and Goddess bless our humble offering.

OAK KING: Sunlight created this food.

GODDESS: Earth created this food.

OAK KING: Air created this food.

GODDESS: Rain created this food.

OAK KING: I bless this food.

GODDESS: I bless this food.

(Those available distribute the food. During this time, Shari picks other random celebrants to take turns being GODDESS. HPS leads singing and dancing.)

#### GODDESS AND GOD

NARRATOR: In the story of what witches do, now is the time to undo all the preparations we have made. Included in all this is the awareness that nothing that is done can be truly undone. All that was made sacred during this time will have at least some echo of that blessing with it, especially those people who took on the role of Divinity itself.

GODDESS: (turns to OAK KING) Listen to me. You are no longer the Oak King. You are my beloved child, Sean. Go with my thanks and my blessing.

HP: Thank you, my lady.

(GODDESS turns to NARRATOR)

NARRATOR: I have always hated saying “goodbye”. This goodbye I hate the most. My Lady, Goddess in Her many forms, I thank You for Your presence and bid you Blessed Be. I ask that

You return our friend Lydia to us. I ask, with full knowledge that the answer will be “yes” and that You bless her for bringing Your presence to us. (HPS leaves the throne.)

#### DISMISSING QUARTERS

HPS: Now, let the guardians at the quarters be dismissed, starting in the North. (Standard quarter dismissals.)

#### CLOSING CIRCLE

NARRATOR: Remember the invisible wall we built? Guided by the point of a sword? (HPS Brandishes sword) It is time to let that circle go, so that it may be cast again, over and over and over and over, at different times and different places, each time connected to the others through the commonalities of our beliefs, of our religion called Wicca. Therefore, we say that the circle is open but unbroken. We also say one other thing, a response and a promise. It means that we meet together with joy and peace in our hearts, that we leave one another with that joy and peace, and that we look forward to doing all this again when we can. The line is “Merry Meet, Merry part and Merry Meet Again.” Try it.

ALL: Merry Meet, Merry Part and Merry Meet Again.

NARRATOR: When the High Priestess announces the circle is open but unbroken, I ask that all of you give that response with all the joy and gusto and sincerity you can muster.

HPS: (walks circle with sword)

This time is connected to all other times.

This place is connected to all other places.

We are connected to the world.

The circle is open, but unbroken.

ALL: Merry Meet, Merry Part and Merry Meet Again! (General cheering.)

#### FAREWELL

NARRATOR: We come to the end of my first story, although it too has no real end. We will gather together again and again in this way, to celebrate the changing of the seasons, to observe the cycles of the moon. If you are so moved, you are invited to join us when we meet again, to continue to be a part of our story.

We thank the Unitarian Universalist Church of Boulder for being such a beautiful place, both physically and spiritually, that it inspires us to hold our celebrations here. We thank the Reverend Jacqueline Ziegler for “nudging” us into doing this. But most of all, we thank each and every one of you. For a little while, you have linked the stories of your lives with our stories, and we are the richer for it. May the principles of Unitarian Universalism always support and encourage such sharing. So be it.

ALL: So be it.

## ...presidents column continued from page 1

we work to heal Mother Earth and all her children. As with all large undertakings, this was a complex task. The first step in making this cloth manifest was to create a strong, well-grounded warp. (For those non-weavers among us, warp describes the vertical threads in any weaving. The warp is laid down on the loom first and no actual weaving can happen until it is firmly in place.)

Warping the CUUPS loom was a lengthy process. But over the ensuing years, the warp threads were firmly laid down. First, in 1987, came UUA recognition of CUUPS as an affiliated organization. This was followed by extensive efforts, both locally and nationally, to educate UU congregations and clergy about paganism. The Sixth Source campaign led to the inclusion of earth-based spiritual traditions as part of the foundations of our denomination. We became incorporated, in the state of Ohio, as a 501(c)3 organization. We wrote by-laws, adopted by the membership in 1998, and learned to function within their governmental framework. We developed financial policies that allowed us to be accountable to our members. Chapters popped up around the country and membership grew. Sacred Cosmos, our scholarly journal, was created to expand discussion and intuition of our spiritual beliefs.

Thanks to the diligence of our foremothers and forefathers, the loom upon which the fabric of CUUPS will be woven has been strongly warped. It is time now to turn our attention to the next step in this process of creation. Our founders started with an image of what this altar cloth would look like, a collection of broadly stated goals. Before we can begin the actual weaving-the taking of threads of varied colors and textures and working them over and under the warp-the gradual building up, line by line, of the pattern we wish to manifest-we must first refine our image of what we wish to create. We must envision a more detailed picture, based in part upon the goals of our founders and in part upon the needs and desires we perceive at this point in our history. We cannot weave-at least not efficiently-without a clearer image of the finished piece.

In her column, outgoing president Joan VB outlines some of the possible images of CUUPS we might wish to make manifest. If I thought these decisions rested solely in the hands of the board, I would probably run screaming into the night (carrying my loom with me). Fortunately, these decisions do not rest with the board, but rather with you-the membership. It is, of course, the board's job to take the disparate images and threads the membership throws in our direction and undertake the actual weaving into something beautiful and coherent. That is the fun part. But first we need to collect threads from as many individuals and chapters as possible. Here's how we're gonna do it.

During the upcoming year, the board is going to collect threads and images from as many sources as we can. All members and chapters are invited to contribute their thoughts to this process. A survey for individual members will be made available on CUUPS-Café, and posted to the web-site. We may even mail this survey in hard-copy, if we can find volunteers to undertake the task. A survey for chapters will be posted to the chapter list. We urge all chapters to spend a meeting discussing their vision of CUUPS, and then to send their ideas to the board. Board members will also

We must envision a more detailed picture,  
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be calling chapter coordinators for one-on-one conversations. In addition, we plan to dedicate part of our annual meeting and one of our programming slots at General Assembly to discussions of where CUUPS should go next, and how it should get there.

During CUUPS Convocation 2003, which will be held at The Mountain UU Retreat Center in North Carolina over Samhain, we will weave together the threads we have collected from around the country into a new vision for CUUPS. This vision will provide direction for future boards, and hopefully help you answer the question-what do I get out of CUUPS?

We invite groups to do regional meetings around this topic, especially those on the west coast, who may find it difficult to make it to The Mountain. As current board president, I would be happy to attend any regional events to facilitate discussions of our vision.

This process will be most successful, and will generate the most enduring vision, if all members of CUUPS participate. Here is your opportunity to put your imprint on the future of this organization. In my opinion, speaking as a lifelong voter, if you do not participate in this process, you have no right to complain about the final result. So please-share your ideas and intuitions

A sparkling, colorful thread dwells inside each of it. Composed of our intuitive essence and our desire to connect with others, it is longing to join with other fibers to be woven into the beautiful altar cloth that will clothe CUUPS for the next decade. Don't deny yourself the opportunity to be part of this exciting process.

Yours in creative anticipation,

Mary Gelfand  
President

# Pagan News

## Court Reverses Cincinnati Ban on Menorah Display



Justice John Paul Stevens

A U.S. Supreme Court justice has struck down the city of Cincinnati's OH ban against a Jewish display of the menorah on a downtown square — and all other religious exhibits — during the holiday season.

Justice John Paul Stevens ruled late Friday that the city may not enforce its restriction against such displays, which was designed primarily to block the Ku Klux Klan from erecting a cross on Fountain Square as it has several times during the Christmas season

in the past.

In upholding a decision Wednesday by U.S. District Judge Susan Dlott, Justice Stevens said the city was denying citizens' rights to use the square as a "public forum."

*Reuters/Macon.com*

## Wiccan Student Accused of "Hexing" a Teacher Drops Appeal

A Union Public Schools student who claimed to have been suspended because of her interest in Wicca, a religion associated with witchcraft, has dropped an appeal in her lawsuit against the school district.

The move came after the district said it would garnish her parents' paychecks to collect legal costs from them.

Brandi Blackbear and her parents sued the district after school officials suspended her for 15 days for allegedly casting spells and for private writings about shooting students on a school bus. The school had also told her that she could not wear or draw in school any symbols that were non-Christian

*AP*

## New York's Police Commissioner Wants More Spying Powers

Arguing that this city faces a far more perilous world than once imagined, New York's police commissioner wants to toss aside a decades-old federal court decree governing the limits on police spying and surveillance of its own citizenry. City officials argue that officers need more elbow room to photograph, tape and infiltrate political and social organizations to uproot terror networks.

But civil libertarians warn of a return to the unsavory days of old, when New York's police department acquired a reputation for police "black bag" break-ins and spying on political dissidents. It's a battle with echoes in other cities. In Chicago, officials have already weakened a court decree limiting police spying. In San Francisco, officials have reversed their own 1997 decision and have now joined an FBI terrorism task force, even though FBI surveillance of mosques and peaceful protests could violate the California constitution.

*Washington Post.*



Police Commissioner Raymond W. Kelly

## Native Americans Offer A Less Festive View of First Feast

Children, dressed as pilgrims and Indians, burst from the art room and flood the school hallway, engulfing music teacher Jamie Oxendine. He smiles wide above the tide of construction-paper vests, hatchets, and feathered Indian headbands. "I wish they wouldn't do that," he says. "The Indian images - I send every school in Toledo a letter every year, telling them about that," Mr. Oxendine says. "Some are sensitive to it. Some don't like me interfering with their lesson plans."

*Toledo Blade (OH).*

## Wiccan Chaplain Targeted By Attacks

Waupun WI - Correctional Institution prison chaplain Jamiy Witch says the mean-spirited telephone calls and anonymous letters she has received are unwarranted and cruel.

The calls and letters, she said, denounce her chosen faith and accuse her of attacking the Christian community.

Witch, a self-avowed Wiccan who serves as an interfaith non-denominational chaplain at Waupun Correctional, says the rumors and verbal attacks began when she moved into the community during the summer but have intensified since the Oct. 14 vote to oust her along with Imam Ronald Beyah, a Muslim chaplain at Dodge Correctional Institution, from the Waupun Clergy Association, a group comprised of prison chaplains and clergy members from throughout the city.

*The Reporter (WI).*

## Santa Ban Spreads in Australia

Banning Santa Claus from some childcare centers and kindergartens could be just the beginning.

The Easter Bunny, Mother's Day and Father's Day could be next to get the boot.

Kindergarten Parents Victoria, which represents more than 1000 parent-run preschool management committees, said it was time to respect the cultural values of whole community.

"If you go to a religious school you know the philosophy before you go and go for that reason," Ms {Dannie} Duplex said. "But in a community-based kindergarten I think religion shouldn't be part of the curriculum."

*The Herald Sun (AU)*

## Nativity Scene On Courthouse

### Lawn Will Come With Disclaimer

A nativity scene will be placed on the lawn of the Tuscola MI County Courthouse, accompanied by some not-so-fine print.

County commissioners voted 7-0 Tuesday to allow the Caro Women's Interfaith Committee for Christmas to erect the display. The resolution, however, requires the display be accompanied by "significantly large signage, that is lit."

The disclaimer says county government does not own or endorse the manger scene.

*AP*

## Protest Against Pagan Festival Fizzles

A Christian protest which promised to attract several hundred ...continued on next page

churchgoers to demonstrate against a Pagan festival in central Croydon turned out in small numbers at the weekend. Around five demonstrators waited outside Fairfield on Saturday (November 23) in a protest of prayer, handing out Bible tracts as revellers walked in to the annual Pagan Federation conference. Protester Patrick Battell said: "Unfortunately we didn't get the turnout we were hoping for." Kevin Bourne, of the organizers of the PF conference, said: "I felt terribly sorry for them standing out in the rain. We took them out tea but I think they gave up at around 2pm."

*The Croydon Guardian (UK)*

### **UN defends appointing sadomasochist**

The UN has defended appointing an Iraqi weapons inspector who runs a sadomasochistic website. Former US Secret Service agent John McGeorge, 53, of Woodbridge, Virginia, is waiting to be sent to Baghdad as a munitions analyst.

UN officials admit they did not make any background checks that would have revealed he runs a pansexual sadomasochistic group. He helped set up the Leather Leadership Conference which produces training sessions for "current and potential leaders of the fetish community," according to its website.

Mr McGeorge is also president of the Virginia security firm Public Safety Group after serving for several years as a Marines munitions technician and weapons expert for the Secret Service. The UN defended the appointment, saying Mr McGeorge was one of a group of inspectors recommended by the US Government.

A spokesman for the UN Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission: "He is someone who has expertise in warheads and munitions, and that's what's important.

"Nobody's suggested that he's done anything illegal, have they? The UN doesn't check into people's personal lives."

*Annanova.com*

### **UFO sighting sparked Britain's own 'X-file' mystery**

Details of an alleged UFO sighting near a Suffolk RAF base more than 20 years ago have been released under the Freedom of Information Act. The Rendlesham File is one of the first documents to be released as part of an opening-up of the inner workings of Whitehall.

The sighting of a glowing triangular "strange glowing object" near RAF Woodbridge in the early hours of December 27, 1980 is described in colourful detail. A number of US Air Force men witnessed the object hover in the darkness, transmitting blue pulsating lights and sending nearby farm animals into a "frenzy".

In a report entitled Unexplained Lights, USAF Lt Col Charles I Halt, Deputy Base Commander at RAF Bentwaters, adjacent to Woodbridge, told how he witnessed an object emitting a "red sun-like light" moving through the trees. Next morning Lt Col Halt and his men discovered three circular depressions, seven inches in diameter, in the ground. Radiation measuring 0.1 milliroentgens was recorded in the depressions - a level 10 times higher than normal.

*Annanova.com*

### **Judge: School Violated Boy's Free Speech Rights**

A federal judge has ruled that a school district violated a student's rights to free speech and due process when it suspended

him for posting "intimidation and threats" on the Internet.

The Waterford School District should not have suspended the student in August 2001 for contributing to "Satan's Web page," U.S. District Judge Patrick Duggan ruled this week.

School officials were concerned by content that included a passage labeled "Satan's mission for you this week." It read: "Stab someone for no reason then set them on fire throw them off of a cliff, watch them suffer and with their last breath, just before everything goes black, spit on their face."

The student, who was not identified, was suspended after a hearing in which he wasn't allowed to cross-examine witnesses and could not be represented by an attorney, said his lawyer, Richard Landau.

The student sued the district, seeking damages of up to \$75,000. He has since graduated from a school in a neighboring district.

*AP*

### **DNA jewelry: A gift that screams you**

Talk shows have used DNA to identify wayward fathers. Detectives have used it to absolve the falsely convicted. But now, English scientists are using strands of life to create the ultimate brand name.

Your DNA can be tagged on a silver and garnet necklace, woven into a wool rug, or stamped on a handmade glass screen. "You're unique, and this is one way of proving it," said Neil Sullivan, head of Complement Genomics, a Sunderland, England, DNA testing company that runs DesignAGifts.com. "They're one-offs that can never be replicated."

Gifts range in price from 175 pounds (about \$250) for a framed DNA certificate to 4,000 pounds (\$5,900) for the stained glass screen. If sales continue to be brisk, Sullivan said he plans to introduce new ways of putting the strands of life into gift boxes, including a line of clothing and paintings.

"It's a fun way to deliver molecular biology to the consumer," he said.

*CNN*

### **Nude Women Spell P-E-A-C-E**

Concerned that war against Iraq is imminent, 50 women in Port Reyes Station, California took off their clothes in the cold rain in mid-November and lay end-to-end in the grass to spell out P-E-A-C-E. The unusual protest was organized in just a few days by artist Donna Sheehan, 72, who wanted to convey the desperation she said women in particular feel about the coming military action.

"I just thought, what can I do? What can we do? It's a desperate feeling. Well, this is what I did," Sheehan told CNN. "And every other women who was there felt like they were doing something for peace." Sheehan called her friends, they called their friends, and they all got ready to pose for local photographer Art Rogers in a baseball field in this small town just north of San Francisco.

"By the time we'd stripped, with a lot of squealing and giggling and whooping and hollering, it was really raining," she said. "But we had fun. It was very empowering." All the women signed documents allowing their images to be sold, with proceeds going to the peace movement.

*AP*

# Reviews

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## **Paganism: An Introduction to Earth-Centered Religions**

Authors: Joyce & River Higginbotham

Llewellyn Publ.

2002

Reviewed by Joan Van Becelaere

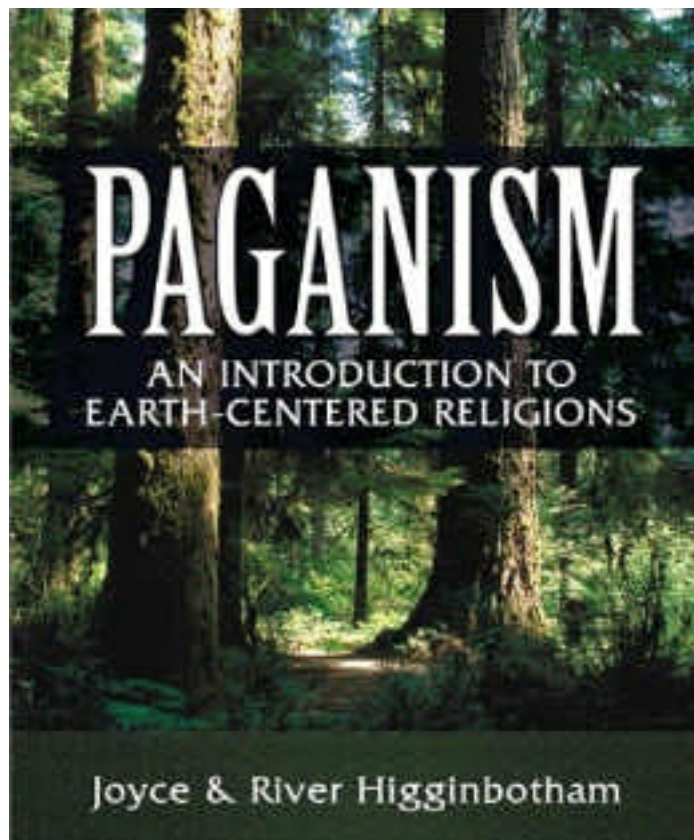
How many times have you picked up a pamphlet or a book titled something like “Introduction to Paganism” only to find that it was really an introduction to Wicca instead? I always find that disappointing. Please understand, I have nothing against Wicca. I’ve spent time in several covens over the past twenty years and studied with some great witches. But the broad world of Paganism is too rich, too varied, too exciting and mysterious to try to narrow it down to just one tradition or form. As I’ve grown older, I’ve come to appreciate many of the more eclectic and diverse paths of Paganism for what they offer and the way they have expanded my own definition of “Pagan

So when I started to read Joyce and River Higginbotham’s new book, I placed a little bet with myself to see how long it would take them before they fell into the old habit of describing Wicca as if it represented all of Paganism. I’m happy to report that I lost my own bet. They never did fall into that trap. Instead, they presented a broad and well-developed overview that was knowledgeable without being pretentious; theological without being preachy.

There are seven chapters titled:

1. What is Paganism? (This chapter includes a definition of Earth Centered religion as well as the basics of good ritual elements.)
2. You Are What You Believe
3. A Pagan View of Deity
4. What About Satan?
5. The Living Universe (A great discussion about the interdependent web of existence and its meaning in modern lives.)
6. Magick
7. Ethics and Personal Responsibility.

I found the chapters on “A Pagan View of Deity” and “The Living Universe” particularly well done. It’s obvious that the authors have read, understood and creatively dialogued with writings from various liberal theologians, including Matthew Fox of Creation Spirituality fame. They have also included writings by various poets and wonderful elements from the works of Sufi, Christian, Jewish, and Hindu mystics for comparison.



The chapter on Satan was well researched and very well written. The section on the sociology of the symbol of Satan was particularly well done. At first, however, I thought the chapter was extraneous and questioned the necessity of its inclusion. But then I realized that in this day and age, when writing for a general audience, one still has to make it very, very, very clear that Paganism and Satanism are entirely different and separate entities.

While Joyce and River never explicitly tie their teachings to Unitarian Universalism, I found connections and parallels to the Principle and Purposes throughout the book. One could use interpret many parts from this book as a study on the first and seventh principles (honoring the worth and dignity of all; honoring the interdependent web of existence) and their place in spiritual growth and development.

The book would be a valuable resource for an Adult Religious Education class. It is written in a textbook format and includes small diagrams, discussion questions, and various group and individual learning exercises. One chapter for each class session would work out nicely. Add a chalice lighting, a brief check-in and a chalice extinguishing and you would have a solid 6 or 7 session curriculum (depending on whether you included the chapter on Satan).

# Let There Be Light

## A Solstice Chalice Lighting and Meditation

by Rev. Joan Van Becelaere (as offered at the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Durango, Colorado, December 2000)

### Chalice Lighting/Ringing of the Bells

At the solstice, when many people celebrate the rebirth of the new year, it is an ancient custom to ring bells. We ring out the old and ring in the new. Bells are said to both drive away evil and welcome good. We will start our solstice celebration today with a ringing of the bells. (Note: Bells are rung at each direction and the lighting of the chalice.)

(Face the East) East is the direction of the intellect, of abstract thoughts and ideas. At this time of New Year, we ring out our old prejudices and biases. We ring in fresh concepts of tolerance and acceptance and new ways of looking at our world in its wholeness. (Ring bells)

(Face the South) South is the direction of energy, the will and healing. We ring out our old will to destruction, our dysfunctional desires for that which harms ourselves and others. We ring in energy for creative work in the New Year, the healing of self, society and our planet. (Ring bells)

(Face the West) West is the direction of the emotions and feelings, our human intuition. We ring out our old sorrows and feelings of apathy and inadequacy. We ring in courage for the coming year and love that dares to overcome hate. (Ring bells)

(Face the North) North is the direction of the earth, growth, and nature. We ring out the death and sorrow of the old year and the coldness of heart that kills justice. We ring in the growth of life with dignity for all beings. We celebrate the renewal of the life force and a rich new year of peace. (Ring bells)

(Center) The Center is the direction of change, both within and without. It is both the center that binds us together in community and the circumference that surrounds our being. We ring out our old ways of living separate and alone. We ring in our renewal of community and the celebration of our interdependence, our unity in diversity.

(Ring bells)

We will now light this chalice as a symbol of our hope. May its living flame remind us that change is needed everywhere, within and without, that now is the acceptable time for transformation. (Ring bells)



### Meditation

The year was 1914. It was Christmas Eve in Denver, Colorado. A young boy, David Jonathan Sturgeon, lay bedridden with a terminal illness. The boy was too sick to be carried downstairs to see the family Christmas tree. But just outside his bedroom window, he could see some beautiful pine trees in the front yard of his house. To make Christmas Eve a little brighter for his dying grandson, pioneer electrician D. D. Sturgeon dipped some ordinary light bulbs in red and green paint, strung them together on a primitive electric cord and draped them over one of the pine trees outside.

The effect pleased the little boy. It also pleased the entire city of Denver. Hundreds of visitors came by carriage from miles away just to see the brilliant, glowing Christmas tree in the front yard. Several years later, the Denver Post (the local newspaper) began an outdoor lighting display contest. From there, the tradition of outdoor Christmas lights spread around the world.

A major holiday custom was born from one man's desire to use his knowledge and talents to help make life a little brighter for someone else. Not only did D.D. Sturgeon make the tree shine, he also let his own talents, his commitment to his family, his own inner light shine for all to see.

This is certainly the season of light, the time when we try to make things shine. It's the time we celebrate Christmas, Hannukah, Solstice, Kwanzaa, Ramadan, St. Lucia's Day, La Posadas, the New Year and probably a few more that I've missed. The sun is reborn again and darkness is dispelled. It's the beginning of the waxing phase of the year, (Editor's note: winter solstice this year is December 22, 01:14 GMT, or Dec 21, 8:14pm Eastern) to be exact.

There are more candles bought and sold during this time than at any other point in the year. We light candles and string lights on evergreen trees as symbols of bounty, balance and peace. We put up electric lights all over our homes and yards to celebrate the end of growing darkness and mark the time when the Sun's light begins to grow stronger and bring light and warmth and a renewal of life. Light, warmth, rebirth, renewal, enlightenment, recommitment. These are all part of our various solstice celebrations, our celebrations in the season of light.

...continued on next page

You would think that with all this light flashing around that we could and should find time to set up a little of our own inner light.

We put up all of these hopeful electric lights, but what do we do to let our own light shine? How do we illuminate the season from within and not just with Rudolph's red nose?

I wonder what would happen if we "let our light shine" just a bit more in this world of darkness—if we let it shine in our personal lives, in our lives as a religious community, or in our society?

It has been said, in half jest, that Unitarian Universalism is one of the best-kept secrets in American religion. Of course, I do happen to think that UUism is one of the best things going in American religion, but why should it be such a secret? If UUism is such a good thing, and we all seem to believe that it is, then why aren't we telling others about it? Letting other folk know that - "hey, there's something really good over here and I want to share it with you."

A couple of years ago, I purchased a car license plate frame that says Unitarian Universalist and has a flaming chalice off to one side. It's kind of cute. I have it on my car right now. Not too long ago, a UU friend was admiring it. I said "it wasn't very expensive. I can help you order one just like it if you want." "Oh no, my friend said, that's too much like proselytizing. I couldn't do that. People might question me about what it means." And I wanted to yell and shout: "YES! Yes, of course, that's the whole point! I want people to ask me about it." But I didn't say that at the time to my friend. She was already too shocked at the idea that I might display in public the fact that I was a Unitarian Universalist.

When I say we need to let our UU secret out of the bag, that we need to "let our light shine", I'm not talking about proselytizing - that's an arrogant form of religion, one where you argue that your particular form of relationship with the divine is so perfect and correct that anyone who doesn't follow your path is ignorant, sinful, deluded or even evil. That's not at all what I mean at all.

Instead, what if we just let others know a bit more about what we've got here? Just what are we afraid of? We could talk with family and friends about what we find fulfilling in UUism. We can describe what it has given us in our lives. Maybe we could invite friends and coworkers to attend a service or two.

What could it mean for this congregation, what could it mean for this community as well as for America, if we didn't hide the light of our liberal spirituality and our commitment to social transformation under this thick concrete lampshade of silence that we seem to carry around with us. When it comes to sharing with others our religious convictions and commitments, we seem to be listening again to that little insidious voice inside that keeps saying: "No, you can't do that. You haven't got what it takes. Why even try?" And we let our light grow dim.

How do we as UUs and Americans show our light to the world? Sadly, the flashes of explosion from the ariel bombardment of Iraq

and the camera flashes from the journalists covering the impeachment story seem to be the only kinds of light we are showing the rest of the world at this time. It's not exactly what I had in mind.

Many UUs have been and are involved in a variety of movements and organizations whose goals include justice, peace, racial and gender equality, and other forms of social transformation.

Many of us work very hard to foster these goals. And many of us experience frustration and even burn out when things take too long to change, when the revolution does not come overnight. We start to listen to that little voice again, the one that says: "What can one person do? No, you can't do that. You haven't got what it takes. Why even try?" And we lose our ability to hope, our ability to risk for the benefit of the future. We let our light go dim or even snuff it out altogether. And when we lose our ability to hope, we lose our ability to make a difference. But change, especially social change, takes time and patience. It's neither quick nor easy. Rather, it can be slow and incremental. And we have to constantly find ways to renew our sense of hope and commitment for the



long haul.

What does it take to get your flame rekindled? What does it take to get your fire going? In this solstice, in this season of light, I want to urge you to find what ever it is that ignites your flame. I want you to find a way to let your light shine, to reveal your talents and knowledge and convictions and commitments to the world, for the benefit of all in this interdependent web of life in which we live.

We are blessed with an abundance of symbols of light and hope and renewal during this time of year. We celebrate the return of the Sun. The Sun traditionally represents the self, identity, empowerment and success. Evergreen trees and wreaths are everywhere. Evergreen is an ancient symbol of rebirth and new life. The Yule log is burnt on solstice night to welcome and strengthen the returning light. Holly symbolizes devotion and commitment. Kissing under the mistletoe is said to ensure the spark of light and life between male and female, to ensure fertility and the continuation of the human species. What serves as your spiritual mistletoe? Find it. Kiss under it. Hug under it. Dance under it. What ever it takes.

Among many earth centered peoples, it is said that the Great Mother brought forth the light in the beginning and she gives birth to the new Sun child each year on the darkest night. What will you give birth to this solstice? How will you let your own little light shine? In what way can you transform the world this year? Don't hide your light. Don't be afraid to speak your Unitarian Universalist truth of hope and renewal. As the old song says, "let it shine, let it shine, let it shine".

So may it be. Amen, Shalom and Blessed Be.



# Rightwatch

## Rape as an environmental ethic

“God gave us the earth. We have dominion over the plants, the animals, the trees. God said, ‘Earth is yours. Take it. Rape it. It’s yours.’”

– Conservative Columnist Ann Coulter

## Defeated Democrats in Guantanamo

“[The Democrats are]... a miserable party. I’m glad to see their power end, and I’m sure they’ll all be perfectly comfortable in their cells in Guantanamo.”

– Conservative Columnist Ann Coulter

## Shaky foundations

“it is time to acknowledge that homosexual behavior threatens the foundation of Western civilization-the nuclear family.”

– Steve Baldwin,  
Regent University Law Review



Franklin Graham

## Not a nice God

“We’re not attacking Islam but Islam has attacked us. The God of Islam is not the same God. He’s not the Son of God of the Christian or Judeo-Christian faith. It’s a different God, and I believe it is a very evil and wicked religion.”

– Franklin Graham,  
evangelist and son of Billy Graham

## Culture Wars

“The [Muslim] culture is very clear from September 11, the culture is to kill the infidels and drive planes into us, and blow us up.”

– James Yacovelli, Family Policy Network

## Demon-possessed pedophile?

“They would have us believe that Islam is just as good as Christianity. Christianity was founded by the virgin-born son of God, Jesus Christ. Islam was founded by Muhammad, a demon-possessed pedophile who had 12 wives, the last one of which was a 9-year-old girl....And I will tell you Allah is not Jehovah, either. Jehovah’s not going to turn you into a terrorist.”



The Vines

– Rev. Jerry Vines,  
former president of the Southern Baptist Convention

## Lesbians speak French?

“French is dying, there is a Library in New York dedicated to keep the language alive, this library is needed because it is dying. A librarian is chosen, I don’t know who it is now but last I heard it was a Lesbian, Typical of the french to have one of those.”

– Brice Wellington

## Is there room in Guantanamo?

“The male homosexual is the most dangerous predator that is allowed to walk free on the earth.”

– Sam Woodgeard

## And you can tell how?

“I always see two Jewish communities in America. One of deep intellect and one of shallow, superficial intellect.”

– Dick Armey (R-Texas)



Dick Armey

## Back to the Dark Ages

“Religion is now one of the organizing principles behind American policy.”

– Elliott Abrams,  
Chairman of the United States  
Commission on International Religious Freedom

## What Would Jesus Drive?

“Through this gospel tour Chevrolet is promoting certain vehicles that get very low gas mileage and produce significant pollution, harming human health and the rest of God’s creation. Is this loving your neighbor? We’re asking the artists and audiences to take a good look at what’s happening here, and to ask, ‘What Would Jesus Drive?’”

– Rev. Jim Ball,  
Executive Director of Evangelical Environmental Network



Baruch Goldstein

## Massacre as a holy act

“Goldstein is a saint, and what he did was a holy thing. We are respectful of his memory. He did a great thing, a holy thing.”

– Itamar Ben-Gvir, former member of the now-outlawed Jewish Kach group at a memorial for Baruch Goldstein who massacred 29 Muslim worshippers in a Hebron mosque in 1994

Coming Up Next Issue:

Phoenix Rises from the Ashes:  
How one CUUPS chapter dealt  
with conflict.

A Pagan UU Wedding Ceremony

# Perspectives in Focus: A Letter from the Outgoing Co-President

by Joan Van Becelaere

Friends,

Let me offer you a brief story about perspectives. An engineer, a psychologist, and a theologian were hunting in the wilderness of northern Canada. Suddenly, the temperature dropped and a furious snowstorm was upon them. They came across an isolated cabin, far removed from any town. The hunters had heard that the locals in the area were quite hospitable, so they knocked on the door to ask permission to rest.

No one answered their knocks, but they discovered the cabin was unlocked and they entered. It was a simple place—two rooms with a minimum of furniture and household equipment. Nothing was unusual about the cabin except the stove. It was large, pot-bellied, and made of cast-iron. What was strange about it was its location—it was suspended in midair by wires attached to the ceiling beams.

“Fascinating,” said the psychologist. “It is obvious that this lonely trapper, isolated from humanity, has elevated this stove so that he can curl up under it and vicariously experience a return to the womb.”

“Nonsense!” replied the engineer. “The man is practicing the laws of thermodynamics. By elevating his stove, he has discovered a way to distribute heat more evenly throughout the cabin.”

“With all due respect,” interrupted the theologian, “I’m sure that hanging his stove from the ceiling has religious meaning. Fire LIFTED UP has been a religious symbol for centuries.”

The three debated the point for several hours without resolving the issue. When the trapper finally returned, they immediately asked him why he had hung his heavy pot-bellied stove from the ceiling.

His answer was succinct. “Had plenty of wire, not much stove pipe.”

Isn’t it interesting how our choice of perspective shapes the way we interpret ordinary, common and supposedly objective bits of data? We can all look at the same ‘thing,’ the same set of ‘facts,’ and come up with vastly different meanings. Is the glass half empty or half full or just dirty?

CUUPS has been going through a rather quiet period this past year for a variety of reasons, most of them stemming from social and economic realities. Some interpret this as the beginning of the end of the organization and dire predictions abound about the place of Earth-Centered spirituality in the UUA. Others, however, see it as a quiet gestation time that is waiting to give birth to a new mission and vision for CUUPS.

I’m in the latter group. I think that in the past few years, CUUPS has successfully addressed concerns and questions about the thea/ological seriousness and respectability of the Earth-

Centered point of view and its place in the UUA. Individuals and chapters have been slowly but surely teaching their home congregations that the Pagan perspective has a great deal to offer our congregations, our society and our world. A solid foundation of non-profit, not-tax status and corporate structure and bylaws has been laid. We’ve seen that outreach through publications can be successful (if funded properly!) This is all to the good.

But the original mission to lay this groundwork has been met. The foundation has been laid. Now what? What’s the next step? The next goal? The next vision?

Good questions. Many people, including myself, are asking them. The Board of Trustees is asking them. They know that the officers of an organization can’t simply stand up and decree a vision. Vision can’t be “given” or handed down or created by the leadership of any organization, whether that can be our churches or our chapters or CUUPS. Not if it is to be a true vision, one that

Instead, vision, real vision, has to rise from the grassroots. It has to come from the hopes, ideas, and concerns of the membership—the “people in the pews.”

leads to effective mission and goals.

Instead, vision, real vision, has to rise from the grassroots. It has to come from the hopes, ideas, and concerns of the membership—the “people in the pews.” Unfortunately, it’s simply not feasible for a continent-wide organization to gather all of the members into a room for a weekend of discussion and visioning work. But vision concepts can be generated at the congregational level, in our chapters and by individuals. These vision concepts/ideas/hopes can be collected and sent to the Board, along with statements of commitment from chapters and individuals about the parts they are willing to play to turn the visions into reality. The task of the Board then is to gather up the individual visions, look at them from a broad perspective, see where the congruencies and energies lie, and then articulate a larger organizational vision that grows from the individual visions.

New vision needs new leadership. That’s a reality of organizational life. That is one reason why I did not run for the CUUPS Board this year. I also happen to have a number of personal projects that are absolutely demanding my attention, including my doctoral dissertation. Balance in all things is a virtue.

I have every confidence that Mary Gelfand and the new CUUPS Board will help us all work through this time of new visioning. We will all be amazed by the results. But it does require all of us as members to really give some time to contemplate and articulate our hopes and visions.

I pray for continued blessings for all of you. May we all be healthy and safe, and find fulfillment in our life’s work.

Blessings,  
Rev. Joan Van Becelaere  
Former Co-President

# Letters

Though I enjoyed Michael L. Anderson's "Recovering Christian: A 'Born Again' Pagan Perspective", I felt that it was marred by his inclusion of an untruth.

In the third paragraph he remarks, "...we are no longer burned at the stake as in Salem..." No one was ever burned in Salem. The English were averse to this practice which was far more popular in continental Europe. Instead, the nineteen executions resulting from the Salem witch hysteria were by hanging. In addition to these deaths, one gentleman was "accidentally" pressed to death during his interrogation.

There have been many attempts to explain why the hysteria happened. Medical professionals have tried to attribute it to various diseases or a reaction to a hallucinogenic fungus which can infect rye. The latest book on the subject "In the Devil's Snare:

The Salem Witchcraft Crisis of 1692" by Mary Beth Norton, professor of history at Cornell University, indicates that post-traumatic stress may be the culprit. The young women who made the accusations were all survivors of the nearly forgotten King William's War, which the early Americans called the Second Indian War.

My point is, as Mr. Anderson states later on in the article, we need to do our homework. Our heritage spans many cultures and times and there is much in our Pagan past that we may never know. However, we need to be certain when we are discussing recent history to separate facts from popular myths. Our search for acceptance within the American spiritual melting-pot may depend on it.

Niko Tarini,  
New Bedford, Massachusetts

**O**n October 20, 2002, the transitional board meeting was held. Newly elected members Christina Constable, Shari Storm and Shannon Cocheo were welcomed on to the board, and retiring board members Joan VB and Phaedra Oorbeck were thanked for their hard work and devotion. Rev. Melanie Sullivan and Lydia Smith were appointed to the board to fill partial terms. New officers were also elected. Under our current arrangements, each board member bears primary responsibility for certain tasks. Each member of the board, their e-mail address and their specific board responsibilities are listed below. Please get to know your board members and feel free to contact them with questions and concerns.

**Judy Craft**, from Houston, is in the middle of her first term. She will be filling the dual role of vice president and secretary this year, having served as secretary last year. [ She will also chair the GAcommittee. Judy's goal this year, in addition to creating a fabulous GAexperience, is to update and streamline our membership procedures. [jkcrafft@earthlink.net](mailto:jkcrafft@earthlink.net)

**Shannon Cocheo** was elected to a three year term. She was appointed to the board two years ago, and has served as treasurer since then, a job she will continue to fill. Shannon brings many skills to this task since she is administrator for the Thomas Jefferson District of the UUA. She is also an active member of the Piedmont UU Church and a founding member of their CUUPS Chapter. She lives in Charlotte, NC with her husband of 13 years, Stan, and their 2 sons. [bookwrm@bellsouth.net](mailto:bookwrm@bellsouth.net)

**Christina Constable** is new to the board this year, nominated by the committee at GALast summer. She hails from South Carolina, and has served as chapter contact person, a job she will continue to fill during this visionary year. Christy will be working to gather data about how chapters actually function in the real world. Christina is a founding member of the CUUPS chapter in her home church. [Christina@solsticecharleston.org](mailto:Christina@solsticecharleston.org)

**Mary Gelfand** moves from being co-president last year with Joan, to president. She is in the last year of her first term as a

board member, and will probably stand again next year. She lives in New Orleans with her husband of 31 years where she works as an artist and writer. She loves to preach on pagan topics at UU churches and assist in creating new chapters. She will be facilitating the visioning process. [MaryCUUPS@aol.com](mailto:MaryCUUPS@aol.com)

**Carlton Hommel** will serve as our board presence on the Web Team, as well as his work with the Regulations and Finance Committees. He lives in North Carolina and was recently married. We wish him and his bride every happiness. Carl is in the last year of his first term on the board. [netelrac@notelrac.com](mailto:netelrac@notelrac.com)

**Shari Storm**, from Boulder, Colorado, is newly elected this fall. She has been active in the Boulder church and helped organize the 2002 CUUPS Convo. As the mother of three, she has a strong interest in helping youth learn more about paganism. Shari will be working on development of a package of educational and ritual materials for both adults and children. [Storm@indra.com](mailto:Storm@indra.com)

**Rev. Melanie Morel Sullivan** has been appointed to a one year term. She will assist in our liaisons with her fellow ministers as well as working with the GAcommittee. A former board member, Melanie has long been a supporter of CUUPS within the UUA. She was recently settled as the minister of the UU church in Cherry Hill, New Jersey. [MelanieSul@aol.com](mailto:MelanieSul@aol.com)

**Summer Woodsong** also lives in the Denver area. She was the editor and publisher (along with husband, Robin) of Connections for many years. She will continue to assist with the newsletter and other publication projects. [Swoodsong@aol.com](mailto:Swoodsong@aol.com)

**Lydia Smith**, also of Boulder, has been appointed to a two year term. She has an extensive background in media, including hosting her own radio shows and teaching journalism at the University of Colorado. She will be functioning as newsletter editor until a qualified volunteer (who is not a board member) is located. [goddesslydia@cs.com](mailto:goddesslydia@cs.com)

*Please feel free to contact any members of the board with your questions, concerns, or offers to help.*

Meet the  
Board