

## A Wiccan Bardo, Revisited: initiation and self-transformation

### Preface to the Second Edition

When I wrote the first edition of *A Wiccan Bardo* I was living in Minneapolis and was once again, more than I realized, on the brink of great changes. I lived near the Mothervalley, that lush and beautiful region which embraces the Mississippi, Mother of Waters, which nurtures the valleys and bluffs and all of the tributaries. That region figured prominently in some of the more powerful events and memories of my childhood and youth. I taught school in a river city and played in that city's orchestra. I drove along the river several times a year, noting her changes, watching her floods. In my late twenties I made my way to London where I had an entire future waiting had I but emigrated. The temptation was strong. I arrived in London already knowing my way around the city and felt certain I had already lived there. It was home. But the river, the Mississippi! I realized that I could not leave it and I turned from the great adventure in England and remained in Minnesota where began my religious conversion. This river remains central to Lothloriën's cosmology for it is the great river of North America. If any doubted her power, the floods which took place earlier in the 1990's showed that, despite human intervention, when she feels the need to rise up and cleanse herself, there is little which can hold her back.

And so, too, it is with life. Certainly I had undergone many metamorphoses during my 45 years living in the upper midwest, I often changed like the seasons. I loved my gardens, living in the Blaisdell House which I rented from a friend, yet I longed for gardens which were permanent. In 1988 I learned that I was sharing my life with HIV. In those days that meant believing in 'permanent' gardens was not so important. Perhaps it was because I had worked very hard and created a good life. Perhaps because I embraced the beliefs of our Tradition of Lothloriën regarding death and the transmigration of the soul. Or perhaps it was because my life was good but the Universe knew I had not yet found my *Highest Ideals*; but for whatever reasons beyond the grasp of my too-human mind, I could not have imagined where I would be today.

### A Remembrance of Things Past

When I was very young, living with my family on Pine Lawn Farm in central Wisconsin ("The Heart of America's Dairyland"), the school bus ride took me past a child's intuitive grasp of his future. Not far, perhaps a mile and a half, from my parents' home was an abandoned shed at the edge of some woods. Why did this so stir my imagination? I haven't a clue, but I know that it was my dream.

Certainly I had many dreams in my childhood. There was that fantasy involving the old, abandoned silo behind the barn. Perhaps twenty feet in diameter and no more than thirty-five feet tall, it was a style no longer practical as silos were becoming increasingly tall and narrow. I certainly entertained my fantasies with that silo! In my imagination I had the skills and resources with which to have it converted into a two story dwelling, the top of which was covered with a geodesic-style glass dome. The fact that I would be living 'in a circle' and that its upper level was sacred space for exotic rituals timed to the passing of the days was significant (rituals usually sexual, for I was after all a very young boy).

The shed I saw from the school bus was transformed into a cabin which I mended and renovated. I drew designs on paper and even invented a heating system for which the primary components were a milk can converted into the fire box and a metal flue. The fact

that it would not have lasted more than a winter's fires was irrelevant. What is significant is that it was a dream, it was a collection of images into which I poured my passion and my then-youthful magick. I reclaimed that dream when, after my spiritual conversion in the early 1970's, I was offered (rent-free) a farm house in northern Minnesota. I moved there with two friends. My most fulfilling task was claiming lumber (board by board) from a barn which had collapsed years before and rebuilding the interior of the house. But that was not my cabin near the woods and I left Kettle River to return to Minneapolis for I knew that it was there I would find my teachers. And so it was.

There were other dreams as well during those years I lived on my parent's farm (we moved from Pine Lawn Farm about the time I turned ten). One year my request for a Christmas gift was fulfilled and I received a chemistry set. Was it important to me? If it's any indication, I can still recall the manufacturer: Porter Chemical Company of Hagerstown, Maryland. It arrived in a red metal cabinet. A small clasp held the two hinged sides together. Opened, they contained a very simple microscope and jars of basic chemicals capable of doing a little, but not much. You see, I can still remember. A couple of years ago I had an exchange of communication from someone living in that city and they could not find a Porter Chemical Company in their telephone listing. Over the years I added to that simple toy, but it could never quite fulfill the desires which I could not identify. And the chemistry courses in high school and college certainly were not the direction for which I had longed. Having written the first edition of this book before I left Minneapolis, I had begun assembling the very extensive and expensive apparatus necessary for herbal alchemy. That was what I wanted when I was young! But now, mature, I realized that I have already tapped into Paracelsus and grasp the concepts and that *this* is not the incarnation in which I will further explore those mysteries. And I have now the patience to wait until the appropriate incarnation.

For a birthday I once received a "printing press" which sounded better in the advertisement. My fantasy was to publish some version of a neighborhood newspaper which would serve our community of farms, providing them with news. The press consisted of a wooden block into which I was to place rubber letters one at a time with the aid of a pair of metal tweezers. I probably never got past one paragraph for it was far too cumbersome. I am certain that parents must feel some disappointment when their child clamors for a specific gift and appears to quickly lose interest in it. I am certain that the small paper box of rubber letters was soon scattered. But that gift from my parents was another seed for my Highest Ideals.

Around age four, when my older brother and sister (twins) were adopted, one of my tasks was to help them with their eye exercises and also, in ways, to help them catch up with some facets of their education. The children's home in La Crosse (images of the Mothervalley from the journey to bring them to Pine Lawn Farm were vividly etched into my mind, the remnants of which are still to be found fifty years later) did its best, but I had an opportunity to discover that I truly loved teaching, and being a teacher became another goal. I began formally teaching music lessons before I graduated from eighth grade. So I was to be a teacher, along with publisher and someone with a laboratory. And I was someone who was enthralled with living in a circle and in sharing the most intimate aspects of life with a male partner in a cabin near some woods.

But my dreams were not simple. There are more. I can still recall the exuberance upon discovering that I could actually compose a song! Well, that may have been a stretch. I placed notes upon hand-drawn measures and presented it to my mother as a gift. And I wanted to create music, so much so that I did quite well in my music theory and composition courses in college many years later. I felt the fulfillment of those dreams upon finding that, despite fifteen years performing as a professional classical musician, I found a depth of fulfillment

from discovering that I could write a pretty good tune. We sing those tunes when we work our rituals of Lothloriën.

And of course, growing up in a Roman Catholic household, my dreams of becoming a priest were fostered. An old, turn of the century skirt from the farmhouse attic plus other clothing allowed me to create a priest's robes. What Catholic family would not be pleased to have their son become a priest? And so my parents and my siblings would faithfully "attend" the services I created. I would do my best to recreate the mass - the only ritual to which I had any exposure, and I would distribute the little candy wafers with great care. For me those sacramental rites were far more real than my family could ever imagine.

To all else, I am certain, it was a child's play-acting. But for me this was *magick*. No, I wouldn't have recognized the meaning of that word had it been given me in a spelling bee. But at those times I was alive, I was vital and although my family could never have grasped it, I felt the power of natural energy moving through me and it was a very real experience. I knew that I also wanted to be a priest. Add that to the list of my childhood dreams.

In my late twenties I began studying the life of Aldous Huxley and his spiritual conversion. Reading the books which changed his life changed mine as well. I did not know, when I took my first steps upon my path, that I was to arrive at a religion we now call Wicca. But now I am soon to observe the silver anniversary of my priesthood. Imagine. Twenty five years as a Wiccan Priest. Who would have thought? It leaves me with so many events upon which to reflect.

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