

Welcome to *Between the Worlds*  
Myth, Magic and Community  
September 2006

## Psyche and Eros: Sorting the Seeds

by *Cynthia Jones*

Once again, Psyche faces an insurmountable task. Before her, seeds. Someone spilled a granary, a dozen granaries; all kinds of seeds cover the ground. Sort them, sort them.... It can't be done.

How many hours do we spend in hopelessness? Too much to do, too boring, not the right work, no meaning in this labor, not fun, not fulfilling, not creative, not for me. How many hours do we spend in helplessness? I can't. I don't know how. I don't know where to begin. Better not start what I can't finish. What about "why me?" and "It's not fair; I did my share." Psyche tries to escape but with each step she sinks deeper into the grain. When I was a child I loved to play in the corn silo. The world moved beneath my feet. If I tried to run, I would dig myself in. If I lay flat, I could move across the corn's rolling surface. Corn. Grain. Seeds of all kinds; there are tasks that wait to be done. We do them and then, the next day, we do them again. When Psyche accepts the challenge, the task reveals its meaning.

As I wrote this month's story, I focused on the seeds. Seeds of belief, seeds of insight, seeds of conclusion—"that's how the world is." Seeds of hope, seeds of hate, seeds of fear, seeds of promise, how can you tell what each seed will grow? What have you planted in the garden of your life? What will you plant after you have sorted the seeds?

Perhaps the challenge isn't about the seeds. Perhaps the magic comes when we accept the work at hand—sort the seeds, pay the bills, feed the dogs, fix dinner, give a child a bath. Meaning comes after the work begins. Perhaps the challenge is to simply say yes to the task at hand and trust that work itself, not matter what the work, is the seed of a lesson, a learning, a doorway to change. There are many little things that need to be done, none of them a calling, fate, fame or future. Perhaps saying yes to the work at hand is the way we find our place in the day.

Sort the seeds; attend to the daily tasks that make our food, that feed our lives. Bounty requires more than a day of harvest. We are in the season of Virgo, the sign that takes care of the details so we can reap what spring did sow. Perhaps the challenge wasn't in the seeds, but in agreeing to do the work at hand.

*Then a ploughman said, "Speak to us of Work."*

*And he answered, saying:*

*You work that you may keep pace with the earth and the soul of the earth. For to be idle is to become a stranger unto the seasons, and to step out of life's procession, that marches in majesty and proud submission towards the infinite.*

*When you work you are a flute through whose heart the whispering of the hours turns to music.  
Which of you would be a reed, dumb and silent, when all else sings together in unison?*

*Always you have been told that work is a curse and labour a misfortune. But I say to you that  
when you work you fulfill a part of earth's furthest dream, assigned to you when that dream was  
born,  
and in keeping yourself with labour you are in truth loving life.*

*Work is love made visible.*

- Kahlil Gilbran, *The Prophet*

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**Cynthia Jones** will continue weaving the Psyche story into philosophy, philosophy into discussion, discussion into challenge and challenge back into the story throughout this 2006 Mystery year. Cynthia founded Diana's Grove with Patricia Storm in 1994.

## The Garden of My Life: Pulling Weeds, Choosing Seeds *by Elizabeth Anne*

"Inch by inch, row by row  
Gonna make this garden grow  
All it takes is a rake and a hoe and a piece of fertile ground."  
—David Mallett, "The Garden Song"

If I look at my life through the metaphor of a garden, I am reminded of the "brickyard garden" near my home. That piece of land had been a vacant lot where a building had been torn down, but over the years my family and our neighbors have removed the debris, enriched the sandy soil with fertilizer and compost, and planted all kinds of vegetables and flowers. I look at it now and can hardly see the walkways between neighboring plots because there are so many plants growing everywhere.

As a child, I rarely paid attention to the brickyard garden, except to notice that our neighbors would occasionally bring us extra fruits or vegetables. However, when I was about nine years old, I came home from school one day with a cup of dirt that contained a tiny seed. I had chosen a seed from a sage plant, since I had been told that it was a perennial, which meant that if it was well cared for, it would live for a long time. I was tremendously proud of it when it sprouted, and eventually it outgrew its cup and was transplanted to my family's plot in the brickyard garden. When I last saw it, it had grown to be knee-high and was at least as wide as it was tall.

The garden of my life also contains some hardy perennials that have flourished over the years. For example, I knew that I wanted to be a teacher from the time I was 16. I have always enjoyed music and dance, as both a performer and an observer. And I have always loved learning, whether through reading a book or taking a class or trying something new. There have been

times when I haven't watered these plants very well, but they have survived in spite of my neglect.

These perennials, and others like them, define large plots in my life's garden. What is perhaps more interesting, in light of this month's theme, is everything that grows between them. How do I choose the seeds for this year's annuals, whether those be flowers or herbs? What will work well with what I already have? And how do I recognize weeds or withered plants that need to be removed so that there is room for the new plants to grow? Discernment, for me, is in both the seed and the scythe. It is in the choices that will bring into reality the dream of what I want my garden to look like when summer comes.

Not all plants will grow in all places, and so I must ask myself: Which of these seeds will probably do well if I plant it in my garden? If I were to change careers, I could choose many different paths, all of which are excellent choices for someone, but I would only thrive in some of them. For example, I think I would do well as a college professor or a massage therapist, but I would probably not be as happy if I became a doctor or a lawyer. From my point of view, those are someone else's seeds, and they would be better off in someone else's garden, where they can become someone else's bread when the grain has ripened.

There have been times in my life when I have tended someone else's seeds in my life's garden, and the fruits have always been bitter. Worse yet can happen when I nourish a plant that I don't realize is poisonous. Once, when I was very young, I admired some purple berries on a plant, and it was fortunate that my parents got me away from that plant, which was a deadly nightshade, before I put any of those berries in my mouth. In the same way, if I were to plant a seed of resentment or denial in my garden and tend to it daily, I imagine that it wouldn't take long for that plant to produce berries that would be just as unhealthy for me.

Another aspect of discernment, then, lies in my knowledge of what is good for me and what is not good for me. This applies to the food plants in my garden, of course, but I think it also applies to the flowers. If I know that I enjoy yellow flowers, then I can plant daffodils rather than tiger lilies. If there's a certain plant whose scent I particularly like, I can make space in my garden for it. And if I'm allergic to any kind of plant, or if I just don't like the way that it looks or smells, I can keep it out of my garden, even if all of my neighbors are growing it.

Once I've figured out what is and isn't good for me, I can start making decisions about what to plant for next year and what to dig up now. I might start by identifying weeds and dead plants: things that don't belong in my garden. The weeds might also include healthy plants from previous years that have no place in this year's plans; even the most beautiful rose would be out of place in a row of cucumbers. First I might pull up the weeds that come loose easily, and next I might get some tools with which to dig up those with deeper roots. Some of the tools that I've used have been daily personal practice, getting advice from a friend, and talking with a counselor if I'm having trouble with plants that have been growing for years or that are prickly and hard to grasp. I think it's also important to pause occasionally and take a breath while doing this work. If I've been weeding my garden for a long time, I can become fixated on what I need to do and forget how much I've done. When I remember to look at the pile of weeds on top of my compost bin, I can call up the strength to keep going.

After I've done some weeding, it's probably time to set down the metaphorical scythe and pick up the seeds. What will complement the plants that I already have? Do I want to plant annuals—

short-range plans, short-lived interests—or do I want to plant some new perennials? Do I want to scatter seeds of grasses and wildflowers and welcome any stray dandelions? Do I want to plant herbs, vegetables, fruits, flowers, or some of each? Do I want plants that are native to my area and will grow with just rainwater, or will I take the time to water any exotic plants that may need special care? And, above all else, are the seeds that I select ones that belong in my garden, or are they someone else's seeds? All of these choices and decisions will help me to sort out which seeds I choose to plant in the garden of my life.

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**Elizabeth Anne** is a third-year Mystery who, as one of the editors for *Between the Worlds*, can usually be found between these words, rather than writing them herself. Some of her current interests include the Sudbury Valley School model of education, creating beaded and maille jewelry, and figuring out how to do what she wants to do with the rest of her life. She lives in Chicago with her cat, Thomas.

## The Third Challenge: Sorting the Seeds

by *Cynthia Jones*

I awoke to the sound of birds singing. Grain. Grain and seeds, corn and wheat. Seeds of every type desired by every gardener. I was surrounded by seeds. Grain. Corn. Wheat.

“Sort the seeds, Psyche,” Aphrodite said sternly. “Sort the seeds, all the seeds. Sort the seeds; your future depends on it.”

Here I am, surrounded by hopelessness. It is impossible; it can't be done. I am willing to be challenged, but what can I learn from a tedious task? I want ... no, I am willing to do the work that leads me to being who I am meant to be, but I did not agree to this. Hopeless. Futile. Pointless drudgery designed to make me see myself as a failure; there is no good lesson in this task. It is a hateful job. I won't do it. I can't.

I am going to leave. Surrounded by grain, I step. A shifting desert of grain beneath my feet, I want to go back to the world I left. With each step, I sink into the grain. Each step sucks me deeper into the shifting mountains of seeds. As I struggle, the grain rises, my body falls. “Sort the seeds, Psyche. Your life depends on it.” I will drown in the seeds if I try to escape. I can't walk away; I can't succeed.

Rage. Frustration. Hopelessness fills me. Despair, like grain, rises as I fall. Too much behind me, too much before me. I am tired. Grief consumes me. Grief.

I take a handful of seeds. They fall like rain through my fingers. I pick up another; they fall like minutes through my day. I pick up another; anger replaces grief. Live or die, succeed or fail, I will fight the impossible. If it be my fate, I will die fighting. Aphrodite can kill me with her grain if she wants; that is her choice; sorting the seeds is mine. How should I sort? By kind, by need, by color, by result? By climate, by season? Which seeds go into which pile? That is for me to decide.

The impossible begins. I smooth a spot before me. I take a handful of seeds, a tiny handful from the vastness. There is no seedless place to sort the seeds. I put grain upon grain, seed upon seed. This goes here; that goes there. I begin to sort. Handful by handful, I belong to the seeds. I belong to the task.

I don't recall falling asleep or slipping into a dream, but when I look up at the vast ocean of grain, the seeds are moments in my life. Each seed is the essence of an experience. My hands are full of minutes and memories. I take a handful of my past, a handful of my future, I sort all that I have experienced. But wait, here are the insights I did not accept, the warnings I did not heed. I pick up a seed and ask it, "Why didn't I listen to you? If I had, I wouldn't be here."

Moments, realizations, truths, and the equally vivid things I did not see; it was all here. My life before me, my life behind me; all of it waiting to fall through my fingers. My job is to sort and choose.

Seeds of love, seeds of fear, tiny seeds of self-doubt, plain seeds of humility; bright seeds of trust; sorting, sorting—the seeds are tiny capsules of beliefs, each one a potential truth.

What will I plant, and what will I store? What do I grind into the meal that feeds me? Which seeds are spoiled and poison the ground? Which seeds grow beauty, and which seeds consume the resources meant for other seeds? Take a handful of your life, Psyche, and sort the seeds. Sort the seeds.

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Find out more about **Cynthia Jones** at the end of one of her regular columns for this magazine, the cover article on page 1.

## Astrology for the Journey: Sorting the Seeds of my Life

*by Teri Parsley Starnes*

I am grateful for the opportunity to write this astrology column for *Between the Worlds*. When I sit down to write another article, not only do I get to deepen my Mystery School work of exploration of self and community, but I am also challenged to deepen my practice of astrology. Each month I ask myself, how can astrology help me on my journey of personal transformation?

So now I imagine myself as Psyche, sitting before a mountain of seeds. I hear Aphrodite, my initiator—the Goddess representing the goddess I wish to become—saying to me, "Sort the seeds, Psyche. Sort the seeds. All the seeds. Sort the seeds or you will die." Have you ever been given this type of ultimatum? Have you ever felt this kind of desperation, like you were being given a task that you must get right, right now, or you will die? I have. I find the enormity of this task overwhelming. As I face this feeling, my question is how can my practice of astrology help me in these times of being overwhelmed?

I don't imagine that everyone reacts to this task as I do. I imagine that there are some people who have the ability to calmly approach the work of sorting all the days of their lives with patience and even joy. I imagine that there are some people who live a much more grounded life than I do. But that is not me. My reaction to this task is a thinly veiled panic. I think of Psyche's task—to sort and choose from amongst all the moments of her life—as her Earth challenge. In Mystery School this year, we were invited to dedicate ourselves to an element. This year, the element of Earth is called Being. Cynthia Jones wrote that "An Initiation by Being asks you to take action, the actions you have been promising yourself you will take." I think of Psyche's seeds as all the actions she has already taken, and perhaps even all the ones she has promised to take and hasn't. This Mystery School year, I am dedicated to Being. I yearn to understand Earth better, to rely upon its stability as I undertake to be more stable in my actions. And I fear I will never achieve this stability. Such fear can keep me from ever beginning my challenge.

Astrology teaches me about my innate character. One piece of information that I know from astrology is that there are no planets in Earth signs in my chart. I understand why I yearn for Earth. I recognize the sense of panic that can arise from being given an Earth task—to sort the actions I have taken and failed to take. Knowing my innate character helps me to step back from this panic. To step back is to take another look. To step back is to begin to sort.

Knowing my innate character, I recognize the feeling of "do this right or you will die." Astrologically, this feeling could be related to having my Moon opposite Pluto in my natal chart. I have noticed that Pluto and the sign it rules, Scorpio, can often present things in an extreme black-and-white way. I respect the energy of Scorpio because it realizes what the stakes really are. This energy doesn't sugar-coat things. Scorpio energy reminds us that it is our very souls that are on the line—"Sort these seeds, or you will die." Although I generally try to avoid reducing things down to black and white, I appreciate the clarity that comes from knowing I have reached the ultimate decision point. I will either agree to do this task or I won't. There is no halfway. Knowing myself through my natal chart, I am able to hear the inner voices of my Self, whispering to me, "This is important, this is your work, listen to Aphrodite. Can you find a way to step back from panic and begin to sort?"

I think of the planets as those inner voices of my Self; they are also my allies and teachers. These allies help by reminding me what is important now, in this moment. Planetary transits to my natal chart help me to discern where I should focus. When confronted with a mountain of seeds, it is helpful to know how to begin sorting. The transits help me to know what is important to do now, what to do first. A few years ago, Pluto transited over my Ascendant (my identity). At that time, it was important for me to sort my priorities in alignment with my power, and claim more space for myself. I began teaching more and was seen as more powerful in my community. Now, another teacher is talking to me through another transit. Neptune is squaring my natal Saturn. Neptune is asking me to surrender old forms. In my sorting, I am evaluating what really feeds me, what I have done that is successful, what is worth keeping, and what hasn't worked, what I need to let go.

The symbols of astrology are tools for transforming the places I am stuck. Knowing my innate character, I can create a plan to change my essential reality. Essential reality is the core belief that influences how I perceive the world. If I have an essential belief that Earth tasks are frightening, then I will reinforce that belief with my action and inaction. But I have choice. I can choose to change this fear into joy. Just now, I asked myself what are three things that bring me joy? The three things that rose up were: meaning, connection, and balance. Using the symbols

of astrology, I relate these three qualities to Sagittarius (search for meaning), Aquarius (desire for connection to community), and Libra (balance through relationship). Next, I look for these three signs in my chart. My Ascendant (identity) is in Sagittarius. My Moon (emotional needs) is in Aquarius, and my Midheaven (what I aspire to) is in Libra. I can create an affirmation with this information: To create joy in my task of sorting my days, I reach for balance and make a safe place for connection, knowing that meaning aligns me with who I am. I see that this sorting includes sorting out what is most important to me so that I may continue my task with joy.

If I can shift my essential reality, my fear of being overwhelmed can also shift into a doable task of knowing myself in all my parts: my character, my yearnings, and even my pathway to joy. Yes, there is a Goddess breathing down my neck, telling me to sort or die. Yes, that mountain of seeds looks immense. But I grab a handful of those seeds, just the ones rising to the surface in this moment. I feel the pleasing variety of shapes, weights, colors, and textures. I have allies and tools. The panic subsides. One more day to sort.

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## Ritual Artistry: Sorting the Seeds to Plant in the Field of Relatedness

*by River*

After days of agonizing over the decision, I chose to miss this year's Mystery School Priestess Intensive—a four-day weekend that focuses primarily on honing ritual arts and community leadership skills—and agreed to officiate a wedding in the San Francisco area instead. I figured that priestessing was a good excuse to miss a weekend devoted to priestessing! As a result, I had the opportunity to really practice and use the priestess's skill of discernment as I discovered what it was like to be a nontraditional officiant in a relatively traditional wedding ceremony. And since discernment happens to be the theme of the month, I thought I would share my experience here.

There were close to 200 people that flew in from all over the country for the event. Large distances invoke a variety of communities, and this was no exception. Both the bride and groom are transplants to the Bay Area, so there was a small percentage of native Californians compared to the number of people from out of town. The guest list included both Christians and Pagans, lots of different ethnicities, children, second cousins, parents, and close friends. Most of them had no idea what to expect, and the word had gotten out that I wasn't exactly a Protestant minister. The bride is an old friend of mine who I met at the Grove several years ago, so she's familiar with the type of work I normally do. The groom, while accepting, is not very familiar with it, and very few of the guests had any prior context for Earth-centered ritual. So my first challenge was to design a ceremony with the bride and groom that was inclusive of

everyone present and didn't compromise my integrity as a priestess and practitioner of Earth-based spirituality, nor the couple's wishes to have a nontraditional wedding that incorporated elements from the natural world. It was a pretty large task, but with careful planning and discussion, we pulled it off!

As this month's metaphor goes, we "sorted many seeds" throughout the planning phases. The bride did a great deal of research on wedding ceremonies and their meanings, and we used that information to provide context for each piece we incorporated. The program not only listed the members of the wedding party, but it also listed each component of the ritual and its intention. For instance, the description of the Consecration read: "Blessing the commitment that is about to transpire." The Convocation read: "The commencement, an invitation to bear witness as a seal of approval." In lieu of a session like "Ritual Conspiracy," which would have been out of place in this setting, the program allowed the guests to understand what was going on and to be a part of the ceremony. Even some of the people who had been to countless weddings over the years remarked that they never really knew for sure what the piece meant, and having that information deepened the experience. The bride was the one who designed the program, and the result was one of the most inclusive weddings I've ever been to.

The next seed to sort was language. For example, the couple wanted to create sacred space similar to the way we might do it in an Earth-centered tradition, but we couldn't do traditional invocations without raising lots of eyebrows and setting ourselves up for lots of unwanted explanations. Luckily, the wedding took place in a gorgeous redwood grove. We simply couldn't do the ceremony without acknowledging the spectacular setting. I was able to invite Air, Fire, Water, and Earth to be present merely by describing our surroundings. Before that, I invited the group to acknowledge the circle of family and community gathered together to witness this sacred event. And voila: sacred space!

This may sound a bit silly, but I assure you, it's not. My greatest challenge was not the language or the format—it was what to wear. I struggled for weeks over this one. I am usually quite conscientious when it comes to picking ritual clothing, since I find it to be a way to enhance the intention of the piece that I'm facilitating, and it allows me to sink into my role with more ease than I would if I were doing the same piece in jeans and a t-shirt. When I was trying to decide what to wear for the wedding, I thought a great deal about my role. Although I was standing in the center with the couple, I was not meant to be the sole focus of attention. I wanted to wear something that would look appropriate to the occasion and my role as officiant, but that would not draw attention to me when I wasn't speaking. The bride and groom were the stars of the day. This was the day to leave the long dark robes and giant pentacles at home. (I don't own any anyway!) I finally opted for a basic black pants outfit with a hand-painted scarf. The outfit was classy and distinguished, yet reserved—and entirely "street-worthy" for a wedding with non-Pagans.

I share all of this in order to lead us to the primary goal of a ritual planner in any ritual: to build a "field of relatedness." Simply put, a field of relatedness is an atmosphere of safety, information, and intention that allows the participants to give themselves over to the experience of the ritual rather than worrying about or being confused by logistics. I knew we were successful when one of the great-aunts came over to me at the reception and said something like, "This is the first nontraditional wedding that I've ever been to. It was a little strange not to say 'Amen,' but you know, it really didn't matter. The service was lovely anyway. I knew I could just say it whenever I wanted to, and that would be fine." I smiled and told her that was exactly what I had hoped

would happen. The ritual served everyone, and it turned out to be a beautiful and touching celebration of this major rite of passage in this couple's lives. Everyone who was there was part of the experience, and ultimately, that was the best result I could have hoped for. To quote Great-Aunt Mary Pat: "Amen!"

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**River** is a Grove staff member who would like nothing more than to talk about ecstatic Ritual Arts for hours on end. She lives in Chicago, IL with her cat, roommate, and half a dining room full of drums. For information on her teaching and travel schedule visit [www.rivermagic.org](http://www.rivermagic.org).

## Will you Dance? Sorting a Lifetime of Seeds *by sisalfish*

"Love and death are the two great gifts that are given to us. Mostly, they are passed on unopened."

— Rainer Maria Rilke

"Death is the last great opportunity in life to experience self-actualization."

— Carl Jung

In this month's story, Aphrodite charges Psyche with the seemingly impossible task of sorting the seeds – a mountain of seeds. A lifetime of seeds. Looking at Moon Shadows 2006, the book the Grove uses for moon work, I was taken with the five questions related to the seeds and how we might sort them. The questions, and the theme this month of sorting the seeds, bring to my mind another five initiators to sorting - the Five Tasks that Quaker physician Ira Byock suggests the dying may need to address in order to die in peace. Byock learned the Five Tasks from a nurse who told him they were the five things that had to be sorted through and addressed before any significant relationship was complete:

1. Forgive me.
2. I forgive you.
3. Thank you.
4. I love you.
5. Goodbye.

What draws me to these five tasks is that they represent so well an approach to dying that emphasizes healing, rather than curing. They address the needs of the spirit, at a time in which it seems to me the spirit is rising, while the body is falling. To die peacefully, a person must often sort through the things left undone, let go of those she loves and is leaving behind, and know that those she loves are ready to be let go. The Five Tasks constitute a wonderfully simple approach to making that letting go possible.

I first heard of the tasks when a friend's mother-in-law was dying. Her hospice social worker suggested them to her. She had other challenges she was dealing with, and was more attracted to the idea of the tasks, from what I was told, than she was called to use them. But I liked how concise and simple the tasks sounded, and I liked the impact I could imagine them having. I

began reading stories about those who found the Five Tasks useful – for some, just reading them to their families initiated a great deal of release and healing.

Their experiences made me realize how glad I would be, I think, to be given work to do during the dying process, work that would let me continue to grow, to find peace for myself and bring a greater degree of peace to those I love. I was also drawn to them because I'm hoping that what I learn about dying will help other Mysteries, and others in my earth-based communities, have a death more in keeping with what they'd like to experience.

I don't want to paint too rosy a picture here. Even if the work of the Five Tasks is taken on, it may not be easy. Just imagine for a moment a situation in your own family that might call for you to say, "Forgive me." Maybe just saying those words would be enough, and arms would open and tears would flow, and all would be reconciled. Or - maybe there would be a lot of back and forth about how painful what you did was, how hard it will be to forgive. In fact, maybe the outcome is that you *aren't* forgiven, even if you are dying, and there will be no other opportunity for forgiveness. The Five Tasks initiate growth and change, and my experience of growth and change has been that it is seldom easy. And it sometimes takes time; and the dying don't always have the time to wait for change to run its course.

Moreover, there are many people who want nothing to do with a death that embraces growth and change, and that choice is wholly theirs to make. Sometimes knowing they are dying helps people embrace unconditional love for the first time in their lives, or come to terms with amends that need to be made. And sometimes people just want to die the way they have lived, which might be cranky, alcoholic, or dysfunctional.

But if the dying person has followed a path of growth and change, it's good to know there is still a path of growth and change to be followed, even as we die. The Five Tasks say, "It's not over until it's over. You are still breathing, and though you are in a transition, there is still good work to be done, work well within your capability." To those who are dying and who feel their life is over, being given work to do, and a way to sort the seeds of things left undone, can be quite a blessing to them and to those they love.

And making amends and clearing the field in relationships doesn't just make a better death possible. It's an approach that also makes a better life possible. I find myself asking: If I knew I were dying soon, which of these tasks would call to me? And with the thought of my own dying as impetus, I find it's much easier to say: Thank you. I love you. Forgive me. I forgive you. So when it is indeed time to do that fifth task and say "goodbye," I think I'll be more ready.

Sorting through your own life, are there any of these tasks that call to you? And do you take comfort in knowing that the choice to take that task on is your choice to make, now or later, whether you believe you'll see tomorrow or not?

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**sisalfish** is a writer and editor living in San Antonio. This is her sixth year as a Mystery in the Diana's Grove Mystery School, where she is currently a member of the 2006 Rites Team. She is currently working toward certification in Thanatology, the study of death, grief and bereavement. You can contact her at [sisalfish@satx.rr.com](mailto:sisalfish@satx.rr.com).

# Going Deeper

*by Synnove*

"I don't recall falling asleep or slipping into a dream; but when I looked again at the vast ocean of grain, the seeds had become moments of my life. Each seed was the essence of an experience. I held my life in my hands. I was sorting all that I had experienced and all that I had concluded from my experience. All of my moments were slipping through my fingers. My job was to sort and choose.

I held moments that were the seeds of love and moments that were the seeds of fear; tiny seeds of self doubt; the seeds of humility; seeds of trust. Sorting, sorting: the seeds became tiny capsules of belief, each one a potential truth."

- Moon Shadows 2006

Autumn has come in a very tangible way this year, at a time when the sun is still bright and hot and the harvest has only just begun. This year, the shift of seasons has been marked by another transition in my life; the death of my father.

In a very tangible way, I am sorting the seeds. Sorting through the stories and letters he sent over the years and selecting the ones I want to share with family and friends, the ones that I believe will reinforce positive memories of him. Sorting through old photo albums to select images to include in a memorial, noticing how few photos were taken within the last twenty years, as his health slowly declined and he began withdrawing from life. Sorting through all of my memories to find and explore the positive threads that run through our relationship.

His death gives me an opportunity to look back over my experience of him and choose what I will keep, what I will throw away, and what I will transform with compassion. So many memories, both positive and negative, compete for my attention. It is so easy for me to step into judgment. So hard to resist that urge and open myself up to other possibilities.

Should I focus on the man who, insecure about the mistakes he had made in his early years, believed it was his duty to punish me physically so that I would grow up to be a good person? Or should I remember how often he worked to create a better life for me?

Should I focus on the man who was everyone's friend, who would spend his evenings and weekends on building or repair projects for his friends but did not have time for his own family? Or think of the stories he told of the negative messages he heard while growing up and wonder, compassionately, how they shaped his choices? Should I remember how he brightened whenever he received praise?

As I gently tug on the thread of each memory, I begin to unravel the fabric of the story I created over the years. The coarse, irritating fibers that seem to tear and catch against my skin hold my negative judgments. My fears are found in the dull, lifeless fabric that seems to fade into the background, unwilling to be noticed. It is easy to see the times when I felt happy and alive; those bright, smooth threads seem to glow with cheerfulness, captivating my attention.

As I unravel all of these threads, I consider how to reconstruct the fabric of my memory. What will I keep and what will I allow to fall away? Would it have been easier if he and I had developed a better relationship? Would a larger collection of positive memories have allowed me to more easily shift my focus away from the difficult ones?

Intellectually I understand that, over time, my memories have morphed into myth. My feelings about each event shaped my experience, and left me with vivid memories of the negative ways in which I was impacted. As time moved on, the more I focused on my own emotional response, the harder it was for me to hang onto positive memories.

As I look back over all of these memories, I want to write a new story, one that is not centered on me and my feelings. It's time for me to leave my childhood fantasy that everything in the world is centered on me; that every interaction with another person holds some deep, hidden meaning about me. It is time to move into an adult understanding, where others are motivated by their own reasons that have nothing to do with me. I'm simply a participant, not the center of their universe.

I'm piecing together a story that acknowledges a relationship that has been filled with painful events without assigning blame to anyone. Looking through the lens of compassion, I can understand some of his behavior. I know that my dad struggled with feelings of worthlessness and sought approval from others. I know that he felt pain and remorse over all of the mistakes he made throughout his life. I know that he loved me.

I also know that he responded to me positively when I gave him approval and negatively when I did not. He avoided me when feelings of remorse over the past were more than he could bear.

Looking back, I realize that I do not understand much of his behavior toward me, and perhaps I never will. Sorting the seeds is the work of a lifetime. Each day, I make decisions about how to build the fabric of my memories. Will I create a stiff, coarse fabric that is irritating to the touch? Or will I create a soft, flowing fabric that reflects the beauty of the world around it?

The choice is mine.

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**Synnové** is passionate about empowering others. She has over twenty years of Management Consulting and Executive Management experience with an emphasis on building effective teams. She also mentors middle-school aged girls for Passages Northwest "Girls Rock!" — a program dedicated to inspiring courage in women and girls.

## Interview with a Mystery: FireDancer

*by River*

*I find that one of the best parts of Mystery School is the online community discussion related to the story. I'm always excited to see what the dynamic will be like as the group begins to coalesce and participants find their online voices. Almost immediately, I found myself drawn in by one particular Mystery's posts. Her insights and questions were always fascinating to me, and I instantly wanted to get to know her better. I got a wonderful surprise when FireDancer*

*decided to come to the 2006 Midwest Reclaiming Camp, which takes place at the Grove. Not only did I get a chance to meet her in person, but she also joined the path I was teaching, and we spent a wonderful week together, steeped in the mysteries of Ritual Arts. It turns out that she is quite a charismatic and talented priestess! I found meeting and working with FireDancer to be an absolute delight, and I'm so happy that she agreed to let us all get to know her better in this month's interview.*

*How did you find out about Mystery School, and what called you to join? How has your first year been so far?*

I have been blessed several times in my life by meeting someone who has introduced me to ideas, activities, or groups that have altered the course of my life (or perhaps brought me closer to my destiny). One of those people is fellow Mystery Zoe Soulspirals, who introduced me to Mystery School and Witchcamp, among other things.

I decided to “enroll” because the themes of the Psyche and Eros story—initiation, destiny, choice, challenge, becoming—fit so perfectly with the work I wanted to do this year, which was to gain clarity on what my gifts are and how I might use them in service to Life in a way that would feed me in return. I asked for clarity, but I have gotten so much more! In surrendering to the story, to Mystery, I have been swept up by a whirlwind of change and growth and challenge and insight. And after so many years in hibernation, it feels great!

I am continually inspired by the articles and the storytelling and the online sharing. And the questions have led me deeper within myself, to new insights and commitments. I was glad to hear that others found their lives in synchronicity with the story, because my own began to move so much in tune with it that I had begun to wonder if I had stepped into the myth a bit too deeply.

*How would you describe your connection to Spirit? What does your spiritual practice look like?*

I experience Spirit the same way I experience life: emotionally, kinesthetically, and a bit fuzzy on the details. I relate to Deity as archetype and metaphor more than as concrete being. I have, somehow, developed a deep faith and trust in Spirit, so I am comfortable with surrender. For me, Spirit and Mystery and Life Force are the same thing, and I find connection through dance, silence, nature, love, deep sharing, and gratitude.

Like Davis (the March interviewee), I have come to my spirituality via a winding path, one that I suspect is still continuing. I am nominally Jewish, but was not raised in that, or any other, tradition. My childhood best friend was Catholic, and I remember enjoying going into the church on our way home from school to light candles for departed loved ones. As an adult, I attended Quaker Meetings, to which I was drawn by the strong community and the tradition of nonviolence. I helped found a Catholic Worker community in Ithaca, to which I was drawn by the commitment to activism. I love the inclusiveness and energy-raising of the Dances of Universal Peace, which is a Sufi practice. I feel a particular resonance with the Tibetan Goddess Green Tara. (The photo of me in the html and full layout version of this magazine is from my participation in a “21 Praises of Tara” mandala dance, which was an incredible experience.)

My spiritual practice is “cut and paste,” incorporating from many traditions what calls to or inspires me, what matches my values and my worldview. I think I would benefit from doing a daily practice, but I haven't managed to find the discipline for that.

*Tell us all about the gorgeous greeting cards that you make. What's your creative process like? How did you start doing this kind of artwork?*

I began making cards in 2001. I'd been rubber stamping before that, but I never liked what I created. I got inspired and found my own style after taking a class at a rubber stamp store. I started selling them so that I could write off the supply expenses on my taxes—I'd rather spend my money on art supplies than give it to the government! My local co-op agreed to carry them, and a business was born.

I make each card by hand, using rubber stamps, stencils, paper punches, colorful cardstocks and exotic papers, various inks and embossing powders, fibers, charms, and whatever other embellishments seem to be called for. I don't have an art background, and I can't draw, but I think I've always been good at composition and layout, which is really what this is. It's time-consuming to make the cards, and sometimes I struggle with finding the right color combination or design balance, but it feels really satisfying when I get in a groove and create beauty out of the pieces.

I like making cards (as opposed to framed works) because I like the idea of them being shared between people, of them being a vehicle of connection. You can see (and even order) some of them at <http://www.firedancerdesigns.net>. (And, in honor of being this month's interviewee, I will donate 10% of the total of any order placed by a Mystery during the month of September to Diana's Grove.)

*What were you like as a child? How has your past informed who you are today?*

I'm utterly bewildered as to how I got here from there! It really does feel as if it is Destiny calling, leading me on, pulling me through even as I was completely unaware of such a concept. As if there has been some seed inside me, something hardy, which to a certain extent grew from its own inherent energy. Not that my childhood was excessively difficult or traumatic, but I don't recall receiving the kind of nourishment or foundation that would have obviously led me to who I am now.

I remember being a serious child, lonely, sensitive, and depressed. (Though I do also have some earlier glimpses of a laughing, talkative, outgoing young girl, and I wonder where she went.) For a long time I wished I were not alive, and yet I was terrified of death and lacked the courage (that's how I saw it) to kill myself. Now I understand how strong the life force was in me, and I am grateful, and I embrace it.

*Who do you see yourself evolving into in the coming five years?*

Ironically enough, given my life-long fear of death, I have discovered a passion for and a calling to hospice work. I am ready to merge what –I do –to –pay –the bills with what –I –love –to do, which have always been very separate spheres for me. I see myself holding space for the dying, and bringing my love of circles and ritual to the bereaved and to other hospice volunteers.

Internally, I see myself being comfortable with my power, and stepping more fully into Priestessing and Leadership roles.

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Find out more about **River**, the interviewer for this piece, at the end of her other regular column for this magazine, *Ritual Artistry* on page 7.

# The Shadow of Transformation: Discernment and the Shadow

*by sisalfish*

“Whatever aspect of your emotional life you banish will come to you as fate.”

— Carl Jung

“This whole world is God, alone. Therefore I raise both my hands to embrace it all - the dark and the light, the animal and the spiritual.”

— Ramakrishna

Stephen Cope, a psychotherapist who studies the relationship between Western psychology and Eastern contemplative religions, tells a story about one of his patients who was haunted by his shadow. The patient was a man in his forties who had always lived with his mother. At the age of seventy something she took off on a trip to Europe. She was having a great time. Her son, meanwhile, kept waking up with night sweats, certain that his mother would not return from the trip. Her plane would crash, he thought, or she'd be murdered, or she'd drown. He was certain he would never see her again.

She was gone for a month, and it took almost that long for Cope's patient to understand what was really waking him up every night. It was that, deep down, he hoped his mother *would* die on the trip. That way, he would finally be forced to grow up, move out, and have his own life.

“Wow,” I thought when I heard this story, “that’s a pretty big secret for someone to have kept on themselves.” Cope related the story to Carl Jung’s theory that whatever shadow we do not bring up into consciousness will rise up as our fate. Because Cope’s patient couldn’t mature and individuate in a healthy way, his need to do so took the form of wishing his mother would die, and because he couldn’t accept that he could wish for such a thing, the wish manifested as nightmares. He couldn’t understand his fear – and in fact, Cope suggests that this feeling of alienness is the best way to recognize a shadow you’ve buried in your subconscious.

Shadow work is about recognizing such shadows and bringing them into the light. But once I recognize such a shadow in my own life, then what? What comes next, when I’ve been keeping that kind of secret on myself? After years of taking on my own shadows the way a fire sign does — fighting, wrestling, bemoaning my fate and my own shortcomings — I’m surprised to find that I now fall back on discernment. On just waiting, and breathing, and giving myself a little more time with the knowledge of the shadow. Here’s why: Without discernment, my shadow work just engenders more shadows.

Once a shadow enters the light, my impulse is to act, and to act immediately. I feel called to begin making changes right away. As an example, during the Tarot year three years ago in

Mystery School, I realized, while working with the Emperor card, that I didn’t have healthy boundaries; that, moreover, what boundaries I did have I threw out as a way to let people know how much I loved them. It doesn’t feel good to write about that realization now. It felt even worse to realize it then.

Dealing with that realization, my first thought was to make up for lost time. To set boundaries all over the place. To completely take the opposite approach; to learn, as quickly as I could, what I needed to learn, and to right things. I won't tell you all the ways this approach went wrong. I think my mistake was to take something that had been a major part of my life — my inability to set good boundaries — and tear it out by the roots and turn my back on it. I somehow thought I'd make good choices from that place, in spite of the gaping hole in me where my shadow had been.

I wish, instead, I had used discernment. I wish I had backed away, honored the shadow, and just been still with it for a while. I wish I'd called in the Witness.

Cope speaks of the Witness, the Seer, as the part of us that always accompanies us, the part that can see and bear anything, without judgment. The Witness feels fully whatever is there to be felt, but without acting on it. I think the Witness represents the soul of discernment. Certainly, for me, it represents a key to working well with shadow. Because I've found that if I've lived with a shadow for years, it takes a little time to come to truly know the shadow once I've named it. It takes a little time, and discernment, to understand how to use this new knowledge well.

I think the Witness is useful no matter which element you fall back on when the shadow emerges. The Witness doesn't let Air think it fully understands, without giving the shadow its time. It doesn't allow Fire to rush into action. It doesn't allow Water to flow around the shadow, and move on without fully experiencing it. And it doesn't allow Earth to judge, or to build barriers to knowing and feeling what the shadow holds.

I've had years of history with my shadows. Why would I expect to know what to do with them overnight, once they come into the light? Instead, I've begun to try what Stephen Cope suggests. I imagine the Witness, a gentle companion who sits beside me, making no judgments. The Witness can look at anything. It holds stillness in the center of the storm. I myself am uneasy at sitting with my shadows - but with the Witness beside me, I can. And then, after giving the shadow and the Witness some time together, I can better use discernment to decide what to do, and when.

Have you found, with your own shadows, that there are questions to be answered, once the shadow has a name? Questions such as: How do you feel about this shadow, now that you know what to call it? How long ago did it take shape, and what were you feeling then, and why? How did it once serve you? And does any part of it serve you still?

Are you curious about what might happen if you gave your shadow just a bit more time, this shadow that may have hidden from you — or you from it — for years? Are you willing to give discernment its time, once you bring your shadow into the light?

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Find out more about **sisalfish** at the end of her other regular column for this magazine, *Will You Dance?* on page 9.

# Stewarding the Land: Alternative Building

## *by Patricia Storm*

Since we moved to the Ozarks in 1994, we've been building things. We've built cabins, sheds, dog runs, outhouses, shops, ponds, tables, shelters. Early on we built two shelters from 8" curved PVC pipe, making a half round roof that we covered with tarps. It kept our groups dry and shaded in the early days. Those shelters have been replaced by pavilions made of wood and shingles.

We had little money but lots of energy and enthusiasm. We took down the inside walls of the barn and made benches for people to sit on. The splinters weren't bad at all. It was "rustic" and "quaint." We used what was available to us.

Now we're again using what is available to us as we begin building a new structure for one of our residential staff. We looked at what we have in abundance here. We have lots of rock. We find some every time we try to dig a hole. We have sand near the creek. We have clay. We have access to old tires. We have hillsides. We have some of the curved PVC pipe from the shelters we built back in the early days. So we're building a house.

We had an opening dug in the hillside. The earth and clay from that space was set aside to use later. We dug a trench around the building site and placed the old PVC pipe in the trench, after drilling holes in it so that water could enter the pipe and drain downhill away from our structure. We covered it with landscape cloth to keep the sand and dirt from filling our holes. Then we covered the trench with gravel. Next we lay tires as a foundation for three sides of our structure. We packed them with full with gravel so they would drain if any moisture did get in and so they would be solid. Two layers of tires were laid, and now we're putting down earthbags.

Earthbags are bags filled with clay/dirt and sand in about a 3 to 1 ratio. The bags Charles found are mis-prints that we bought in bulk for a very reasonable price. They are filled, set on the tires and tamped in place. Over time, as moisture evaporates, these bags start to harden like adobe bricks - very large adobe bricks. We will continue to fill bags and raise our walls in this way on three sides of the building. The bags are held together by barbed wire, and will be covered with plaster to form the inside wall. This process will make the walls about 2 feet thick, providing plenty of insulation. The outside will be covered with plastic to prevent moisture from getting into the earthbags, and then the space between the land and the bags will be filled with more gravel. We expect these three walls to be very energy efficient. The fourth side will be made of rocks. We have begun gathering rocks from the land. Beautiful rocks to make a beautiful front for our building.

So far, we haven't spent much on our building. But we have expended a lot of energy. We have had several apprentices here over the summer working with Charles and me. The work does not require special skills, but it is hard. This method has some potential as an alternative building technique for poor areas, but only if an adequate labor force is available. It does make me wonder how we can develop better tools and techniques to help us use resources more efficiently, while keeping costs down.

Thank you, Charles, for the planning, work, tweaking, and vision that is changing a hole in the ground into a building to live in.

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Patricia Storm, one of the founders of Diana's Grove, has been instrumental in the development of the Diana's Grove Stewardship Path program. For more information, see the Diana's Grove web site, or contact her at [patricia@dianasgrove.com](mailto:patricia@dianasgrove.com).

## Journey in Words

### *by Shaun Perkins*

Our journeys truly begin when we are ready for them and we choose to begin them. The journey in words of this online class this year technically began in January, and many of us began at that time. Many posted in the first few months, and as the journey of the class continued, many stepped onto another path. This month's column follows one Mystery as she began her writing journey for the class in the middle of the year after July Mystery School.

#### Check-In

Gia checked in after July Mystery School in an email that said, "My goal is to start posting this year. I feel like I have officially come out of my cave and one of the things I enjoyed most about last year's (and my very first) mystery school was doing the poetry list."

When I responded to Gia's post, I also noted that I knew she had just written a few concrete poems at the July MS, and I asked if she would post those. If you are reading this online, you can click on a few links to see the actual poems.

#### The Chalice Poem

[http://static.flickr.com/98/206735636\\_68602e53d5\\_o.jpg](http://static.flickr.com/98/206735636_68602e53d5_o.jpg)

Gia wrote this poem in a Going Deeper session that Canyon and I facilitated. The exercise involved finding the words and images for the things that fill our cup and putting those words into the form of a cup (or whatever form you were inspired to make). If you cannot click on the above link, Gia's poem has these words:

Friends who accept me for who I am.  
Love.  
Love from others and love I give to others.  
The touch of another who feels my pain or joy.  
My words, my music, my soul.  
Faith in my healing.

Jewels, glitter, sisters, love, music, joy, secrets, friends, peace, hidden, acceptance, blessings, hope and faith in myself.

#### Non-Negotiables Poem

[http://static.flickr.com/86/206735638\\_8519918038\\_o.jpg](http://static.flickr.com/86/206735638_8519918038_o.jpg)

Gia said of this poem, “In the Taking It Home session with Sisal & Shaun (July MS) we drew pictures to signify what it means to bring our non-negotiables more fully into our life. . . . I really, really enjoyed doing the concrete poems so I did another one.”

Again, click on the link to see Gia’s “drum” poem. The words in the poem are as follows:

"Sing! Drum! Give yourself joy through music!"

### Hero’s Challenge

One of the year’s first exercises was to answer a series of questions about challenges for the year and to write a paragraph with the answers. Gia’s paragraph follows:

"This year I am being challenged by life. By living. By coming out of my cave and re-engaging with the world. Though I know that I will have to deal with fear, the discomfort of intimacy, and the worry of making my own dreams a reality, I will use my strength and determination to meet the challenge and work with my fear and insecurities so that I might leave behind the memories of damaging past relationships, specifically the one with my abusive mother. I will put my act of survival, of perseverance in perspective, and grow into my timeless, expanded self."

### Living the Challenge

The next exercise was to put a copy of that challenge somewhere where you could look at it several times a day for a week and then to write about the experience. Gia wrote:

"I felt drawn to reading my little paragraph. I kept a copy of it on my computer desk at home (a place I visit every day) and took to reading it. I didn't add to the paragraph because whenever I read it, it seemed perfect just the way it was.

"I was really surprised by how good and stable I felt when I would read the challenge. I haven't shared it with anyone in my home life yet, but I plan to. I am a little shocked, to be honest, at how the paragraph continues to move me. At first I just thought I was filling in blanks left by Shaun . . .but it really became MY blanks, my paragraph, my story.

"I made a copy to keep on my computer desk at work so I can keep in mind that I'm a survivor, even when I'm at work and feeling stressed out and bogged down.

"This has been a really rewarding experience."

Gia’s words and experiences have informed my own journey inward. Her creativity and joy in meeting the challenge that I see in her writing are qualities I carry with me as I continue to write and read the writing of others.

Mysteries, your journey into your own becoming is one that can begin at any time in a given year, any day of the week, any moment in a day where you might find yourself aware that you are leaving one path behind and beginning on a new road. I have always found that words that I write help me on this journey. My words surprise me, and I surprise my words. They alight on the page like tiny insects only visible when landing on the space they claim.

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**Shaun Perkins** is a fifth year Mystery who lives in Locust Grove, Oklahoma, amidst rye grass, cats, dried-up ponds, family, and teenage boy. She can be reached at [okieload@sstelco.com](mailto:okieload@sstelco.com).

# Dreaming with Morpheus: Discerning What to Do with that Dream

*by Shauna Aura*

Have you ever had disturbing dreams about people you know? Perhaps an argument with a friend, a visitation of a lover you haven't seen in years, or a dream in which a family member becomes ill?

What do you do with those dreams?

Some of the most confusing and haunting dreams for me are the dreams I have had about people I know. Dreams about real or realistic situations are huge red flags that can leave me feeling uneasy for days.

## Dreams of Illness, Death, or Accident

I have at times dreamed that a friend or family member has had some tragedy befall them. I've done dreamwork for enough years to know that in the dreamscape, time can be fluid. And I have, on occasion, dreamed events before they happened.

So when I dreamed that my mother had cancer, was dying in the hospital, and I had to go through the process of pulling the plug on her, I was stressed out and torn with indecision. Is this the time when I should call her and urge her to go to the doctor and get checked out?

Dreaming of other people can be tricky. Sometimes, in my dreams, my mother is my mother. Sometimes my mother is an archetype. And sometimes my mother is a facet of myself.

In previous articles I've mentioned that context is critical to unraveling a dream. So when I have a dream like this, I look at the recent context in my life. Have I talked to my mom recently and had a fight with her, or have I been distant? Have I watched a movie or read a book in which the mother dies? Do I have other issues going on inside that my mom might represent?

My mom and I had a fairly estranged relationship at that time. We'd been really close when I was a kid, but after I moved away from home, we didn't see each other much, and when we did, I felt strained. I still loved and missed my mom, but I didn't want to live back home. All the same, I worried about my mom; she'd started smoking again. I determined that the dream was most likely an expression of my own fears, and perhaps a catalyst, an excuse for me to contact her and re-establish our relationship.

I did call her, and I mentioned the dream. She didn't stop smoking, but we did start talking more.

## Recurring Dreams of Unease

Years later, I'd become a lot closer to my mom again. We took a vacation at a theme park to reconnect. Almost immediately after, I began to have recurring dreams about that vacation.

I realized that although we had talked, we hadn't gone deep. During the trip, I felt like we were strangers. It took some time, but I worked to open up, and my mom and I are now closer than

we've been in a long time. And I no longer have dreams in which we're trapped in a theme park and strange things are going horribly wrong.

### Dreams of Fights

For me, dreams of nasty arguments with friends, coworkers, and lovers can be some of the dreams that make me feel the most queasy on waking. While these sometimes feel prophetic due to their realism, what I've found is that it's much more likely to be my intuition saying, "Something is wrong in this relationship that needs addressing."

If I'm having shouting matches in dreams, or if they start escalating into fistfights, I definitely know that it's time to initiate some direct communication and settle things. It might be a painful and uncomfortable situation, but if I work it out then, before something else goes wrong in the waking world, I can avoid any catastrophic arguments.

Severe aggression in a dream sometimes wakes me up to a critical issue that I might have been suppressing. While being part of such violence in a dream can be unsettling, I find that by writing out what happened, I can get a good deal of insight into the unexpressed parts of the conflict.

Dreams speak in metaphor. Obviously there's a conflict, but looking at the strange ways in which the conflict is structured in the dreamscape can give me a peek into what my unconscious knows that I don't. Unraveling the symbols can help me to understand, for instance, why I'm angry. Sometimes I don't always know what about a relationship dynamic is hurting me, and my dreams can clue me in. By knowing what is really bothering me, I can be more authentic during a conversation and address the problem.

### Dreams of Long-lost Lovers

I find it frustrating to have these dreams when I thought I was over and done with an old relationship. And yet they often lead me to understanding an unexpressed need.

In this example, the need is for communication and closure. Occasionally I dream about a guy I was in love with once. I haven't been in love with him for nine years, although my heart was truly broken at the time because he didn't want me.

Years later, I know I'm still bothered by this unresolved relationship because of the occasional dream. It doesn't seem to matter that I'm happy in my current relationship. When I have a dream about the guy from nine years ago, I recall that he and I never, ever talked about how I felt—I never approached him; I just pre-rejected myself for him. It was pretty clear that he was not attracted to me, and I wasn't willing to risk either humiliation or losing him as a friend.

He and I still have a long-distance friendship, and to date I haven't racked up the courage to talk to him about these dreams. But I dream about admitting to him how I felt, and asking him if he knew, with enough frequency that I know I won't have peace until I address it.

### Discerning What to Do

Sometimes after a powerful dream about someone, I'll be tempted to contact them right away. Depending on the situation, it might be best to wait a day. And, if I'm really feeling that it's urgent, I might go ahead and contact them immediately.

The trick to discernment is in knowing myself, and my dream language, enough to know what the dream is about so that I can take proper action. Then I can know when it's time to have a conversation, or when it's time to call my mom and ask her to go to the doctor.

It sometimes takes a very visceral dream to let me know that I'm really still emotionally grinding on an issue with a person. To discern what action to take, I usually look at the dream, the context, and how I feel.

When you wake from your dream, do you have just a vague sense of unsettledness? Then perhaps the conversation can wait.

Are you waking up angry, with clenched teeth? Three days in a row? Or did you wake up with that gut-wrenching sense that something is horribly wrong? I've found that then it's best to take action and have a conversation.

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**Shauna Aura** is an artist and designer who has been working with dreams since she was 12, and believes dreamwork is an integral part of her personal, spiritual, and creative practice. She can be contacted at [shaunaaura@gmail.com](mailto:shaunaaura@gmail.com).

## Appalachian Trail Tales: Discerning my Reality *by Lorely Lather*

I concluded my Appalachian Trail hike in Harper's Ferry, West Virginia in July of 1993. In less than a year's time, I had intimately witnessed my partner's death and had lived 100 days in the wilderness - backpacking 1000 miles and enduring many physical struggles on my journey. Like Psyche, I was a changed person – enlightened by my experiences, but also confused. Who was I now? How would I ever fit back into my old reality? I could not keep hiking forever. I had to sort the seeds of what I had learned; I had to discern how to live after deep personal change.

My time of discernment came when I spent time with my family near my childhood home. Before my AT journey began, I had arranged to return to my brother's home in Minnesota to retrieve my car when I was done hiking. I arrived in Minnesota after an unpleasant 24-hour ride on a Greyhound bus. I was exhausted and must have appeared weak. My brother and his wife are kind and generous. They fed me and cared for me as if I was ill. I was admittedly exhausted and slept long hours.

Ordinary things seemed so strange. After carefully pumping every bit of water through a filter before I drank it on the Trail, it amazed me to get abundant clean water from any faucet in my brother's home. I felt like scolding anyone who let the faucet run and wasted precious water. After eating and drinking everything at air temperature, it seemed odd to eat hot foods or drink cold liquids. After sleeping in a mummy bag and hearing the wind move through the trees at

night, a double bed seemed huge and an air-conditioned room seemed eerily silent. Each weekday, my family would leave for their town jobs and I would be home alone. Daytime television seemed absolutely stupid; the news seemed trite. No books or magazines interested me because my own life seemed so maximized. I looked around and felt like a stranger in the commonly accepted reality of a luxurious American home.

My brother's home is across a gravel road from the farm where I grew up. It seemed fitting that I was sorting through my seeds of change so close to the site of much of my personal history. The first day of my visit, I stood and looked at my childhood home from the road. The old house seemed well maintained. The trees were aged; some were gone. My family no longer owned the land, but I got permission to walk on the land the next day. I walked in the apple orchard and out in the fields. I remembered being a little girl on this land and dreaming of my future life. As I walked around, I accepted that life had turned out differently than I could have imagined. I felt warm affection for the little blonde farm girl I had been when I sat daydreaming in this orchard.

Later that day I was restless and missed hiking, so I put on my boots and set out to walk around the 4-mile section. Farmland is surveyed into nearly perfect squares, a mile long on each side. In my 18 years of living here, I had never walked around the section. Farm kids did not walk for the sheer joy of it. This day, I walked west  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile to the corner where our one-room grade school had been. It was long-since torn down. Three-fourths of a mile had seemed a long walk as a grade-school child; as an experienced backpacker, however, I was just warming up. I turned south and walked along noticing the small wildflowers in the ditches. A rabbit hopped along the edge of the gravel, unafraid of me. I turned and walked east one-mile and then north one-mile, seeing my homeland in a new way at the pace of a hiker. I walked slowly and paused to look at the details of the landscape closely. Flat fertile land at the peak of summer crops stretched in all directions; it was completely different from the view in the mountains. Just as I turned the corner to walk west to my brother's home, a neighbor drove up. Recognizing me and amazed to see me, he insisted on giving me a ride the last  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile. "You don't need to walk," he said. I sorted my seeds and thought: "I do need to walk. In some way, for the rest of my life, I need to walk."

The third day of my stay, I began to worry about driving my car. I had not driven for 100 days. An incident while I was hiking in Virginia still bothered me. I had met 5 young adults at a large campground. Four of them had been backpacking for a week and were staying one more night at the campground before ending their hike. Their friend had brought a car that they would all return home in. They offered me a ride to a restaurant and I accepted. The young man who jumped into the driver's seat declared "I'm not sure I can drive. I haven't driven for a week." We started out of the campground along a long gravel road. After a bit, he relaxed and said "I guess I can drive. I'm doing it now." Then, his friend in the passenger seat laughed at him and said "Look dude, you're only going 20 (mph)!" Sitting quietly in Minnesota, I realized I had not driven for 100 days; I wasn't sure I could do it.

So, I got my car out of the barn and washed it. Then I took it for a trial run. I drove west, past the schoolhouse site. I turned south along the same route I had walked the day before. But, I saw no small wildflowers; I was moving too fast. I looked at the speedometer; I was doing 20 (mph). I turned west again. Two miles ahead was an asphalt highway. I sped up to 35 mph and watched the dust cloud arise in my rearview mirror. In a few moments, I stopped at the beginning of the asphalt. I had traveled  $3\frac{3}{4}$  miles in about 5 minutes. It would have taken about two hours to hike  $3\frac{3}{4}$  miles in the mountains.

A long flat highway extended in both directions with no traffic in sight. I turned south and pressed my foot to the floor. The car took off in a powerful manner; I felt the acceleration push me against the back of the seat. I watched the speedometer until it reached 70 mph. Then, I put both feet flat on the car floor. I felt foolish - foolish like an insecure teenage boy. "Of course, I can drive," I thought. "Why did I ever doubt it? I can do all the things I could do before my hiking experience. It is just that I look at life with a fresh vision and deeper appreciation." My car coasted for nearly a mile while I sorted my seeds and considered the changes in me. I then turned around and drove back to my brother's home at an appropriate speed.

Sorting the seeds of my life after my deep experiential changes, I found that I was all that I had been, but I was also more. I maintained all the skills that I had developed since childhood, but I also had abundant new skills. A few days later, I drove my car 500 miles back to Missouri and began to build my new life.

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At a pinnacle of her life, **Lorely Lather** stood at Harper's Ferry, West Virginia, having hiked 1000 miles in 100 days - all the way from northern Georgia. In the years since 1993, Lorely found Diana's Grove. This will be her fifth year as a Mystery.

## Hounds of the Hill: Patrick

*Diana's Grove is devoted to dogs as well as people. Each month, a Grove dog weighs in on the monthly theme in his or her own special way. This month's article features Patrick.*

If I lie here in the middle of the room, you will have to sing around me. Your voices will rise and fall around my head. I will notice which ones I like and which ones make my teeth rub together. You may think I choose to lie here to annoy people—the woman with the broom during the break, the one who tells the great story and wiggles her butt at the exciting points. You would be wrong. I'm figuring things out here, whether or not it looks like I'm just sleeping in the middle of the room.

If I lie here in the middle of the hallway, you will have to notice me. This hallway is not wide. I have very long legs. I know these things. There is a reason. There are pieces of conversation I hear from four different rooms at a time. I can hear the dogs outside and the dogs in the library and the puppies in the office all at the same time. I can figure things out here. I appear to be in the way. Look, I don't particularly like this either. We can't all work in the same way. This is where I can see, hear, and feel more.

If I lie here in the middle of the sidewalk, you will have to pick up the bag and carry it over me. This will tell me something about who you are and who I am. If I happen to bark, it may not be about you. Sometimes sound helps me figure things out. Don't you know things better when you talk about them? I'm just saying . . . I'm here for a reason. Here's a joke for you: Why did the dog lie on the sidewalk? Because he would tell the truth on the dirt.

If I lie here in the middle of the driveway, you will have to pay more attention. I will have to pay more attention. There are places we go that put us on edge. We go there on our own. For the

most part. We go there and we have to figure things out. I look at the size of the vehicles. I see how much space exists between the road and the bottom of the vehicle. I watch where it seems to be heading. I listen for the sound of the engine cutting. On extreme occasions, I will move. Mostly, I want to see what happens when you meet me.

This is all our lives, isn't it? Seeing what happens when you meets me? It seems like I remember more about me when I meet you. I suppose I look like a lazy dog most of the time. I'm just waiting to remember. Little pictures come. Little pictures of a voice or a particular door squeaking open. The place I sleep, the place I eat. Large hand smoothing down the hair on my head and neck. The pictures flash now and then, when I'm lying in the middle of somewhere. They cram my head and I have to lie there for a while. Notice that I'm not sleeping. I'm just trying to figure things out.

## Mystery's Light: Giving Up self to Become Self

*by Canyon*

As he hugs the cliff face below the source of the River Styx and watches Psyche, in the form of an eagle, soar above him, Eros speaks to the Mystery List. "Mysteries, with each step Psyche takes, carrying Aphrodite's cup - carrying her own heart - I become more immobilized, here against the granite rock. With each step Psyche takes, she draws closer to her own immortality, while I become more mortal. I would give my immortality to her, to see her survive, to see her become everything she can be." This god, Eros, who would give up divinity and immortality to see the woman he loves gain the same, asks, "Mysteries, tell me: when have you given up some essential part of yourself—your home, your voice, or a relationship—to serve an idea, or the greater self you wanted to become?"

*All text within quotations is taken (with minor edits) from emails to the Mystery List, the voice of the 2006 Mystery School community.*

This question sinks deeply into my heart and soul. I see parading before me a long line of sacrificed aspects of my self. Have I been so careless, then, with my essential self? Am I so willing to trade away who I am to get what I want? Well, the answer seems to be yes, when what I want is associated with an expansion of that essential self, an evolution to the "greater self" I seek to become.

At the head of the parade line marches sacrificed expression. "In my relationships with my siblings and mother, I have given up much of my voice—speaking my perspective—to have a relationship with them that is not riven by conflict." This sacrifice earned the privilege of leading the parade by virtue of its very recent recognition, and by virtue of the fact that its recognition allowed it to be, in turn, released. I am now on the verge of an even greater self, learning to give up that silence and still maintain these family relationships I treasure.

The next place in line goes to one of my older sacrifices of essence, from decades ago. When I gave myself to therapy and gave up being a victim, “I gave up powerlessness. I gave up childhood. I gave up needing someone else to support me.” And I became, first, a survivor, and then one who walks in her own power. I gave up being someone who lived from the wounds of the child I was, and became someone who speaks on behalf of childhood as the source of healing.

As the parade continues its review of my life, I notice that I’ve also begun to give up “wanting to be right - arguing my point in the belief that others will come around to seeing things my way.” The self I am expanding into with this sacrifice is one who is more generous, more open to options, and more likely to be able to sustain “relationships and conversations, which have a lot more room to continue if ‘right and wrong’ aren’t part of the subject matter.”

One interesting little cluster of floats at the mid-point of the parade shows me that, sometimes, “I’ve given away the same thing, piece by piece, over and over.” With the perspective of time and this objective stance, I now “understand that, truly, this process actually *revealed* what was essential.” One spark, one flame at a time, I lit the light until I could truly see what was truly true. “And the reward was sight. And the price was sight. I learned something new and I can never go back to being the person who didn’t know it.”

And the winding line continues with clowns on tricycles, followed by a marching band, golden helmet plumes sparkling in the sun. I am not sure what these represent in the parade of my sacrifices to becoming, but I feel the rightness of their presence. Then I see the giant, green, lumpy inflatable of blame heaving above me. As I reflect on this sacrifice, I remember that “The notion of blaming others seemed to leave when I realized how little it achieved, and how awful it made me feel. I don’t know if blaming was an essential part of me, but I do know it was something holding me back from being whole, from being in relationship.”

I thought at first that the characters from the Wizard of Oz had joined the parade in honor of my Kansas upbringing. But no, it was only the Tin Man, and so the sacrifice he represented came clear. “The me-I-used-to-be was cold. Lots of emotional walls. Unwilling to feel. I held on for so long to the me who wears armor because I had to be strong all the time, untouchable.” But I let that armor go; I sacrificed what I had thought was an essential and forever part of me. I let go of the comfort and stability of that protection. “But if stability and the stagnation of ‘comfortable’ is what I give up to reach for larger things, then it is worth it.”

Last year, my partner and I ended a relationship of almost 20 years when we understood and accepted that *that* form of our relationship no longer served our individual processes of becoming. “Though I was incredibly sad and grieving, I felt grateful that I had the courage and integrity to give up a relationship” of such long duration. “I am currently learning to walk a different path in my soul, new patterns instead of the old routes.”

And then the tail end of the parade wandered around the corner of my memory and, Eros, “I remembered one more thing that I have given up. The remembrance of this one opened the door to a gust of cold wind from your rocky cliff. I have given up having children; I have given up ever being a mother...and I would have been a good one, I think. I made other choices; I give my time and my passion to other pursuits.” Sometimes I grieve the children I never bore, as if their newly-wide eyes had bonded to mine for a brief breath before I lost them. They follow the parade as chimeras, perhaps appearing to other eyes as merely heat waves rising from the pavement.

So far in these 30-odd years of adult life, I have laid these and so many other essential parts of me on the altar of becoming an Expanded Self. I do grieve the pain of letting those parts go, no matter how ready I was to release them. The paradox is that I also celebrate what I have become without them. “And so I cried earlier this year, as we sang the chant in ritual, *I am more than this; I am more than this; I am more than this; I am all of this and more!*”

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**Canyon** is a staff member at Diana’s Grove and has been reading and writing for the Mystery List since 1999. She is currently writing a book on how adults can face unresolved developmental challenges from childhood and work them through to a different conclusion. She offers programs and publications that support you in your striving to become who you truly are, who you were intended to be.

## Moving Images: Everything I needed to know, I Learned from Filmmaking

*by Dan Wilson*

*This year’s “Moving Images” will explore the how films are made and the life lessons learned from the production process as we follow Dan through a semi-fictionalized year producing a re-telling of Cupid and Psyche in Milan’s fashion industry.*

I am a negotiator. During pre-production, as we’re planning our film, I need to negotiate with our vendors, cast and crew. I need to juggle schedules and priorities. There’s a good amount of give and take necessary to make everything come together and, initially, there’s a fairly straightforward list of what things need to happen. Once we start shooting, though, all bets are off. Anything can pop up, and it usually does. I encounter situations and circumstances that require me to rethink, that need to be re-negotiated or re-addressed.

This past spring we were shooting a film between Milwaukee and Utah. Around Lincoln, Nebraska we hit a snowstorm that was bad enough to close the Interstate. Two immediate challenges presented themselves.

We’d scheduled ourselves in Ogallala, Nebraska overnight, and we were planning to shoot a few scenes at a motel there. The storm kept us stuck in Lincoln for a day and a half, which threatened to put us further behind in our already tight schedule.

The other thing we needed to deal with was that there was no snow mentioned in the script, and the newly-white landscape wasn’t going to match anything we’d shot that day. Would we need to re-shoot those scenes, putting us even further behind?

We had plenty of time on our hands, since everything was closed (in fact, we were blocked into a truck stop by all the semis that had been diverted off of the freeway), and we spent a few

hours doing some rewrites. We worked a snowstorm into the script, figured out how to seamlessly work those new scenes into what we'd already shot, and came up with a few transition shots with which we could occupy ourselves while we waited for the Interstate to reopen.

As we changed the creative direction of the film, we had to ask ourselves what we needed to keep and what could safely be re-written. We needed to analyze the essence of the project and determine what was critical to the storytelling and what could be tweaked to match our situation. As a result, we shot a handful of scenes in Lincoln and Milford, Nebraska, and were able to cut back what we needed to shoot in Ogallala. The net result was that we made up time in Ogallala by capturing alternate scenes while snowbound.

The parallels between this situation and Psyche's charge to separate the seeds jump out at me almost instantly. I can go into a film project with the best of intentions and a near perfect script, but reality always intervenes. It may be an actor who suddenly has a schedule conflict. Maybe once we see some of the scenes on tape, we realize the script isn't working as well as we'd thought it would. It might be the loss of a location. Maybe our camera breaks and a replacement isn't available for two days. Or maybe there's a snowstorm.

There are numerous things that can go wrong, leaving the producer scrambling to find options. I need to look at the big picture and make snap decisions about what's expendable and what's not. I need to work with my production team to negotiate the compromises that will keep us on schedule and under budget. It may be a compromise on our location, a re-write of the script, or a selection of a second-choice actor for a role. I need to be able to separate what we really need from what's just nice to have.

Sometimes it can be completely daunting. Imagine being three days away from shooting in Italy, and weather systems in Chicago are preventing some principal crewmembers from flying out to Europe. Maybe Venice's annual winter floods shut down a location. It's impossible to plan for the unexpected. The best I can do as a producer is just start working at it, trusting that the Universe will provide me with the solutions necessary to pull it off.

I can imagine Psyche looking at the piles of grain she needed to sort and wondering how in the world she was going to accomplish that task. Cupid called the ants to help Psyche and, in the same way, a production team that's unified in its intention always comes through, helping me sort out the essential and assist with the give-and-take so critical to those snap decisions.

Ultimately, I believe that the success of a project depends on starting the process. Even when it suddenly morphs into an almost completely different project, and the prospect of re-starting completely insurmountable, they say that the journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. Being able to sort out the essential and strip away everything else is very important to that process, and will ensure a successful result.

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**Dan Wilson** describes himself as being from Milwaukee, WI. INTF. Art. Music. Film. Scorpio Sun, Leo Moon, Scorpio Rising.

# Lonely Hearts: These Fifty Dogs Will Be Fed Tonight

by Cynthia Jones

*I wrote this article a year ago. Shocked by the devastation in New Orleans, no one wanted a dog. A year later, 48 of last year's 50 have found their rightful homes. The 49<sup>th</sup> will be homeward bound on September 6<sup>th</sup>, and Leo, the 50<sup>th</sup>, believes that he is at his forever home, and he is right.*

I have just returned from a discouraging adoption day. Labor Day Saturday was very busy. Ambassadors all, ten of our dogs represented the canine world. The day ended with lots of socialization but only one new home. After the basic housetraining and puppy-care talk, a trusting little fellow named Skeeter became a young couple's first dog. Skeeter went to what I hope will be a loving home. As I rode home through the dark landscape, Missouri's hills brushed past the car window. The sound of dogs sleeping in their crates was comforting. "Safe again after a hard day of being charming," they thought.

The dogs slept; they were tired and at peace. I was tired, but not at peace. I thought about my passengers and the dogs at home. I pushed back my demons with the mantra "*These fifty dogs will be safe tonight. These fifty dogs will be fed tonight.*"

I am haunted by the eyes of the dogs waiting in a shelter—our shelter, any shelter. I am haunted by my concern for the dogs we place. Did we make the right decision? Each adoption is a life sentence. That life might be short. "Why do you insist on a fenced yard?" "She ran away." "I opened the door and he just dashed out into the street."

It might be a long life. A fenced yard, yes, but imagine a life lived in a back yard pen. A child's enthusiasm for the new dog doesn't last longer than her mother's. Constance tries to explain to a father and son why she can't let them adopt a Golden Retriever pup if he is going to live in a twelve by twelve pen. Can you imagine a lifetime in a twelve by twelve pen?

Can you imagine living for a few minutes of companionship? All day, all night, you wait for a brief touch. The rare treat that you hunger for is a chance to look into someone's eyes. A few months pass. Winter comes. No touch at all; you live for the sound of a caring voice. It is summer again ... you live for any voice at all. *These fifty dogs are safe tonight. These fifty dogs will be cared for tonight.*

We make arrangements to pick up a dog who is being returned. After four months, he has to come back because he sheds. He chews up the children's toys. Kids, if you want a dog, your dog's life might depend on your willingness to pick up your toys and put your shoes away. As we negotiate the exact hour for a meeting, the man says, "If you can't make it by 9:00, I'll just take him to the pound."

If it were as simple as "I'll just take him to the pound," I wouldn't have fifty dogs to care for tonight. The shelter he referred to as "the pound" is full. If they had an opening, he would be asked to make a nominal donation to help care for his former pet. Where I live, even the most nominal fee is often beyond consideration. And so, I do what I do.

So often I hear “I would love to do what you do.” Many of you want to save a life or ensure that an abandoned dog can have a night without fear, hunger, or pain. “And...” “But...” I understand the ands and buts. They are very real considerations. I consider myself fortunate to be able to do what I do, and I am one of many who do this work. I care for the lives that find their way into my keeping, and, like you, I can’t do it alone. No one can do it alone. We *can* do it together.

*Give me an hour and these fifty dogs will be cared for tonight.* Give me one hour’s wage and.... It is ten o’clock on a gloomy Monday morning. You are hoping that your third cup of coffee will restore meaning to your work. Look at the clock. You can say, “This hour saved a life.” Fifteen dollars will vaccinate three puppies.

It is the last hour of a long work week. The hour hand on five, the minute hand creeps toward twelve. Will you give me that hour? With that hour, we can spay a young dog who has had 28 puppies in her brief two years of life. Did you know that one spaying can prevent a thousand puppies from being born to die of homelessness and neglect? Yes, one dog and her children can bring a thousand dogs into your local shelter. One hour of your time ... that is an hour well spent. No one can do it alone. We can do it together. Give an hour. Save a life. *These fifty dogs will be safe tonight.*

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Find out more about **Cynthia Jones** at the end of one of her regular columns for this magazine, the cover article on page 1.