

Welcome to *Between the Worlds*

Myth, Magic and Community

January 2007

Stepping into the Story

by Cynthia Jones

There are wild places, untamed places, that don't succumb to the laws of civilization or reality. Wild places in your heart, wild places in your soul, wild places that reach out and call your name; this is a story about a young woman named Jennet who answered the call of such a place.

Sitting in a tower, she could see the winter landscape all around her. Cold January sun filled the room with light but not heat. Jennet was sewing a fine seam—stitch, stitch, stitch—when she heard her name on the wind. The scent of wild roses filled the room and she knew, she knew she had to go. She threw down her sewing and raised her skirts and she ran. She ran to a forbidden place, an enchanted place. She ran to Carter Shay.

“Maiden fair,” the balladeer sang, “don't go to Carter Shay for young Tam Lin lives there.” Many a maiden has gone to Carter Shay and, when they return, they are no longer maidens. Jennet knew this tale; she knew the songs. She knew the dangers, but nothing was as dangerous as ignoring magic's call and the scent of wild roses riding on a January wind.

Jennet speaks

You know my story and you know how it ends. I didn't know the end in those moments before the beginning. I didn't know the end, but I did know what I wanted, what I hoped my life would bring, what I hoped I would become.

The Outcome.... If I had chosen an outcome for that year, that fate-filled year, it would have been to have the courage to claim freedom for my soul. Just that, only that; it would have been to lift my skirts and run to wild places.

That may be confusing to you, for lifting my skirts and running to the wild places is where my story so often begins. You might wonder ... how, then, could that beginning also be my wish for the end? I will tell you.

I wanted to live in that place of complete abandonment, abandonment to my own soul. I

wanted that act of running to where I was truly called to be more than a transcendent moment shimmering in the darkness of a predictable life. I wanted to be a woman who gave herself to her hunger and to her hearing. Willful, willing, I wanted willingness and I wanted my willfulness to define me. Even then, I knew that if my life were to become a song, I wanted to be the one who shaped the way the world would sing me.

Cynthia Jones founded Diana's Grove together with Patricia Storm in 1994. Her unparalleled ability to weave mythology and philosophy into a pattern for community and personal development is what makes the Mystery School program so unique. She will be re-telling Jennet and Tam Lin's story throughout 2007.

Why Mythology?

by Cynthia Jones

"Facts don't change people, stories do."

A member of the Mystery School community jotted this line down on her way home from the Grove. She heard it in an NPR interview. I made note of it without writing down the name of the speaker. I share it with you with an apology to the speaker. Truth, like myth, doesn't require the author's credentials to validate its authenticity.

"A myth is a story that has never happened and is always happening."
Howard Sasportas

A myth is a story told by a culture. It is a story told by a generation or for generations. The myths we tell in Mystery School, they aren't our stories. They don't come from our culture. They don't come from our time. They don't dwell in our landscape, because most of us aren't Greek.

You might say "these aren't my stories," and they aren't. But then ... they are. They live deep inside of you. We need to retell them because somewhere deep inside, we believe them. We believe that nature is dangerous. We believe that passion will betray us. That is why we need to rehear the stories. We need to hear them differently. We need to find new conclusions, ones that support life and growth. We need to grab the thread and travel the maze. And when we do, we can place a different possibility at every turn.

In Mystery School, we work with stories from different cultures. We work with stories that transcend time. We retell stories that have been told for hundreds of years; we tell stories that were told thousands of years ago and are still relevant to us. They are still about us. They are still about that timeless piece of us. I retell a story as if it were a labyrinth. Each piece takes us deeper and deeper into our own story. The characters remain the same. The way they are perceived changes. Old motives are seen in a new light. I might say ...

“Facts don’t change stories, people do.”

Myths are the great stories we live by, even if we haven’t heard them. They create the archetypes, the patterns that we embrace as the blueprint for how things are, for who we really are.

Archetype means *original pattern*. Myth is the home of the archetypes. Myths give the archetypes a place to live, rooms to walk through, a closet full of cultures to dress in, a variety of personal histories and personalities to use as decoration. Myths give the archetypes daily life dramas and interactions; it’s a hall of mirrors that lets us see them and lets them see themselves. The archetypes—the gods, goddesses and mortals who live in myth—are the keepers of the blueprints that tell us how life is.

Myths let us peek into our own psyche and walk around in the subconscious of the collective mind. They let us interact with beliefs that we didn’t know we had. Myths tell us how women really are and how men really are. They tell us about the nature of nature and about the secret life of divinity. If we are going to enter the subconscious of the collective mind of our culture, then I say, let’s rearrange the furniture. Let’s make some changes while we are there. If we can tell a story differently, we can “story” our lives differently.

The stories that we tell at Mystery School have no villains. Neither men nor women are helpless. Neither men nor women are at fault. Neither men nor women are portrayed as weak, deceptive or deceived. Now, that requires a lot of retelling. You might wonder if a story without a villain is boring. It isn’t. In fact, after 6,000 years of blame, blame is getting to be boring. We have given all of the power to the bad guy for far too long. Sure, we make mistakes, we trip ourselves up. We try to renege on the promises we make to life and life tells us that won’t work. We fall in love with magic and the beauty of nature when we promised we wouldn’t. But still ... there are no bad guys. Just magic, mystery, magicians, kings and queens, daughters who get engaged to the god of ecstatic rites, sons who grow up to be heroes; sounds like home, doesn’t it? And ... we all have secrets. We hide them in a maze of our own creation.

We can look at another culture’s mythology and hear it as a myth. We are free to retell their stories. The great stories of our current culture—the stories that tell us who we are, what nature is, and the expectations and preferences of divinity—be they religion or science, these stories aren’t considered “mythology”. Mythology is a word that we apply to past religions and past truths but not to present ones. In common language, it applies to other people’s gods but not our own. In Mystery School, myth doesn’t mean fiction; it refers to a larger-than-life truth.

To understand a Greek myth, we have to be willing to look at the Greek culture. A myth contains the sediment, the settlings, of the culture that shaped it. Pour a Greek myth, and in the last glass, you will find the dregs of the Greek culture. You will find the remnants of lingering beliefs. Like tea leaves, those dregs are prophecy. The Greek culture is present in modern religions. It lives in your subconscious. Those forgotten

stories tell themselves over and over again in your dreams. You can find it in our language and in our collective psyche. We can recreate these stories. We can replace misogyny with respect. We can add healing. We can take out blame.

A Celtic ballad, now that is just a story, just a song. And still, if a ballad is sung for 400 years, it has captured a truth that is greater than its time. Ballads, fairy tales, legends; they are all myths. They belong to a culture and a time; they belong to us as we live them every day.

We will spend a year retelling an old story, an old Celtic ballad. We will spend a year redesigning the feminine archetype and our beliefs about what women really are. We will retell the story of what men really are. We will retell a story about love, trust, and betrayal. As we do, we will tell a new story about ourselves and the possibilities within each of us.

Respect means to *re-see*, to see again. When we respect a person, when we re-see someone.... When we re-see a belief or a truth, it gives us insight. We have no common word for re-hear, but we do have a word for re-hearing a story. When we *re-story*, we restore. Through myth we can restore ourselves. We can restore our relationship with the world and each other. That is what Mystery School is all about.

To change mythology requires a great conspiracy. It takes a great effort and a willingness to play. No one individual can do it alone. It requires a community; it requires a conspiracy.

Con-spire, to breathe together, to tell together, to hear together, to imagine together, to create together, to create new patterns within ourselves.

For Cynthia's bio, please see *Stepping Into the Story* in this month's magazine.

Living the Story A Space for Listening

by Canyon

"There is no other way to hear the call of the wild places than to first learn to create a space in which to listen." Cynthia Jones
Moon Shadows, 2007

It was January of 2000, what some were calling the new millennium, and the beginning of my second year in Mystery School. Six months before, I left a job that, to a large extent, had killed my spirit, drained my life force, and stolen my self-worth. I wasn't yet aware that, like Jennet in *The Ballad of Tam Lin*, I desperately needed to live in complete abandonment to my soul. I needed to live by my choice; needed, as a baby

needs nurture, to define myself. I needed both to stop living up to others' expectations *and* to stop rebelling against them. I no longer wanted to be the yes or the no, reacting to established norms by accepting them or by rejecting them. I needed to be somebody else, a different self ... but I didn't know who that was.

I wanted, without knowing that I wanted it, to answer a call that I had yet to hear, to satisfy hungers that I felt but could not name. As Cynthia wrote early in that first Tam Lin year, "Jennet's name means *first eating*; she hungers for the wild." I hungered for that first eating, that first consuming of dreams and desires, that first soul-meal of real life, *awake* life.

Coming to Diana's Grove over and over, month after month, that year and the next, I began to approach the possibility of that first eating. I moved my home to within 10 miles of the Grove and became a part of the staff; closer and then closer to that first soul-meal. Although I didn't know it then, I was building a table, then finding a cloth to cover it, then setting it with silver, china and crystal. I was selecting a menu, growing and gathering ingredients, and preparing the meal. And then, finally, I served the meal ... and could not eat it.

It was an autumn in my life, though the calendar showed summer. But it was a time of harvest for me, despite the blistering heat and humidity. My harvest banquet was laid and I could not eat it. Something was missing. I found myself constantly humming and hearing a chant by Nancy Plockman: "Before the autumn, summer. Before the summer, spring. Before the spring, the wintertime. Before the winter, sing. Before the song the singer. Before the singer, air. Before the air, creation. Before creation, prayer."

Prayer??? My very center rose in rebellion. Not that! That can't be what I need! I have witnessed and participated in a dozen forms of prayer, from Methodist to Catholic to Judaic to Buddhist. None of them worked for me; none of them spoke to me.

Then, in a flash of insight, I knew what I needed. I knew what would both feed me and allow me to eat. I needed silent communion with the land, silence in nature, silence that would touch the deep places inside me, the deep and wounded places from which my hunger rose. I had spent plenty of time on the land that is Diana's Grove. And I had spent plenty of that time without speaking to anyone. I had even spent some time there in the winter, when the voices of the woods are stilled. But I had never been *silent*, still inside.

"You are the needle. Silence is the first thread. Life is the fabric."

Cynthia Jones

Moon Shadows, 2007

I began to seek silence. I began to talk less and observe more. I started to listen, to open, to become willing. I made space. Years after my first experience with the Tam Lin story in Mystery School 2000, I finally made a space in which to listen for the call of the wild. It is 2007 and we are returning to this beautiful story. I feel myself ready; I've

begun now to taste the luscious dishes of the soul-nurturing meal that I prepared, painstakingly and lovingly, during so many of these intervening years. I've heard the call of my wild; I've hitched up my skirts and I am running, I am running. In silence, still listening, I am running.

"I wanted that act of running to where I was truly called to be more than a transcendent moment shimmering in the darkness of a predictable life. I wanted to be a woman who gave herself to her hunger and to her hearing...."

Cynthia Jones
Moon Shadows, 2007

Like Jennet, I have given myself to my hunger and to my hearing. Running to where I am truly called is a way of life. In a space of silence that both fills and opens me, I listen. I sit and sup to nourish my soul, I sit and sip to fill my spirit ... and I listen. And when I hear the wild calling, I lay down my spoon, hitch up my skirts and....

Canyon is a staff member at Diana's Grove and has been writing for *Between the Worlds* since 2002. Also known as Dr. L. Carol Scott, she is writing a book about the 7 Childhood Treasures™. She uses the wisdom of childhood to help you become who you truly are, who you were intended to be. Learn more about her work at www.LCarolScott.com.

Ritual Artistry: Entering the Wild

by River

Hello and welcome to "Ritual Artistry"! This monthly column is devoted to the realm of leadership that we call "Ritual Arts" here at Diana's Grove. My primary focus will be on ritual facilitation. Whether you are leading ritual in your local community, are learning how to hone your presentation skills, or are just interested in the mechanics of how an ecstatic, earth-based ritual tradition works, I hope there will be something within this column that piques your interest and sparks some ideas. This column will also complement the Ritual Arts online discussion list, which is an optional part of the Mystery School program.

First off, let me start by defining what I mean by an "ecstatic, earth-based ritual tradition." There is a common misconception that being in a state of ecstasy means being separate from my body. Quite the contrary! For me, an ecstatic state is when I am completely present in my body. My senses are heightened. My awareness expands. My connection to life is enhanced. The actual goal of ecstatic ritual is to create an environment that engages the participants on several different levels—physical, emotional, and spiritual.

My favorite definition of ritual (and one I'm sure you'll see me quote several times

throughout the year) is from Cynthia Jones, one of the co-founders of Diana's Grove: "Ritual is a multi-sensorial prayer that allows us to lay new patterns in our souls." It's the multi-sensorial part that makes a ritual ecstatic. Our rituals are often a mixture of song, movement, rhythm, and sacred play that serves to invoke a sense of mystery and connection to something larger than our selves. And to connect to something larger than me—be that community, divinity, or my expanded Self—I first must be completely connected to me. That's the point of ecstatic ritual.

In addition to being ecstatic, the Grove practices an earth-based ritual tradition. By earth-based, I mean life-based. Although there are many different flavors and shades of earth-based traditions, the one thing that they have in common is that they honor the elements that make up all life. In a Grove ritual, our elemental invocations acknowledge that Air, Fire, Water, and Earth are already present. In other words, I'm already breathing, so Air doesn't need to be summoned, but I strive to strengthen my relationship to Air in my invocation. Our ritual practice invites participants to open to the sacred, rather than calling upon it to manifest. I like to think of ritual as a way to deepen my connection with my community—and I consider the elements as part of my community, as much as the person standing next to me in the circle.

The elements themselves are constantly changing, adapting, and shifting form as they come into contact with one another. Those changes create a vital environment that is full of life energy. One of my favorite aspects of Grove-style ritual is that it is constantly changing, adapting, and shifting form as it comes into contact with new people and new ideas. Every year we change the ritual format to accommodate the story of the year, as well as the community interactions that will build and create the Mystery School community for that year.

We believe that changing the ritual format each year prevents us from becoming too rigid in our structure. Ecstatic ritual in an earth-based tradition is a living, breathing thing that thrives on variety. A garden has more opportunity to flourish with several different species of plants than with a single, homogenous crop. Ritual responds in much the same way. Ritual that repeats itself over and over runs the risk of becoming stale and lifeless. I believe that there is a danger of ritual becoming too dogmatic when the facilitators allow no room for creativity or variation.

This brings me to the next reason why we change our ritual format: our strong community value for inclusion. When we change the ritual format each year, everyone coming to the Grove is placed on equal footing, whether this is your first or fiftieth visit. In priestessing terms, we call this creating a "field of relatedness," which, in a nutshell, means that we strive to get everyone on the same page with the least amount of frustration or "culture shock." There are a number of ways we do this, including teaching the chant before dinner so you know it thoroughly and can sing it comfortably at the evening ritual, and sharing the intention of the ritual, as well as what else to expect. In other words, we attempt to give everyone plenty of context so that you can all participate fully in the experience.

This year's story is all about hiking up our proverbial skirts and running off into the Wild to touch the ancient and eternal magic that flows from every blade of grass and can be heard in every rustle of the leaves. We'll cast our circle by stepping onto the edge of the border that stands between the wild, untamable realm of Faery and our own mortal, waking world. In the story of Tam Lin and Jennet, this border is represented by a place called Carter Shay.

We'll begin our elemental invocation pattern with Earth by invoking the Wildwood itself, a place that thrives on pulsing, undulating life-force. Can you already smell the green in the leaves and the sap inching up through the roots? And into this Wildwood we will call to the Air as the Night Wind that carries the scent of roses on the air and calls Jennet out of her tower. From the Night Wind we turn to the Fire as the Hungry Flame that must consume, must feed itself in order to survive. It must find that which it desires in order to flourish. What is the dream that sustains you? What allows you to burn and thrive? From the yearning of the Hungry Flame we dive into the Deep, Deep Water. Both still and yet not so still, this is the element that can shift landscapes over time. To what depths will you dive to uncover your desires? And finally, we step into the Center as the Spiral, the dance of the stars themselves and the endless swirling of mortality and eternity. This is a year of magic, my friends!

Another one of my favorite quotes from Cynthia is that "Magic is strong enough to uphold itself, regardless of the form that we mortals impose upon it." By shifting our ritual form from year to year, we allow ourselves to rekindle the vitality of our earth-based tradition.

Whether we see each other in person across the circle at the Grove or you play with these concepts in your home community, I am curious about your experiences! May this be a year full of magic and mystery for you, and may you deepen your relationship with life itself.

River is a Grove staff member and 8th-year Mystery who hails from Chicago, Illinois. When she's not teaching, facilitating, or just plain talking about ritual, you'll probably find her solving a crossword puzzle or playing one of her sixteen or so drums while singing her heart out. Please feel free to contact her at river@dianasgrove.com.

Cornerstone: Welcome

by Jennifer Wilson

Welcome to *Cornerstone*, an in-depth exploration of the cornerstones of the Diana's Grove community.

I find the idea of a cornerstone to be an apt metaphor for the principles of healthy interaction upon which this community rests. First introduced by Cynthia in 1999 in the opening Mystery School packet, they are as relevant today as they were then. Here is

what Cynthia wrote about this metaphor: “Like constructing a building, when the foundation is solid and intentionally laid, it will support amazing height and weight. If the foundation is weak; the building will require constant repair. Little adjustments here and there; the roof always leaks, the windows require effort to open and close. And so—the cornerstones.”

What determines how well those cornerstones are laid? What creates the stability and strength that we desire from our foundation? What allows the cornerstones to have the strength to bear our collective weight as we press upon them, standing and reaching for healthy community? We do.

I hope you will join me in delving into the mysteries of all five cornerstones this year, month by month.

The Cornerstones of Diana’s Grove are:

Choice ~ We have the ability to choose our relationship to reality, even if we cannot always choose our reality.

Thinking Well of the Group ~ A Quaker concept. This is not a contract to engage in group denial and pretend that everyone is wonderful all the time. It is a choice to be willing to believe in people’s good intentions first and find out more when we perceive something different. It is a choice to promote the well-being of the group and act with respect.

Thinking Well of Self ~ This cornerstone is born from the notion that we all have essential worth, simply because we are. If we are to think well of the group, we must first think well of ourselves.

Stewardship of Self ~ From the experiences of Buckminster Fuller comes the premise that we are not the owners of ourselves, but the custodians who are charged with the duty to steward ourselves throughout our lifetimes as best we can, as one would care for a loved one.

Sacred Wound ~ “Change begins with wounding; creation begins with wounding. The egg is wounded by the sperm and life begins,” writes Cynthia. That is the Wound. The Sacred refers to sacrificing the way we cling to our wounds in service to something larger, so that we might open ourselves to a grander story and restore ourselves to wholeness.

Upon these Cornerstones rests the weight of our community. I believe they can support the weight of all humanity if we work shoulder to shoulder to move them into place and preserve their integrity by living them well. Will you join me in the attempt?

Jennifer Wilson is a Diana’s Grove staff member and founder of New Leaf Coaching and Consulting, www.newleafcoach.org. She is a teacher, rock climber, mountainbiker, wanderer, writer and nature-lover. jennifer@dianasgrove.com

Mystery's Light

by Laurie Dietrich

Light. An ancient symbol. A timeless metaphor. And an energetic reality. Traditionally, light is equated with the spirit. It is a manifestation, variously, of morality, of the intellect, of the creative force. It is illumination, the recognition of truth, another name for wisdom. Psychologically speaking, to become illuminated is to become aware of a source of light and, in consequence, of spiritual strength.

Light is the medium in which we see and are seen.

At Diana's Grove we walk with archetypes. We speak in metaphor—the native language of the subconscious. And we bring what we find in those rich, often dark depths into the light. Like seedlings, we spend a season growing toward the light and risking what that light reveals. We do so in ritual, in community and personal work on the land, and as a part of the larger online community of those enrolled in Mystery School.

This year, we'll shed our unique light, made up of the insights of those who tell and those who hear, on The Ballad of Tam Lin. That story, as we tell and shape it, will be retold here, in the pages of *Between the Worlds*.

Have you ever experienced a tale told by community? A fading legend restored (re-storied?) by those whose very modern, very *real* lives it affects? In this column, every month, the voices of the Mystery School community will weave this tale anew for you. Those enrolled in Mystery School (we call ourselves "Mysteries") step into the circle of light that is cast, in cyberspace, by the online discussion group called "Mystery." On Mystery, the characters of our year-long story live, speak, and interact with us. They challenge us, and we respond. They change us, and we change them. Together, we shine new light on an age-old story. And, in so doing, we are all revealed.

Those of you who are Mysteries this year will see your words here—anonymous, woven like individual colors into the pure, white light of illumination. Those of you who are not Mysteries will find a place, here, to put your eye to the chink in the curtain—the one through which a strange, shifting light is shining—and look into the heart of our mystery.

We walk through myth into reality. We make the universal, personal—and the personal, universal. Reaching for the light, we step into the light. In responding to the light we see in others, we shine a light on ourselves. Here, in this column, every month, we will share that light with you.

We welcome you. Just as we did at this time last year, we welcome you to this magazine, and, beginning next month, this column will welcome you into the heart of who we are. "Mystery's Light" will welcome you into Mystery, that online community where we, the members of Diana's Grove Mystery School, tell our stories of who we are

and who we are becoming, in light of the story we are all telling together—*The Ballad of Tam Lin*.

We welcome you, and we invite you to join us here, each month, where Mysteries come to light.

Mystery School's Online Discussion Groups

Many Mysteries never come to the Grove, but their words and insights connect them to community through the many online discussion lists that Diana's Grove Mystery School offers. The *Mystery* online discussion list is a place to discuss your journey through the story and will be the foundation for this column, "Mystery's Light," but long-distance Mysteries also become vital, individual presences in the Diana's Grove community through their participation on lists such as:

- Oracle—Whether you are new to the arts of tarot and astrology or consider yourself an expert, whether you are called to tarot, astrology, the work of the Moon Shadows journal, or all three, join us to explore the moon's cycles, and to learn to listen to the patterns of Mystery known as Oracle.
- Leadership: An exploration of the leader's role, and the Grove's philosophy of leadership skills, arts, and challenges.
- Ritual Arts: The art and craft of ritual. On this list, the ritual artists in our community (and those who would become ritual artists!) share experiences, brainstorm ideas, ask for advice, get clarification, and grow as ritual facilitators..
- Journey In Words: This writing class will be a year-long venture into fairy and folk tales and into writing the stories of the lives that engage us
- Community - Talk about yourself and what you are doing. Talk about your home community, political work and political action. Talk about your experiences in your larger world.

There's still time to join Mystery School and take advantage of any or all of these rich discussion opportunities. Register online, by mail, or by phone by January 31st. See www.dianasgrove.com or call 573-689-2400 for more information.

Laurie Dietrich is (among other things) a freelance writer and editor living in San Antonio, Texas. A fourth-year Mystery and sometimes over-enthusiastic volunteer, she has too many pets, not enough silence, and just the right amount of challenge in her life.

The Dark and the Wild

by Raven Shine

I stand. I stand and I feel what is waiting. A myth is waiting. "A myth is a story that has never happened and is always happening," says astrologer Howard Sasportas. Tam Lin, Jennet and the Fairy Queen Oenothera are just three of the characters in this year's

story, inviting us to join the chorus of their song, and make it our own. One way they invite us to step into their story is through the gift of the Moon Shadows book - a journal offered as a part of Diana's Grove Mystery School. The monthly theme pages of the Moon Shadows book are a place in which to explore our experience of the myth we are living. They also offer questions to discuss with a home study group, a tarot deck, or another personal oracle.

I stand and I feel the ground, hard beneath my feet. I smell spring in the crisp air of January. I hear roses growing in my heart. I feel the presence of my dog standing behind me on this high place in the world.

I stand above nothing and far below everything. The moon embraces me with her light. Her shadows nip at my toes.

I will jump. I will. I will move my right foot forward and I will step out into air. But first, I look. For now, I don't look down. I know that down is a dark and wild place. For now, I don't look up. Up is the vastness of possibility. Up is where the stars write our stories and the moon shares her counsel. I look ahead.

I am Raven, and I will share in this column, each month, my experience of the Moon Shadows work. I will walk alongside Jennet, Tam Lin and Oenothera, and search among the shadows of the dark and the wild. I will bask in the light that casts these shadows, and listen deeply within to hear and to tell the story hidden there.

I stand now at the beginning. I am not alone. I have my allies. I have my elements and my archetypes. I have my community standing alongside of me. We all see different endings and we all wait to begin. A myth, a story, a winter night's tale is waiting. The Ballad of Tam Lin is waiting for me and for you to step in and breathe life into a journey of love and relationship, of choices made and traditions fought.

To begin this year's journey, Tam Lin, Jennet and the Fairy Queen Oenothera invite us to join in with the chorus of their song and make our own music. You will find these characters in the monthly theme pages of the Diana's Grove Moon Shadows journal, a resource that offers us a place to explore our experience of the myth we are living. It also offers questions for you to discuss with your tarot deck, or another favorite tool for insight, or possibly your study group.

Moon Shadows marks the phases of the moons each month. The full moon becomes a time to honor the world that holds you. The new moon offers a time to honor the world within you. Solar holidays, like Beltane or Spring Equinox, are also explored in the book.

The Moon Shadows book can be described as a journal. It is written for and offered as a part of Diana's Grove Mystery School. If you register for Mystery School before January 31st, you will have access to this rich and beautiful resource of tarot spreads, astrology, and connection to the wild of nature through the moon's cycles. If you are not a member of our Mystery School community, you will get a glimpse of that rich beauty here in this

column every month

Perhaps the moon's mysteries brought you to this page. Will you now stand where the moon can embrace you? If so, then step. Jump. Initiate your own ending by being here at the beginning.

Raven Shine is a member of the Diana's Grove Post-Rites Leadership Team. She comes from a family of writers and artists and longs to tell her story through words and pictures, needles and thread. She lives in St. Louis with her two boys, Ben, 11 and Nick 13, her husband John, and her two Diana's Grove Rescued Dogs, Princess and Patrick. Raven practices and teaches Massage Therapy. She credits the work she has done through Mystery School and the Leadership Training as her means to healing old wounds and living her dreams today. She wants to change the world and make it a better place to live.

Stewarding the Land

by Patricia Storm

Work is love made visible: The Stewardship Program 2007

*"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 toward the infinite...
Work is love made visible."
Kahlil Gibran*

In our years of working with and for the land, with and for the community, we have discovered that labor is, for some, a spiritual practice. Yes, I believe that many of us have lives filled with work: jobs, tasks, long lists of things we need to do. I don't know about you, but my daily work is why I am "a stranger to the seasons." We began the Stewardship Program in 2006 and found it to be a rich new addition to our work. This column will bring you updates about what's happening at the Grove all year and much of what I report may be the result of this program.

This year, the Stewardship Program is manifested in our *Commune with the Wild: Stewardship and Community* weekends. These gatherings are time to connect with the land and with the rhythm of working together to bring in the harvest. That "harvest" may be the completion of a portion of a building project or the tending of a garden. These are also weekends (and one week in October) to learn about group process and group dynamics by working together as a team with intention.

Each weekend begins when you arrive on Friday. After you get settled, take some time for yourself or join an on-going project: work on the land, dinner prep, etc. The weekend officially begins with a *Creating Community* session before dinner that introduces not only each individual but the work of the weekend.

After dinner, as a community, we will put the food away, tidy the kitchen, feed the dogs and join in the work of caring for ourselves and each other. The evening session will focus on Group Dynamic or principles of working together in community. We will create work teams for the next day. After that, there will be plenty of time to enjoy the hot tub, the land or the company of community over dessert.

Saturday begins with a 9:00 breakfast but early risers might begin a task before breakfast. Those with a need for solitude might take the early hours as time for themselves. Breakfast: eggs and philosophy; the philosophy of working together. The work day officially begins at 10:00 with two and one-half hours of work before lunch. Early afternoon will be break time for those who need it and back to work for those ambitious souls who have been captured by their project. The work day ends at 4:30 with time to rest or clean up before dinner. Again in the evening there will be time to talk about the day and what we learned. Then, the hot tub for weary bones, a fire circle, or to bed.

Sunday begins again with breakfast again at 9:00. Then, time to complete projects and a closing session at before a late lunch at 1:00. Some will eat and be on the road, others might stay to enjoy the land or tour the work complete during the weekend. All and all, at the end of the weekend, we will be able to see that "Work is love made visible."

These *Commune with the Wild: Stewardship and Community* weekends are limited to 20, to make possible effective coordination of work projects and the intimacy that enriches our learnings about group dynamics. Will you "step out of life's procession" and join us as we "keep pace with the earth and the soul of the earth?" *Commune with the Wild* begins in March.

Patricia Storm is one of the co-founders of Diana's Grove, and is famous for being as comfortable on a tractor as she is playing frame drum. (Both of which she does extremely well!) She has been instrumental in developing the Stewardship Path program, which is a key part of Mystery School 2007. For more information on how you can be a part this work, visit www.dianasgrove.com or contact Patricia at patricia@dianasgrove.com.

Astrology for the Journey: Dream and Reality

by Teri Parsley Starnes

"Knowing our natal chart, our personal transits, and the ongoing major planetary cycles (the 'world transits'), helps us to make conscious what is unconscious. This offers us greater freedom and greater responsibility to participate intelligently and creatively in the unfolding of these forces and patterns, rather

than being merely their puppets. We also begin to forge what James Hillman has called an 'archetypal eye': that capacity to see through the particular and concrete to discern the universal and mythic."

—Darby Costello and Richard Tarnas - from "Anima Mundi and the Individual: Co-Creating the Future with Astrology"

This quotation expresses what I believe to be astrology's potential to help us know ourselves better.

In this column, I will write about how astrology can help us to become more self-aware and more empowered to create, responsibly, the world we want. And I will use astrology to develop an archetypal eye. I will tell the stories of astrology in a way that creates personal associations with eternal archetypes. My goal is to bring the personal into the mythic, and then return again to the personal.

The mythic and the personal are two worlds that touch each other. The mythic story we will be working with at Diana's Grove this year is a story about two worlds touching each other. In this story Jennet reaches from one world into another to grab what she most desires. The conscious mind - what I know about myself - and the unconscious mind - what I don't know about myself - are also two worlds that touch within.

Astrology helps to "make conscious what is unconscious." Astrology illumines the patterns that shape our lives. We may think that illumination is better than darkness, but this is not always so. I used to think that the purpose of developing my archetypal eye was *only* to become more conscious. I have pursued consciousness as fiercely as Jennet from the mundane world pursued Tam Lin in the faery world. I appreciate the *in sight* this pursuit has given me, but now I am beginning to appreciate that my unconscious has its own gifts.

Both the conscious and unconscious minds are necessary. Like the inhalation and exhalation of breath, they belong to each other; each feeds and supports the other. The conscious mind needs the unconscious mind for food, for mystery, for its very survival; and the unconscious mind needs to be uncovered, used, and brought forth into consciousness so that we can be more conscious of "co-creating the future."

Astrology is one of the tools we can use to breathe into both sides of our consciousness. It reveals what we are unaware of about ourselves, and it clothes in myth what we still do not understand. The story of Tam Lin, with its two worlds—human and faery— is a mythic reminder that we need to honor both these states of being. Astrology works best as a tool when it serves both the conscious and the unconscious mind. With conscious self-awareness we become more empowered; in the unconscious world, the food of symbol, story, and dream replenishes the soul.

Where does the conscious mind begin and the unconscious mind end? Is it important to notice when we cross over from one to the other? I believe, this year, we will learn more about the boundary between the worlds of dream and reality through the story of Tam

Lin. But there are also astrological allies who will play a role in teaching us this lesson this year.

Saturn and Neptune opposition.

The planets are allies and teachers. Just like the gods of Olympus, each planet has its own point of view, the part of life that it is most interested in. Perhaps the distinction between the conscious and unconscious minds seems less clear to me right now because the two planets most associated with the real (Saturn) and the unreal (Neptune) are traveling opposite each other this year (see sidebar). An opposition of two planets is created when two distinct, separate planets face each other across the zodiac. Even though they are separate, these two pieces cannot be separated. They are linked. Worlds collide.

At times, an opposition between two planets feels like an either/or choice. Opposing forces beg us to declare a winner. But the interesting thing about an opposition is how alike the two poles become. It is as if, by holding a mirror up to another, we become what is in the mirror — the other. Is it Neptune telling us to dream our dreams into reality, or is it Saturn telling us to construct our reality based on dream? Does the source of inspiration matter?

What *does* matter during this transit is that these worlds — the real world that we create consciously, and the dream world that enchants us — need each other, and we need both worlds.

Do you feel a hunger for the wild places? Can you feel the strength of that hunger? Does the yearning come from a desire to create a world that can sustain your dreams? Does it come from the beauty of the dream itself? Did Jennet know where her hunger came from? The planets are conspiring to enfold us into this story of dream and reality. Neptune and Saturn are marking this moment. Do you hear their call?

Important stages in the present Neptune/Saturn cycle:

Conjunction (coming together in the same place): 1989

Waxing square (90 degrees apart): 1998

Opposition (180 degrees apart): 2006-2007

Waning square (90 degrees apart again): 2015-2016

Next conjunction: 2026

Saturn and Neptune take about 35 years to complete their cycle.

Each stage is an important moment in our communal experience of the realms of dream and reality.

Teri Parsley Starnes delightedly begins her 8th year as a Mystery in 2007. She has been practicing as a professional astrologer since 1995. She welcomes all your astrology questions and encourages Mysteries to continue the astrological conversation on Diana's Grove Oracle e-list. Visit her website www.starsdanceastrology.com to find out more or contact Teri at tpstar@mninter.net

Design Your Becoming

by Canyon

Do you want to live beyond the routines of earning and consuming? Would you like to stop censoring who you are, without losing relationships? Are you willing to believe in your dreams and bring them into reality? Imagine, if you will, that these goals are possible. All you must do is tap into childhood. Not *your* childhood, but childhood as an archetype, a pattern.

I believe in the wisdom of childhood. As its student for more than 30 years, I have learned that childhood and its processes of development contain guidance for adult relationship issues, life issues. With childhood's wisdom you can design a process of becoming, can grow and heal. This column in *Between the Worlds* will offer that wisdom and its opportunities as integral parts of the personal growth work that is the heart of Mystery School.

Here is what childhood knows: we build understanding of the world and how it works, one interaction at a time. Every time anyone had any social interaction with you, you put one brick or stick of understanding into the home of your Self. Every time anyone responded to your overtures—kindly or harshly, supportively or dismissively, with love or disregard—every time, you added one more rank of height to the walls that now house your spirit.

One interaction at a time, you built your sense of self, your sense of others. You built understanding of the treatment you deserve and of how you should treat others. You constructed your capacity for trust, and built a sense of self. You learned about faith, about belief in the impossible. Stone by stone, you built your ability to negotiate through problems and your ability to create a vision and achieve it. You learned something about how compromise finds common ground and something about what to do when there is no common ground.

If you were lucky, you built strong and enduring capacities for Trust, Independence, Faith, Negotiation, Vision, Compromise, and Acceptance. These I call the 7 Childhood Treasures™, each one associated with one of the first seven years of life. Your interactions in early childhood may have left your spirit living in a home built without these treasures, with rickety walls, full of holes. If so, you are not alone ... and it's time to remodel. Here's the good news: it's never too late. You can build these treasures now and use them to shore up the walls that house your soul.

You can be the architect who designs a new home for your Self. You can rebuild your understanding of how to live in relationship with the world. These childhood treasures can be constructed now, stronger than they were in childhood. To begin, an understanding of child development will help.

Perhaps you think of a human's development as maturation, the inexorable unfolding of innate potential. Do you see a child developing as surely as a flower opens, as surely as a seed becomes a plant? Yes, you are right, and that's not all that development is.

Do you see child development as a gradual acquisition of skills, knowledge, and patterns of action? Perhaps your view of development is that it results from external influences such as instruction, reward, and punishment. Yes, you are correct, and that's not all that development is.

Your development as a young child was a natural and innate unfolding *and* was shaped by praise and disappointment, by teaching and repetitive practice. Both are true, and there was more. Human development does not result only through these passive processes. You were also an actor in your own becoming.

Your development required you to *construct* your self and your world. You built them, manufactured them, sculpted them. Your development resulted from both conscious and unconscious efforts to make sense of what happened to you each moment. Using the raw material of your interactions with your world and those who peopled it, you constructed reality, understanding, and rules.

Children act on—interact with—other humans and observe the outcomes. Each interaction provides some of the raw materials used in this building project. As a newborn infant, you cried out in discomfort: hunger, or a wet, cold diaper against fragile skin. Did the world respond? Did someone comfort you? If you were reared by a parent guided by an “expert” who advised scheduled feedings, perhaps you cried alone in the dark, your need unmet.

When you were two years old, someone gave you a direct order—“Stop that”—or a polite order—“Please come here”—and you said, “No.” Even if you remember being extremely well-behaved and compliant, you said “No” at least once. Toddlers' job descriptions require it. What happened when you refused to comply with someone else's view of what you should be doing? Were you ignored, distracted, admonished, spanked, put in time out?

These interactions, these exchanges of information with the world, provided the material you used to construct your image of your self in relation to the other beings around you, your social world. Your identity may say, “I trust—or don't trust—that I will have my needs met.” “I am an initiator of my activity—or I am dependent on others to tell me what to do.”

Each exchange with every person in your world left you holding the stuff with which to build your life. Like so many locking blocks, you snapped them together and made a self. A little mistrust, a little shame, a small bit of faith, an edge-piece of fear ... you built yourself, you built your Self.

This construction aspect is usually the “missing piece” in our understanding of human development. Woven into the natural and innate unfolding of some abilities, layered between abilities shaped by teaching and practice, you gained other abilities by being an actor in your own becoming. You built your capacity to trust, your understanding of relationships, your sense of wonder, your ability to negotiate for what you want, your belief in your dreams.... You constructed your self and your understanding of how that self “fits” in the social world.

Back then, you built yourself, and now you can *rebuild*. That's what this column will be about all year: rebuilding, strengthening the wobbly walls you built years or decades ago. Which ones of the 7 Childhood Treasures™ are you most ready to build, and what parts of them need to be reconstructed?

On Sunday morning of each Mystery School intensive, we will spend an hour exploring childhood's wisdom as it relates to that month's story and themes. These explorations, in community, will enliven and enrich this personal growth work through shared experience.

For Canyon's bio, please see *Living the Story* in this month's magazine.

Journey in Words

by Shaun Perkins

Above my desk is a framed messy page full of small drawings with penciled comments next to each. The title is “Any Thing a Spy might have.” My son drew this page when he was heavily into wearing his deerstalker-Sherlock Holmes hat and carrying a magnifying glass around the neighborhood. The items include a Groucho-Marx style pair of glasses with nose and mustache, binoculars, a notebook (labeled Top Secret), file folders, matches (labeled Box of Matches with camera inside), a periscope (not named, but labeled “could see over fences”), and more.

The crude drawings are neat, but the words are what appeal to me. I have tons of artwork from my past and my son's past, but it's the words that he and I have written that touch my soul more than anything. Words have that power for me. Do they have that power for you?

They don't have to be words that are put together in any specific kind of pattern. The words on Luke's spy page are random, not meant as poetry, just labels, just there for explanation. And still, they have a kind of power. I am embarrassed to admit this, but I have a paper towel, a regular old paper towel, that I wrote on when I was a teenager: “I made you some coffee to take to work.” The note was left next to a thermos for my dad.

Under my sentence, he had scrawled, “Thank you.” That paper towel is folded and inside a box of old letters, photos, and memorabilia under my bed. It is almost thirty years old.

What are the words that haunt you? Which ones have stayed with you? Which ones are working on you still? Which ones want to come out of you?

This year’s online writing class for Diana’s Grove, Journey in Words, will explore words. We will play with words and forms and images. Our general theme, because we are in the year of Tam Lin, will be fairy and folk tales, but the specific exercises, discussions, and ideas that come out of that theme will probably vary widely.

We will have some months of brainstorming and discussion and some months devoted to class exercises and themes. More specifically, there will be two 3-month classes from March-May and from September-November.

Last year, the class focused on chronological storytelling and was structured around the elements of the hero’s journey, and these elements were spread out over the year in a specific pattern. This year, we will return to a less-structured format since we will be working with the genre of fairy and folk tales but not following a specific monthly theme.

But to start our year in the class, we will begin in an even more general sense—with what I was discussing at the beginning of this article: words. A few weeks ago, one of my ninth-grade students wrote this in his English folder:

“I found this written in a note: ‘Be weak, be weak for a day, let yourself fall, let yourself . . . let yourself . . . become what you really are.’—Author Unknown. I find myself, trapped in a corner again.”

What I wrote in the margin of his page was, “I wish you would write about it.”

If you join Diana’s Grove Mystery School you can journey into the wild that words can create with our class. Will you do so? What do you wish?

From the wild where Jennet will run this year, whispers snake around the trees and whistle through the peeling bark: “What is your story?” The fragrance of the rose in Tam Lin’s garden evokes a memory, a dream, an image that asks you, “Will you bring me into the world? Will you write about me?”

Shaun Perkins, a published author and presenter, offers workshops throughout the year at Diana’s Grove events and facilitates the Grove’s online writing class. She has presented workshops nationwide, for such organizations as the National Storytelling Network and the National Association for Poetry Therapy. You can learn more about her and her work at www.journeyinwords.com

Interview with a Mystery: Cynthia Jones and Patricia Storm

by River

Welcome to the 2007 edition of “Interview with a Mystery!” This column is designed to introduce you to just a few of the myriad of amazing members of our far-flung community. While my goal is to get to know some of the folks that either aren’t able to or rarely come to an on-site intensive, this month I’m sticking a little closer to home by interviewing the two founders of Diana’s Grove: Cynthia Jones and Patricia Storm.

How did you decide to start Diana’s Grove? Has it manifested in the way you originally intended?

Cynthia: I had a metaphysics store that changed each night into a classroom. Patricia and I taught Tarot, Astrology, and Ritual Arts. Our back yard was a high privacy fence around an unused parking lot. It worked for ritual, but not really. On Candlemas in 1993, Patricia and I both had the same knowing, the same vision.

Although we were in the same place, our minds were in different realities. Patricia was attending a workshop with Starhawk; I was consumed with a community crisis, and yet, after that trance, we both knew that we wanted to offer our work on land dedicated to mystery and community. We wanted to create a place where an in-depth personal or magical process wasn’t devoured by daily life pressures at the end of three hours. We wanted to offer not just information and an experience, but land, an outside fire, privacy and safety. I wanted those who were learning about earth-based spirituality to be in a place where they could spend some time with *earth*. That was my original vision.

Seasonal weekends, workshops—I thought our primary focus would be providing a facility for other organizations and presenters to offer their work. When we began Mystery School, we invited 22 people with the hopes that 13 would respond. One bunkhouse, a small kitchen, no staff: that was our plan. Obviously that changed!

Patricia: Our metaphysical center in Springfield, IL was about ten blocks from the capitol building. We had been working together for 7 years when we went to a workshop with Starhawk in 1993. During the workshop, Starhawk led a trance in which I became deeply involved. Cynthia was busy writing about a community crisis we needed to deal with when we returned. Trance works when you listen and get involved, and it works when you don’t. On the way home, we shared a vision that had come during the weekend.

We did a nine-month search and looked at hundreds of properties until we found the

one that matched all of our criteria—beautiful land, trees, privacy, open spaces for camping and rituals, a creek, and a building to live in, work in, and grow from.

I don't believe either of us could have imagined the way that Diana's Grove has grown. I certainly could not have imagined the variety of people who would come into our lives and be such a vital part of what happens here. I did dream of a full campground and quaint cabins to house our participants. Those things have manifested, and so much more.

Cynthia and I shared the original vision of creating a space for spiritual and physical retreat. Now we are in a growth phase that involves two different visions simultaneously. Cynthia's dream of a dog rescue has been made manifest in the last couple of years. My vision of doing more sustainable and renewable building and energy work is beginning to manifest in a program we introduced last year and will continue developing in the coming year.

What excites you about the upcoming Mystery School year and the story of Tam Lin?

Cynthia: A year to listen to the land, a year to—once again—fall in love with a vision, a year to work with the elements as the voice of nature: this is the kind of magic that accompanies this Celtic tale.

Just as Psyche and Eros was a primer, a blueprint for being in relationship, this story tells you just what to expect when you fall in love with a dream, a vision; when a dream or vision falls in love with you. Jean Houston once said, "Some people have a vision, a calling, and other people are had by their calling." "Seized by a vision" is what she said. When we began Diana's Grove, I was seized by a vision. And just like in the story, that vision was hard to hold on to as it struggled into form. Things change, the dream changes; in the process of loving, of holding on, we are discovering who we are. That is the Ballad of Tam Lin.

Patricia: What excites me most is revisiting a story that I know, and learning how it and I have grown. It always amazes me to see what new people bring to a Mystery School year and to see how returning Mysteries have grown and changed as well. I'm also excited about the new form for the Stewardship program, a vision that was born during last year's Mystery School.

This year, the Stewardship work, stewarding the land and stewarding the community, will be offered in a series of 3- and 4-day weekends. In May, we will build the foundation of a cabin, and some people might stay on for the following week, a week of focused construction during which community members will finish the cabin.

The Grove community has inspired literally hundreds of people through Mystery School Intensives, Open Gatherings, and beyond in several home communities. How has it inspired you?

Cynthia: Mystery School is my inspiration. Inspiration ... inhalation ... what fills me and

what I release. It's my reason for being.

Patricia: Perhaps I could best describe it as inspiration from behind! It is a continuing challenge to keep up with (and occasionally be one step ahead of) those hundreds of people. I often feel like one of the dogs (Magic, who passed on just last year) who always ran ahead of the truck, and always had to keep checking back to see which way the truck was going so he could stay ahead. I'm constantly trying to run ahead of the work here, and constantly looking back to see which way we're all going together.

A tangible way in which Mystery School has inspired me is in developing my skills as a drummer, through work with Layne Redmond, then developing my skills as a drum teacher by working with many groups of new drummers. Those classes give me opportunities to practice the Diana's Grove Cornerstones of Community and my priestessing skills.

What do you imagine the Grove community will look like in the next decade?

Cynthia: Because the Grove community is going through a major shift right now with the addition of the Stewardship Path, I see it taking an organic turn. The people who are coming here are more involved in the land, and equally involved in the philosophy. So I see the next ten years as years where we begin to deepen our relationship with both the land and our values. I want the Grove and our Dog Rescue work to live beyond me. I want them to change shape in the arms of new dreamers who, like me, are seized by the vision of what is possible.

Patricia: I think I can imagine it, and I'm sure I'm wrong! I see more people living here and sharing the physical and magical work. I see others teaching and drawing new people in to fill workshops and events. I see sustainable energy becoming more prevalent and renewable resources increasing. I see gardens, paths, solar panels and wireless networking. I see me retiring and sitting on the porch doing nothing but reading a good book, drinking coffee, and petting a dog (or six). You did ask for an imaginal view, didn't you? Well, maybe I'll still drive the tractor a bit.

For River's bio, please see *Ritual Artistry* in this month's magazine.

One of the Grove's favorite dogs ever will speak in this space all year, giving her unique perspective on the Ballad of Tam Lin and other topics that catch her attention.

Skippy Speaks

by Skippy

It's time to step into the next great adventure and ... did I say "step?" Forget "step!" I mean run, bound and leap into whatever comes next. Take caution in your teeth and

race into the winds of chance, change and choice. Run with your life....

And perhaps I have gotten a bit ahead of myself. Some of you have never even had the wonderful opportunity of meeting me. We must try to remedy that sad fact. Some of you may never get the change to meet me in person ... er, dog, so I have once again volunteered to share my canine soul and wisdom with all of you via this magazine. I am, among other things, a very clever dog.

Who else am I, you ask? Modesty and space preclude me from listing ALL my titles and duties. You all may call me Skippy, but I am also known as Skippena, Warrior Princess, Guardian of the Grove, Protector of the Mysteries (people and otherwise), Scourge of Skunks and Terror to Coyotes. I am the chief meeter and greeter of the Grove and She Who Attempts to Keep Order in the pack (canine and otherwise). I am Skippy, Top Dog Extraordinaire!

So ... where were we? Oh yes, bounding into the great adventure of Mystery School 2007. A new year of Mysteries—all kinds. Old friends coming back. New friends to meet. I love it! Meeting, greeting and knowing. I like to keep track of everyone and everything. I'm very good at it.

What I know about this month is our Dog name for the Full Moon just past. Among some of my ancestors we dogs remember it as the Moon of the Running Deer. Times have changed, however, and we modern dogs, who are lucky enough to live with your people holidays, remember the Full Moon just past as the Moon of Good Garbage. We are, after all, dogs, and we call life as we see it.

May the coming moons call to you with whatever mysteries they hold. More canine mysteries next month....

Lonely Hearts: Why do we rescue dogs?

by Cynthia Jones

As the theme of the month is hearing the call, I must begin this year with why we do it, why I answered the call to rescue dogs.

We don't look for the dogs that we rescue. In most cases, they weren't looking for us either. They simply stand before us, creatures of circumstance; fate placed them in our hands. Why do we do it? Why do we have 60 dogs that require care, feeding, medical attention and love? A frightened puppy cowers in my arms and believes that he will be safe. The last person who held him placed him on the side of the road and drove off. I

can be a solution for a pup whose birth was the result of neglect and whose life has been an extension of that neglect. I am compelled to live up to the hope in an abandoned dog's eyes. That is why I do it.

I care for forty to fifty rescued dogs in my home. I live at Diana's Grove, a retreat center in the Ozarks that offers personal and spiritual growth work. We are just one of many grassroots animal rescue groups. For all such groups, caring for animals is a consuming passion. It requires time, energy and money. We do it because the animals need us. We do it because....

I believe that each of us is called to do what stands before us to be done. You might be called to stand up for your political beliefs or devote your resources to your spiritual work or church. You might be a volunteer who provides a needed community services. Some of you might care for abandoned animals ... just not at home or not so many. Like you, I do what I can.

We live in a rural area with limited resources. There are very few services for people and none for companion animals - no local vets, animal care facilities or doctors. When any one of us sees a dog wandering on the roadside, we decide what to do. Should we say yes or should we be realistic about our limitations? Where I live, I can't kid myself. Another solution isn't coming down the road behind me. If I don't do it, no one will. In order to continue our work, we must find homes for our dogs. Yes, we are a no-kill shelter, but the dogs that we can't take don't live in a no-kill world. Every dog that we place means another dog can live.

We do it because it is before us to do. In exchange for our time and care, we get to save lives. We get to provide an alternative to less humane solutions. How can a child learn compassion if Dad has to shoot the family pet when he loses his job? How can we teach a child responsibility when she watches Mom leave a litter of pups on the side of the road to "fend for themselves", to die of starvation or be killed by a predator?

Why would someone dump a dog on the side of the road? Because all the shelters are full. When it's not my problem, it is easy to blame the one whose problem it is. Blame the owner, blame the person who can't find or afford a solution. It is easy to consider ourselves separate from a situation that has no acceptable solution, but there will only be a solution when we are all willing to create one. I am not separate from the person who put that dog on the road. I am not separate from the family who can't afford to spay or neuter. Blame is easy but it doesn't lead to a solution. "Not my problem. Not my fault." Should we simply decide whose fault it is and be done with it? Blame is alienation's pup. Alienation ... tell me, how do we fix that dog?

Here is my request: rather than lose yourself in the abyss of hopelessness, look into the eyes of the need that stands before you. Respond. Give your time. Give a little bit of your heart. Be it rescue work, volunteer work, social action or speaking for a cause you believe in, connect with the world around you. Be an advocate for that which you love. Do what is yours to do. If you, like me, are called to help dogs and cats, donate to the

shelter of your choice. Give an hour of your time; give an hour's wage. You have no idea how much an hour can do, but the puppy that I hold in my arms knows. He knows. Someone's hour saved his life.

One Dog's Life

That pup I held in my arms when I wrote this article a few year's ago was a little guy named Marcus. He stole my heart. I think of him still. Just a little black pup with trusting eyes and belief in life; in time, he found a very good home. Today other pups fill our arms. Bonnie just joined us. She is one of 11 pups currently living at the Grove who are aged 8 weeks or under. Bonnie is a Chocolate Lab mix. Full of energy, play and puppiness, she was an older couple's unwanted Christmas present. Christmas presents often find their way into shelters. Bonnie's new family brought her into our vet's office hoping he would know what to do. He did. Because she is chocolate-colored and not black, Bonnie will find a home more quickly than my long ago Marcus. To see all of our dogs and pups: www.takeafriendhome.org.

For Cynthia's bio, please see *Stepping into the Story* in this month's magazine.