



**Heart of CMA**  
**Online Issue #4 - Summer 2006**

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**Supporting The Land We Love**  
Online Issue #4 - Summer 2006

**The Accord's theme for the Summer 2006 issue is "Supporting The Land We Love "**, focusing on Spirit Haven and experiences members have had there.



*A note on Accord themes:* While the Accord staff is usually looking for works related to the theme, not all submissions are required to be in line with that issue's theme.

If you are interested in submitting articles, essays, reviews, stories, poetry, or art for the Accord, more information is found below or at the [Accord's main page](#). The Accord is a member-driven e-zine and we are looking for work from you! We do not require professional quality work. This publication can be a good start for amateurs or those who just wish to volunteer some time for CMA.

"Thank you" to all of our submitters for the Accord! Without you, there is no Accord.

**Accord publish dates for 2006:**

Fall 2006 - October 1st

Winter 2006/2007 - January 1st

For more information, visit the [Accord's main page](#).



We've also added a downloadable copy of the Accord to the [Files](#) section of the CMA site and to the Accord. [Click here](#) to download and print this issue using Adobe Acrobat.

**CMA Samhain fast approaches!** This year's theme is "See Beyond the Mist " and runs from October 19 - 22, 2006. For more information, visit our [page of festival information](#).

Blessings,  
The Accord Staff - Bruce, Bonnie, & Lightning

## REPORTS

### Director of Records Report

Review, collating and consolidation of CMA Records remain an ongoing process.

Documents from CMA's CPA are now in hand from 2000-2005. Conversion of these documents to an electronic format should be complete by August 1, 2006, barring any unforeseen circumstance.

#### Second Appeal:

I have, as yet, received no contact on the items listed below. So, I am asking you, as a member, to search your own memories, old newsletters and old Accords to assist me in recovering what we have lost. Listed here is what I have not been able to find. All are minutes of Great Works meetings over the years. If you have or know where I can go to obtain them, I would be grateful.

Beltane 1983	Samhain 1986
Beltane 1984	Beltane 1988
Samhain 1984	Samhain 1988
Beltane 1985	Beltane 1989
Samhain 1985	Samhain 1989
Beltane 1986	Samhain 1996
Samhain 1999	Samhain 2002

If you have copies of any of these documents, either paper or electronic, please contact me at [scribe@magickal-arts.org](mailto:scribe@magickal-arts.org).

May Spirit hold you and yours.

In Service,  
Mary "Wolf" Gray  
Director of Records 2006

## SHOPPING

### Related Shopping

Remember: A portion of purchases made through the CMA site go to CMA.

The following items are available for purchase through CMA's site. You can find them online at:  
[http://www.magickal-arts.org/accord/summer2006/related\\_shopping.html](http://www.magickal-arts.org/accord/summer2006/related_shopping.html)

 <p>All New Square Foot Gardening</p> <p>Mel Bartholomew</p> <p>Best Price \$11.75 or Buy New \$13.59</p>	 <p>1,001 Ingenious Gardening Ideas</p> <p>Deborah L. Martin</p> <p>Best Price \$11.63 or Buy New \$17.61</p>	 <p>Native Texas Gardens</p> <p>Sally Wasowski</p> <p>Best Price \$15.72 or Buy New \$15.72</p>
 <p>Texas Wildlife Portfolio</p> <p>KAC Productions</p> <p>Best Price \$7.00 or Buy New \$16.47</p>	 <p>Texas Wildlife</p> <p>James Kavanagh</p> <p>Best Price \$3.03 or Buy New \$5.95</p>	 <p>Living with Wildlife</p> <p>The California Cen...</p> <p>Best Price \$1.75 or Buy New \$10.50</p>

## **SOCIETIES**

### **Society Report for Temple of the Dancers – Summer**

The Temple of the Dancers Society met on Friday during the CMA Beltaine 2006. We discussed the Beltaine Hafla – Fundraiser and made plans for dressing the stage and back stage assistance.

We also began the preparation for the Samhain hafla, on the possibility it might be approved for the Samhain Event schedule. The members who were in attendance, voted on the Hafla theme “Dark Fey / Unseelie.”

The Hafla-fundraiser went well and everyone had a good time. We had two guest dancers, Avalon “the Henna Artist” and Aurora, who delighted us with her double veil routine. With generous tips from our audience and the auction of articles donated by the dancers, we raised \$252.00!

Thank you, for all the encouragement from our wonderful fans and to the lovely Lady Watersong for the introductions to our amazing and very beautiful “Double A” tag team.”

Special Hugs and Smooches to our wonderful support staff:

- Nancy, the best “back stage mom” we could ask for
- Dr. Steve, our wonderful announcer
- Seannon, the Master of Music

And

- Gary Park, who provided our stage, set, lights and sound system.

Without all of you, we couldn't have danced!

## **ARTICLES**

### **A Hug by Any Other Name...**

By Anonymous

Hugs. They abound at CMA events and pagan gatherings. Hugs; The feel of another person's body pressing against yours. Hugs; An exchange of energy. Hugs; A form of greeting. Sorry. Not for me.

Okay, I probably just lost most of my audience. Don't get me wrong. I love hugs. From people I want to be intimate with. That's right. I said intimate. A hug is a very intimate form of

communication. Think about it. When you hug someone, you're basically wrapping your entire body around another person. You're enclosing their aura and their energy within yours. That's an incredible exchange and very powerful. Hugging has become a casual greeting in our society in general and the pagan community specifically. One that I think has gone too far.

I know I'm probably going to get a lot of flak for this article, but before you get out your poisoned pens give me a chance to explain how I came to this conclusion.

Many years ago, I hugged everyone I met. I loved it! It felt great! I even considered joining the hugging crew at CMA. Then I got sick. Very sick.

The summer following Beltane 1999, I was diagnosed with a virus similar to spinal meningitis. Nasty stuff! I was flat on my back all summer. One whole season of sheer misery. (That is a whole story within itself.) When I finally began my recovery, I was startled to realize that I had *no* shielding left. I had been stripped completely bare. Now for an empath, that's a pretty sorry state to be in and, no matter how hard I tried, I could not get my shielding back up.

The first pagan event I attended after that, I stayed about twenty minutes. It was bad enough just being in a room with so many people, but having them come up to me and hug me was *actually painful*. So I wrapped myself in a cocoon and hibernated. It took six months for any shielding to come back at all and another year after that before I could stand being in large groups.

When I attended Pagan Pride Day the following year I found myself shying away from hugging everyone. Or I cut those hugs very short. The look of incredulity on some of those faces was amazing and I wondered to myself, "When did hugging become mandatory?"

There is no doubt that human touch can be one of the most healing and incredibly comforting things in the modern world. I don't dispute that at all. But it must be by invitation. Many of us believe that we must have permission from an individual in order to perform any kind of magick with them or for them. Hugging is magick.

Thirty years ago, if you didn't offer someone your hand to shake, you were thought to be either; 1) making a statement about the other person's character, or 2) trying to hide something. Today, those thoughts have shifted to hugging. There are a lot of people I like that I don't necessarily want to hug. It is not a commentary on that person nor is it a sign that I don't trust them. It is simply a form of contact that I reserve for those people in my life that I am closest to - spouse, lover, sister, or very close friend.

Along those same lines, there are people I respect magickally that I don't wish to join in circle or ritual. Not because I disagree with their practices, but simply because theirs is not energy I wish to experience that intimately. Watch, possibly, or read about, but not share. It's that way with hugging.

So, the next time you see me at an event - I'll shake your hand or bow to you in acknowledgement. I'll smile and wave. I'll invite you to join my fire or offer you a drink from my cooler. All these are signs of community and friendship. Please, don't be upset if I don't hug you as well.

***Authors Note:*** This article originally ran in the Spring 2001 Accord. After several specific incidents leading up to and during this past Beltane, I thought it prudent to submit it again. I would like to a couple of observations and suggestions.

When someone moves away from an offered hug, it is a violation of their personal space to continue to try and hug that person. At that point, the magick of the hug is no longer a shared experience; it is one of trying to take from someone something that was not offered. The same thing applies when a person tries to disengage from a hug and the other person refuses to let go.

If you are unsure or don't know someone well, please ask first if they would like a hug. I do that with ALL the newbies, so they don't get overwhelmed or think hugging is a requirement. Also, please do not be insulted if a person moves away from you, puts up a hand to stop you, or simply says, "no, thank you." Remember, it is not necessarily a reflection upon you; it is a choice they have made for themselves. It is up to all of us to respect choices made about personal space and comfort.

***Contact requires consent.***

## **The Coming of Spring** By Magickal Mariposa

Ahhhh the coming of Spring...such a sweet scent in the air...warm breezes blowing...with a hint of old winter still here...but with a promise of beauty and splendor as all the woodland creatures and foliage awaken...as mother earth once again arises as mother to all...Isis, Astarte, Dianna, Hecate, Demeter, Kali, Inanna, Ishtar....

Beltaine...the celebration of spring ...and passion...beckoning the child within to come out and play...spiraling fires with drummers and dancers playing in unison under the clear full moon...chanters singing praises to mother earth...swaying in together...with the heartbeat of one...trancelike...ethereal...inviting all the Ancients to come forth....

Seeing old friends...meeting new ones... new lovers handfasting ...old lovers renewing their passions...with smiles and laughter floating thru the air...a tangle of energies... forming the strongest of magicks...creating memories to last a lifetime...the great rite replenishing the land and her people...

So how do we return to the mundane world.....?

## ***Goddess of Eire* By Janeen O . Kerry**

A book review by Sky Ladywolf

Well for those of you who want a little light reading with a magickal flair, I highly recommend the book *Goddess of Eire*. Just enough romance to keep the love story going and enough masculine challenges and magickal influence to entertain either sex. In the back of the book is the pronunciation for all the Gaelic words and facts.

For centuries, Eriu, goddess of Ireland, had spent one night only with the Ard Ri, the high king "elect", to confirm him in his office. After that night, they parted, never to see one another again, but for Parlan, the newest Ard Ri, that is not enough. No other woman will now do for him, and his defiance brings a curse upon the land. To break the curse and atone for his pride, Parlan must go on a quest to retrieve four sacred artifacts that will allow him to face the Black Dragon with a prayer of winning. Eriu herself chooses to help him, for not only has she lost her heart to the proud king but if he fails, the land of men, she is sworn to protect, will also die.

This is part of a series that I am going to search the half-price book stores for the rest. Her Celtic Journey series also contains the following:

*Sister of the Moon* - This story is set against the ancient pagan festival of Samhain

*Spirit of the Mist* – Is about a young woman of ancient Ireland who must only marry a king or lose her magick.

*Keeper of the Light* – Is about Rioghan who is a healer and mistress of magick living alone in a forest cave among the Sidhe, the Little People of ancient Eire.

*Maiden of the Winds* – Is about Keavy, a beautiful young woman of ancient Eire who has never forgotten her magical encounter years before with a magnificent golden eagle -- an eagle which, she is convinced, was actually a man with the legendary ability to take the form of a bird.

*Daughter of Gold* - Is about Niamh (neev), a beautiful young woman traveling with her simple farm family to the Lughnasa Fair, the great summer gathering of five kingdoms.

Other books by the same author with a magickal theme are:

***MISTRESS OF THE WATERS***, a time-travel romance which takes on the ancient and powerful ritual of life and fertility called Beltane

***QUEEN OF THE SUN***, a time-travel romance, takes as its setting the very magical occurrences surrounding the celebration of the Summer Solstice

***LADY OF FIRE***, a time-travel romance, involves a Celtic celebration of early spring called Imbolc -- a celebration which happens to fall on the same date as the heroine's birthday.

(These books can be found for sale on the CMA site at: [http://www.magickal-arts.org/accord/summer2006/goddess\\_of\\_eire.html](http://www.magickal-arts.org/accord/summer2006/goddess_of_eire.html))

## **Leave no trace....**

By Rain - CMA Land Admin

What does this mean to everyone? Since I joined CMA less than one year ago there have been several conversations with varying viewpoints on why this phrase doesn't always get followed. Either we have a hard time with recycling. No companies to pick it up. No one wants to take it with them. Or no one has room for all of it. Then there is the sorting. But what about the ways we can individually cut the amount of trash that we take to and generate at events.

I have been at the work weekends immediately following the last two events. Keep in mind my first two events, my only two events. I have seen the amount of trash left at the land and seen what it is. There is no reason to point fingers or get mad. That doesn't change the facts. We generate too much trash as a group. I have come up with a few ways to minimize the amount of trash. Some things that others have mentioned and some I have thought of and usually heard out of others also.

First, we have to look at what the trash is, and of course not all of it can be eliminated. There are a few big things I have noticed myself. First is the packaging. Really, how hard is it when you have a new tent, air mattress, even water, and other misc. food items to take it out of the packaging before you leave home? We all have a way to get rid of trash that already costs us money and doesn't make our yards look like that land does after an event. That in itself would help some. Water is another big thing. Everyone likes individual water bottles. Sure they are easier to deal with. But what is wrong with taking a few bottles and refilling them out of gallons or having a reusable water container of some sort to fill. 20 ounce water bottles take up a lot more room than we realize in the trash. The bottles you do throw away..... Crush. It takes 10 seconds tops to crush a bottle. One last thing I will point out is plates and plastic ware used for meals. If you have to use disposable plates, why can't we burn them? There are fires everywhere. Keep your PAPER products separate and burn them. Or even better..... use plates and silverware that can be washed and reused. Our camp did that this past event and granted doing dishes sucks, but it is better than an over loaded trash dumpster that costs CMA.

I am sure some people are rolling their eyes by now, and others won't read this. That is fine. I just know that we have beautiful land that I hate to see look like it does after the event. When we can't put our trash in the dumpster because there is too much sitting on the ground which later draws the animals to it, and they scatter it. We can't blame them, it is survival. But we can do our parts individually to make sure that we don't leave it for them to get into. Let's take care of our land and keep her as beautiful when we leave as she is when we arrive.

## **Living Gently, or, Leave No Trace**

By Jennifer Evans

I've been coming to CMA campouts for some years now, and I am always amazed at the lengths people will go to bring creature comforts into the wilderness with them. I have also been surprised at the amount of refuse and garbage that a group of Pagans can produce. Perhaps I

wore my expectations on my sleeve with my heart, looked at CMA through rose colored glasses, but I really did think that a Pagan campout would be... Cleaner.

I'm older now than I was then, and I've seen a lot and grown in wisdom (Or at least I've read more books) and in tact. I realize, now, that not everyone knows how to live gently on the land, how to minimize their impact upon the earth. To that end, I present my take on the "Leave No Trace" ideal.

For me, Leave No Trace starts at home, in the shopping center, and at the Farmer's Market. It begins with you, the consumer, making choices about the products you purchase. Ask yourself some basic questions: How is it packaged? Is it recyclable? What is the cost per unit? How many times can I re-use this item? Can I split this up into several smaller packages, store or freeze the extra until needed?

Each person, as an individual, must decide for themselves what are acceptable answers, what cost/benefit model they are most comfortable using.

A few good guidelines are, however, to buy in bulk and repackage. For items that don't freeze or keep well, are there others in your area that could go together to purchase a large quantity and split it up?

Use your own re-usable containers. Goodwill, thrift stores, and yard sales are wonderful places to get re-usable containers. Re-sealable jars with rubber gaskets are fabulous to keep dry staples in, like flour, beans, rice, pasta, herbs and seasonings. Use paper labels to clearly denote the contents (it is a bad thing to reach for turmeric and get curry powder instead) along with the date purchased (some things do go bad over time.)

Don't be afraid to ask questions. Go to your local thrift store, ask the shop clerk to keep an eye out for useful items and set them aside for you. The worst they'll do is say no. Ask the Farmer's Market to keep you in mind if they have a really great deal on bulk produce.

Hot water and soap don't hurt. Instead of single use items, switch to items that can be cleaned after use. No more paper plates, plastic cups, paper towels, or disposable anything. Buy higher quality items and wash them when they're dirty.

Learn to can and preserve. Honest, it's not hard. For jams and jellies, puree the fruit, add sugar, stick in a jar, use a new inner lid, reuse the outer rim part, and pressure seal. (Ok, that last bit requires special equipment, but, again, get a group together, and do all you're canning at once. Everyone chips in, no-one does all the work and you get tons of yummy veggies, jams, preserves and canned goodies for later.) All in re-usable jars that you got for a great price at a yard sale. Super easy, yes?

As for camping, it's even easier to live gently. You're not going to be concerned overmuch with your long-term impact upon the area, because you aren't going to make any lasting impact. Here's the simplest set of rules:

If you bring it in, Take It Out.  
Think Small.

If you're using reusable containers, then they by definition aren't garbage, and don't need to be thrown away. You'll want to keep them, so you'll take them home, wash them, and use them again, and again, and again. You will find it easiest in some cases to use non-reusable containers when camping. In this case, rule two comes into play. Think small. Repackage in as small of a container as you can find, and try to find recyclable packaging. Aluminum foil works fine, and can be recycled easily, along with your aluminum cans. Instead of paper towels, use terry cloth towels (small washcloths work great for camping. Take a Ziploc bag --reusable, did you know?-- soak a washcloth in a ten percent bleach solution, stick in the baggie. Voila, instant Clorox wipes, and they're reusable!)

When you're selecting the major items you will bring with you to the campout, remember that you'll be applying the two rules to your selections. Tents, chairs, tables, rugs, coolers and awnings are NOT disposable, single use items! There should be no reason for you to leave these items behind when you leave CMA. If an item breaks, return it to the store you purchased it at, or recycle it appropriately. Old coolers become planters, bits of tent become fodder for some yard art.

As for tent size: Bigger is not necessarily better. A couple camping out really do not need a twelve person tent. At the end of the next campout, look at the area you laid your tent out in. The smashed down vegetation is your footprint. Ask yourself: Am I a Bigfoot? While you do not have to force yourself to fit into a single person earth pimple, conspicuous consumption and one upmanship in tent city \*is\* alive and well. Of course, if you already have a large, palatial tent with all the fixins', by all means, don't add to the consumerist frenzy by replacing it before it dies a horrid drippy leaky death! Let your tent serve you well, and be well patched before you retire it. And replace it with a smaller, cozier model.

As my final note on living gently on the land, and as a bit of advice for making your camping experience the best it can be, I'd like to advocate communal camping. Create your own family, for a week or longer, living together only twice a year. Experiment with group meals, camp decorations, and the fun of sharing. Start an email list to keep in touch with your camp family, and plan your event together. Large meals are easier if all you, personally, have to keep up with is five pounds of red potatoes and a yellow onion. Volunteer to cook a meal for your camp, or if you can only cook cinders, to wash up for your camp. Buy in bulk and share with your camp. You'll never believe how fast a case of wine can disappear when there are fifteen adults pitching in. Camping en familia means that there's always someone around to help pull pencil cactus out of your legs, or hold your hair while you, well, you know.

Live gently on the land, and the land will support you for years to come. Treat Spirit Haven as the place you come home to, not the place you leave behind, and She will be there for you. I truly believe that by living with more care for our long and short term impact upon the earth we will find more caring, empathy, and love for our entire world and the people in it than we have ever found before. The only place to go is home.

## Meditations on the Earth

By Mary "Wolf"

“What I love is near at hand, Always, in earth and sky.”

-- Theodore Roethke (1908-1963)

American Poet

Simple words these; calm, understated...evoking, however, much more than modest words on a page. They bring memory and emotion and remind me of a sense of belonging I have felt in very few places. A certain source that calls the magicks from my hands. There is an old saying among some of the tribes that "home" is where the earth knows your name. Spirit Haven knows my name - the one I do not speak.

I am a simple child of earth and sky, content in meadow and wood. Doing as I can to be a steward for the land that knows **me**. I am its servant not it's master. I do not own it - it owns me. It holds my sweat and blood and tears; my laughter and my sorrow, my fear and my bravery, my pride and my shame, my accomplishment and my failure. It does not judge, nor does it complain, it is and in being becomes the guide to follow.

If you listen - **when** you listen, you will hear its voice in the sigh of the breeze that caresses your cheek, in the song of the birds calling fire into the dawn, in your own steps as you travel its shaded secret ways. What does it say? There is the question, for it may not say the same thing to each individual. And each can be valid.

But what does it mean to be a steward to land? The answer is a simple one, and yet, so complicated that no one may ever know its entirety. It is an enigma... This is how it is for me and, perhaps, for you as well.

First, whenever possible, do no harm. Go lightly, go gently. Remember that there are others who share with us. It is their home first. They have generations in their living and dying. Spirit Haven knows them and gives of itself to ensure their survival. It is, effectively, their mother and their protector. And, in many ways, because it knows us too, it does the same for us two-legs as well.

Second, respect what we have been gifted with. For, though we have gone through accepted mundane practice to become "landowners", Spirit Haven is still a gift. One we must honor, or through our own arrogance we will lose...not entirely because some bank takes it away but because the land itself refuses to recognize us anymore. Respect entails recognition and awareness of something/someone outside of our own beings; one with equal rights, equal position, equal voice. Respect means asking, not taking.

Third, tend. This has multiple levels, physically and spiritually. And, no, I am not merely speaking of picking up garbage, though, unfortunately, it does make up a large part. Remember though, much of our trash is poison to the land and those whom we share it with. Please, treat it as such and, whenever possible, keep it away from those it would harm. Tending also means being aware of your surroundings - not just in the "public" areas, but in the quiet, still places. If

you find a creature that could be in harm's way, then encourage it to move or assist it. If you cannot for whatever reason, find someone who can. If you find a tree or bush with a freshly broken live branch still hanging, tend it gently and remove it cleanly to avoid potential "infection". Our awareness notwithstanding it does feel pain - tend it as you would a small child who cannot tell you why or how, only that it hurts. Spiritually, be calm... be still save in your joy. Share and give freely of your jubilation and delight, but if you can, curb your anger. Anger and rage hurt. Not just those who you direct it towards, but also the ground on which you stand. Do not wound where no harm is meant.

Finally, give back...on all levels. Whenever I travel to Spirit Haven I give it water, not from its source, to acknowledge and give thanks for the water it has given me. I give tobacco to say my thanks and acknowledge that it is sacred space - all of it, not just those places where we do ceremonies and rituals. Finally, I give of my own energy to use at it sees fit so that, in a small way, I support and help sustain it, as it has done for me, just as I do for any person who asks for my aid.

All of these things I do to honor the land which gives me that feeling of "home". As I serve it, so, in part, it serves me and allows me a sense of place. I ask for you to remember that we hold the land in trust - not just for our generations, but for all our relations (plant, insect, bird and animal) as well.

BELUM,  
Mary "Wolf"

**Supporting the Land We Love**  
By Pam "Luna" Scott - Teen Mema

We attend festivals twice a year. Supporting our Land can be done by leaving no trace during and after the festival. Working together to help clean up taking the extra minute or two to clean up where we have camped or neighbor camped and didn't see the trash fall out or what got left behind.

There are many different areas that go back to their cities but still continue to get together at different functions and talk about how wonderful the events were and how much they love the land. Some of the events take donations to be sent back to make the land payment smaller. There is Pagan Pride Day, where CMA members show they are part of a land they love and celebrate twice a year. There are the volunteers that put hard earned sweat and tears in the land on work weekends.

Many different ways we can support our land we love dearly. One good one I see of today is lighting candles, rituals, prayers to peaceful resolution to the conflict everyone is sharing. There has been anger and frustration, but the inferences I see is we all are showing our love for the land. Now just if we can step back and see what we can do to resolve this issue without so much conflict and hate.

Fundraisers, auctions, donations at various locations and times have been done to support the land we love. Also by supporting our people we support the land we love. There has been many times this Land; these people have been there to support me and my family when in time of deep need. I am grateful to know and help support the land that has given so much to me. Plants are being planted on the land, sacred areas of herbs for ritual use are in plans, and these all will support and make our land flourish.

**Veggie Kabobs**  
By Jennifer Evans

Bamboo Kabob sticks, soaked in water

Cut up veggies:

New potatoes, red potatoes (traditional Irish 'taters tend to have tougher skins)

Squash

Zucchini

Mushrooms

Cherry Tomatoes

Onion

Scallion

Garlic

Broccoli

Cauliflower

Kitchen Sink

You'll also need some aerosol oil, like olive oil in a spray bottle (the little ones you can get at the beauty supply shop for around a dollar...)

Skewer the veggies on the wet kabob sticks. The water keeps the bamboo from catching fire. Spray with oil. Stick over flame. Cook. Tomato and mushroom will cook first, potatoes take longer. To optimize cooking, I recommend doing single type veggie skewers, and then pulling the veggies off the skewers, onto plates for eating.

If the veggies get cindery, pull them away from the flame.

Season with a dash of salt and pepper, and enjoy!

**Small Group Dynamics**  
- or -  
**Oh No, not Another Witch War!**  
By Judy Kay Craft

Two or three years back, when both of my pagan acronyms were having political contretemps, I attended an alternative lifestyles meet and greet at a large restaurant. People were kvetching about still another lifestyle group splitting up, and abusing each other. Not abuse in a fun, kinky

way, but in a nasty, accusations flying, friendship shattering sort of way. I mentioned some pagan groups' problems, and some similar problems in gaming groups. Then I reminisced about problems in fandom groups, like when many people suddenly quit one local Trek group and defected to the Klingons. I mused out loud about small, fringe groups. Was the problem being a fringe group, or a small group? Do asynchronous electronic communications make it easier to be rude? Do archives just facilitate grudges? Or was I the problem? Maybe my Venn diagram has too many intersecting sets, and my friends and I were creating our own problems?

This navel gazing was arrested by a fascinating tale from my across the table neighbor about his vanilla wife and her amateur clown society.

Clowns, he explained, have an in-character hierarchy. And the costuming indicates the hierarchy. Big shoes, wild crayon color hair, low status. The more clown white and the less red greasepaint on the face, the higher the status of the clown. There was a noticeable silence until someone piped up "You mean mimes are the highest status clowns?"

"And people think we're kinky," said the women to my right.

The hierarchy is very important in choreographing the physical comedy routines. Low status clowns can be pied or seltzered by anyone of the same or higher status. Medium status clowns could seltzer other medium status clowns, but could be pied only by those of high status. High status clowns could seltzer each other, but only pied those of lower status. Higher status clowns were the arbiters of status changes, and had veto power over costuming and makeup design. Our narrator stressed that his wife was a medium status clown, working her way up. Her friend was a newcomer, one of those had to wear a lot of garish makeup and big clown shoes. She had very little status, but was a hard worker, and very organized, and become a go-to volunteer.

The newcomer got elected secretary, and did a great job. They got substitutes for busy team members rather than canceling gigs because she managed to get the telephone tree working efficiently. As an award, they promoted her in character, so she wore smaller shoes and a less garish wig, despite her physical comedy skills not being quite up to snuff. The next year, she was elected vice president and she was doing a bang up job. She added nursing home gigs to their schedule, they had more members, and with more gigs, more teams which meant more chances for advancement. But Ms. Newcomer wanted to be a high status clown. Unfortunately, she didn't pass the audition and some older members with higher clown status didn't want to lower their standards. Then, during a performance, she pied her team leader, the highest status clown in the club. Yes, he was the leader of the old guard; the one she and her friends thought had blackballed her in-character promotion. Some people called for her to resign her post, for she had broken the in-character pie code. Others pointed out that she was doing a great job, they had a newsletter, and they were getting new members, having more gigs and thus creating new teams. Okay, maybe her clown skills weren't the best, but she was an asset to the society. After months of fighting, the group had split into 3 much smaller groups, and many less hospitals and nursing homes were visited. But our narrator was kind of glad, because his vanilla wife was considered coming to the next meet and greet, as long as there wouldn't be any nasty small group politics.

The infighting in the alternate life style group eventually lost them a great dungeon space, and

the group didn't survive that loss. Me, I never got to meet the vanilla amateur clown. But I did grok that witch wars aren't unique to pagans, we're all human. I say, "Witch war", you say "fan feud", let's call the whole thing off!

Blessings Bright & Dark,  
Judy Kay Craft

### **Blackness**

By Althena

These recurring dreams  
are killing me  
Is there a way out?  
someone tell me  
My soul turns black  
only darkness  
I try to smile  
but only sadness comes  
My face is a mask,  
can no one see it?  
My soul just turned black  
I'm dying inside.

### **Top 10 Ways to Support the Land**

By Merideth Chaffin

#### **10) Donate** - *Thanks, I could have figured that out myself.*

This should be obvious, but it bears stating. Running CMA is a bit like running a business in a college town. Business is great while class is in session (the months leading up to Samhain and Beltane), but during summer and winter break, the money dries up. If your business has not earned enough during the semesters, you cut hours and services until September comes. Donating on a semi-regular basis, especially in between festivals, helps CMA build up savings, improve the land, maintain a budget and deal with emergencies more easily. Talk to your lead reps, mail in a check or sign up for Gary's direct withdrawal program. Remember, every bit helps and small amounts add up quickly over time. Setting aside just \$1 a day comes up to \$365 at the end of the year. Just think what we could do if even half of our membership did that.

#### **9) Workends** - *They're like mini-festivals with extra work. And cows.*

What's that, you say? You don't have a \$1 a day? You're in between jobs, on hard times, a starving college kid, living on ramen? You don't have enough to donate? Hey, that's ok. We've all been there. Just remember, you don't have to be Merlin Moneybags to support the land. Come to a workend some weekend. It's a lot of fun: when else can you camp on the land for free, enjoy a weekend getting back to nature, socialize with likeminded souls and support your favorite piece of land, all while working your butt off? You don't have to have special skills or tools (though that helps). A strong back or extra pair of hands go a long way. The satisfaction of seeing the difference you made with your own hands will usually last longer than your sunburn.

### **8) Prioritize** - *Feel the burn!*

There are times when things are tight, when every penny counts and that jar of peanut butter is the only thing between you and starvation. More often, there are times when things are merely a little snug. You may think you can't afford to donate, but before you close your wallet, stop and think about this. How many times a month do you go out to eat instead of making a home cooked meal? How many fancy cups of coffee do you buy? Smokers, how many packs of cigarettes do you smoke each week? I don't know about you, but my answer to all three is: "probably too many". Maybe we should think about what we would rather have: a triple vanilla latte or the land payment, a nice steak or working flushies? Maybe you could cut back, one pack, one meal, one cup and bring your savings to the next festival. CMA will thank you (not to mention your lungs and waistline).

### **7) Change it up** - *Alms, alms for the poor.*

If you're like me, you probably have stashes of pennies and dimes lurking in odd corners. I usually have a little in my pocket, a little in the car ashtray, a little in my bag, a little here, a little there. As I said before, every little bit helps. A quarter a day comes out to \$92 a year. Try putting a jar on your dresser. At the end of your day, drop your loose change in the jar. Come October and April, bring your jar and give the Bridge Trolls a workout!

### **6) Voting** - *It's not just for political news junkies!*

So, you think Executive Director A is a skinflint and won't shell out for your favorite band or extra portapotties? Executive Director B doesn't know the meaning of the word budget? Whatever your opinion may be, you need to remember that you have the ability to vote, and not just with your dollars. At the last Samhain election, one third of the membership voted. That's better than our country, but do we really want to compare ourselves to that standard? Do you think CMA would be best served by bringing in big name bands and authors to attract more members? Then vote for the candidates that agree with you. Do you think CMA is better off economizing until the land is paid or the festival attendance tops 1000 again? Make your voice heard.

### **5) Spread the Word** - *The word of the day is...well, you know.*

Tell a friend about CMA. Tell all your friends about CMA! Tell your coven how much fun you had at Revel fire last Beltane, how much you enjoyed main ritual, how you learned new drum beats or chants or mead recipes. Warn them about the politics if you think it's necessary, but remember to tell them about all the joy you experienced at Spirit Haven. For every friend you convince to come to Samhain, that's \$75 for CMA. If they come back for Beltane, that's \$125. If they bring a spouse, double that figure. Hopefully, they'll tell a friend, who will tell a friend, who will tell...well, you get the idea.

### **4) Fundraiser, fundraiser, fundraiser** - *More than just a bake sale.*

So you have no money to donate, no way to get to a workend, no friends to bring to festival? Never fear, fundraisers are here! People are still talking about San Antonio's fundraising extravaganza (or at least I am). Talk to your area reps about organizing an event. Raffles have a tried and true success rate. You could organize a concert like San Antonio or a hafla or a show. Pagan packrats - get together with other members and throw a community garage sale; you can

donate the proceeds and make room for those new sarongs and statues. Get your creative juices flowing and see what ideas you can dream up.

### **3) Volunteering** - *Stop me before I volunteer again!*

What, you've got no money, no time, no transport, you're the only Pagan in a 200 mile radius and you don't know what to do? Don't fear, volunteer! Are you a member of a fledgling band? Talk to the Entertainment Lead about doing a show. Are you a budding Shakespeare? Join the likes of Hooligan Will and...um...Hooligan Will and write a play, take the stage and entertain the crowd. Do you have plumbing skills to rival Mario? Talk to the Land Crew about working on the bathhouse or improving the flushies. Everyone has a skill or talent that could be put to good use with a little creative thought. It may not make money for CMA, but it could potentially save a bundle.

### **2) Trash for Cash** - *Leave No Trace is not a myth! I've seen it!*

Last Samhain, we filled three 30 yard dumpsters. That is 90 yards of trash, folks. 90 yards! At \$660 per dumpster, that's some expensive garbage. Think about it: \$660 is over 10% of the land payment. The 2 biggest expenses of a festival are trash and portapotties. Since we can't be expected to hold it for 4 days, we need to seriously reevaluate our actions when it comes to waste. We need to realize that every piece of trash we bring on the land has to be taken off, and that costs CMA money. Try taking a few steps to reduce that cost. Start small: unpack your new tent, extra batteries, cases of water at home instead of on the land; take a bag of trash with you each time you leave the land; use reusable plates instead of paper, or burn your paper plates afterwards; crush your cans and take them home for recycling. It adds up. Together, we can make "Leave no trace" more than a half-hearted mantra. If those darn, dirty hippies at Burning Man can do it, so can we!

And for gods' sakes, pick up after yourself! Litter at a festival is an insult to our land and a burden on our work crews. If you clean up after yourself, then Land Crew can spend more time on what they ought to be doing: getting rid of those bloody mesquite trees.

### **1) Don't Sue CMA** - *Just kidding!*

But seriously, people. The number one killer of a community is excess drama. During the last month, how many "I'm mad as hell and I'm not going to take it anymore!" emails have you seen? How many more don't bother with a last volley, but quietly decline to renew their membership after each political storm? How does our reputation in the greater Pagan community draw new members? If we can't play nice for more than a few months at a time, we will never survive. CMA celebrated its 25th birthday not long ago. If we're going to see 50, we need to grow up. Each of us needs to take a long, hard look at ourselves and our actions. Before you open your mouth or fire off that email, ask yourself if your words are going to help the situation or make things worse. Are you offering a solution or stirring the pot? Are you giving information or spreading rumor? Examine your motivations and your words. Remember, words have power. The easiest way to support CMA is to cut the drama: check your ego at the gate, keep the "spirited debates" on the list civil and try to work out your personal problems amongst yourselves before calling everyone you know, the Grievance Committee or your lawyer.

**Stages**  
By Michele Jenkins

**Prologue**

*Good morning, everyone. Sorry I'm late. Is everyone else here? Are we set up? Let's see the stage: lights up. OK good, but I need a couple of minor changes. Let's just have the house lights. The spot looks a little too much like an interrogation... I know, I know, it looks great but these actors are usually wound pretty tight. I want things to be as non-confrontational as possible... Just humor me, OK? Also, can I get a small table next to the chair?*

*What about the actors? Are all the roles accounted for? Let's see:*

*Denial - this is why I want house lights  
Anger - another good reason  
Bargaining - this should be good  
Depression - we'll need some tissue  
Acceptance - wonderful*

*Great performers - very high maintenance though. Make sure they have everything they need.  
Can I get some coffee? And keep it coming.  
How are we doing on time? Sh--*

*<rumble> <flicker>*

*Sorry...I mean: Shoot! I didn't realize it was that late. Always nice to have the Producers here.*

*Since you're here, I have to ask: are you sure about this? It's a spectacular production. You don't want to extend it just a little longer?*

*<rumble rumble> <flicker>*

*I realize that but this Venue is having a great run. It seems a shame to waste the potential. The actors aren't going to be very happy either.*

*<FLASH>*

*All right. You're in charge. I wouldn't be doing my job if I didn't ask.*

*<rumble rumble rumble>*

*Well, that would help if we could actually **tell** the actors about the new Venue but we can't. It sure would ease a lot of the anxiety though. There's improvisation and then there's flying blind...not that you, as Producers, don't walk that line very well!  
One last question before we get started. Do you want the same actors as last time or do you want to bring in any new members?*

<rumble rumble rumble>

*Oh, I agree. The next Venue will take a seasoned cast who know their parts very well. Once again, I had to ask.*

*OK people, let's get the sound check started and get the first actor ready to go. Let's hear it!*

(BEEP...BEEP...BEEP...BEEP...)

*Monitor sounds good. What about the crowd noise?*

HOW DO HIS VITALS LOOK?  
VITALS ARE OK. BP'S A LITTLE LOW.  
THAT'S TO BE EXPECTED.

*So far, so good. Let's get started.*

### **Démenti**

*OK, who's the first contestant? What? Oh, hey, thanks. Mmm...good coffee. Here we go. Hello, Démenti. How are you doing?*

What?

*How are you doing?*

What am I doing here?

*Its audition time again. Should we get started?*

I shouldn't be here. There's been some kind of mistake.

*Oh good, we've started.*

No we haven't started. There's been a mistake!

*Démenti, the sound check started as you were walking on stage.*

I didn't hear any sound check. Is this some kind of joke?

*There's no mistake, no joke and the sound check has started so the process is in motion. Now, if we could get on with...*

I'll say this one more time. There was no sound check! I can't believe this. I finally get to a Venue that knows how to live and you guys mess it up. Just put us all back and we can pretend this colossal mistake never happened.

*Fine, we'll do it the hard way. Continue sound check.*

(BEEP...BEEP...BEEP...BEEP...)

ARE THE RUMORS TRUE ABOUT HOW HE ENDED UP HERE?

CAN YOU BELIEVE IT?

HOW'S THE WOMAN?

IN SHOCK – UNDERSTANDABLY – BUT OK.

*Thank you. What about that?*

That wasn't for us.

*What do you mean? Of course it was for you.*

No it wasn't.

*Yes, it was.*

No it wasn't.

*Yes, it was.*

No it wasn't.

*Démenti, were you even listening? Who else could that have been for?*

Were **you** listening? You heard what was going on when you pulled the plug. Even the Producers aren't that cruel!

<rumble> <flicker>

I'm sorry, but this can't be right!

*Then why are you here?*

How the h-h-heck should I know?

<Rummmble>

One...one moment I'm living life, having a *really* good time and the next I'm auditioning again. I've found a part that I'm good at and I don't have the time *or* the need for another role.

*You knew the role would end sometime.*

Sometime, yes. Now, no. This guy is full of life so...

That's it! I'm having a little too much fun. This is part of the "Grand Finale", if you get my drift.

Wink, wink, nudge, nudge. I'm having an out-of-body experience. OK, it was fun now send me back.

*Did you ever stop to think that your "Grand Finale" was just that? Maybe that's what brought you here.*

I'm telling you, I shouldn't be here!

*Démenti, how long have you been doing this?*

What's that got to do with anything?

*Just answer the question.*

I've lost track of how long. I've been with quite a few Venues.

*And how long in this particular role?*

This role is my specialty. I've had a few gigs with other parts but the majority is with this role. What are you getting at?

*You are a veteran of these productions and have more experience in this role than anyone I know.*

Yeah? So?

*So how often have you won this argument?*

WHAT??? How dare... Listen here! Not winning an argument all the time does not make you wrong! You make it sound like my role is irrelevant!

*I'm sorry. I didn't mean...*

I know what you meant! My role here is relevant and vital to the "process". If it weren't, you could just start with Raiva and I could take a long-needed vacation. Do you know how many times we haven't even made it to auditions because of *my* influence? The Venues have lives and we are part of them.

Now, if you're done insulting me, I'd like to go back now.

*I'm sorry I offended you but you are here now. If we could continue with the audition...*

I am *not* auditioning! I don't know how else I can phrase it so you will understand! This is a mistake!

*\* Sigh \* All right. If you were auditioning, how would you play it?*

Do I have "Stupid" stamped across my forehead? If I didn't buy into that last stunt, what makes you think I'd fall for this one? That's not our sound check so I'm not auditioning. So put me back and I'd better still be having a good time!

What about the rest of the cast? Where are they? What have they said about it?

*You know it doesn't work that way. You're the first in line. It's all about you, Babe.*

Now I know you're full of it when you start that "Babe" stuff. This isn't LA or Broadway so you don't need to play that game.

<Rummbles>

OK...new reading: calmly, with feeling. This isn't our sound check so I don't need to be here. Either this is a HUGE mistake on the part of the Producers...

<RUMBLE> <FLASH>

...or...or a terrible practical joke. Either way, SEND...ME...BACK!!!

*Sorry, can't do it. You're perfect for the part. Congratulations.*

### **Raiva**

*Well, that wasn't as bad as it could have been. Can we get the next part of the sound check under way?*

(BEEP...BEEP...BEEP...BEEP...)

*Buckle up, people! The next audition is going to be a bumpy ride!*

(BEEP.BEEP.BEEP.BEEP.)

BPS DROPPING. HE'S CODING.

GET THE CART. COME ON GUY, STAY WITH US.

*Raiva! Good to see you again!*

Don't give me that! What's going on?

*The sound check process has begun and Démenti's been and gone. You're up.*

That's not what I'm talking about! You pulled the trigger a little early, didn't you?

*Raiva, you know I have no control over that.*

You management types are a piece of work. You know that? Wait...are you smiling? What are you smiling about? I don't see anything here to smile about!

*I'm sorry. You're just so good at this role.*

My ROLE??? The fate of a Venue is in the balance and you're enjoying my PERFORMANCE??? Is that all this is to you???

*No, of course not. I apologize.*

Fine. Now, what am I doing here?

*You hear what's going on.*

Yes, my hearing is fine, thank you. I also know that technology has come a long way. It's way too soon to tell if this is for real.

*Of course it's for real.*

Don't get smart with me, Mister! You know good and well what I meant. The Venues have been given the knowledge to figure this kind of thing out and you go and pull the plug before they can even think about it.

What kind of drugged-up psychopath would allow something like this to happen?

<rumble> <flicker>

Are you having personal problems? Is this some kind of compensation thing and – like most men – you finished a little prematurely? You know, this Venue never had that kind of problem.

<Rrummble> <Flash>

Now don't you go all "Thunder and Lightning" on me! You know I'm right. Shutting me up with your "effects" won't change that fact. I don't believe the saying goes, "Hell hath no fury like a 'Producer' scorned", does it?

I mean, the balls to pull a stunt like this at this point! Do you not read your own press? You're not supposed to let stuff like this happen!

<RUMBLE> <FLASH>

Again with the effects. Oooh, I'm so scared. I'm trembling in your presence. Is that what you want to hear? Well, I want to go back to my gig! What are you going to do about that?

*\* snicker \**

If I see you smile one more time, I will make you understand the severity of the situation in no uncertain terms. Are we clear?

*Crystal. If we could just get back to the audition...*

I told you! I don't want to audition! What is so hard to understand about that? It's way too soon to make a call like this and I should not be the one to suffer for it! Admit there was a snap judgment and PUT...ME...BACK!!!

*You know that can't happen.*

NO! I know it WON'T happen! There's a huge difference. Oh look, we have another "guy" thing. It's like asking for directions: How do I get where I'm going? How do I fix what I've broken? These aren't hard questions!

<RRRRUUUUmmmmble>

*If we could just all calm down...*

CALM DOWN???? First: As you pointed out earlier, I'm very good at my *role* and it does not include being calm. And B: I think you and the producers are a little too removed from the Venues lately. I don't think you appreciate their value.

<BOOOM>

Listen, I don't know what the purpose of this "Grand Scheme" of yours is, and at times like this, I don't care but I wouldn't be performing my *role* if I didn't point out that your acting like a bunch of puppeteers on high who don't care about their charges.

<CRASH> <FLASH>

OK...I've had enough. Send me back or don't. Cast me or don't. I don't care. I'm going out for a smoke.

...AND STOP SMILING!!!

<rrruuummmbble>

*I know, I know. I tried to warn you. More coffee please??? Anyone???*

### **Verhandeln**

*Glad that's over. Let's just shake it off and move on to the next one. Sound check!*

(BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP)

CLEAR!

NOTHING.

OK...CLEAR!

STILL NOTHING.

ONE MORE TIME. CLEAR!

*Verhandeln! How ya been?*

CD! Doing fine! How did you survive the first two auditions?

*You let them get it out of their systems and... Wait. CD?*

You know, Casting Director. That's you!

*All right. What's going on?*

What do you mean? I figured you had a rough start so I'd be nice to you. Is that a bad thing?

*I can't wait to hear this. Let's get started.*

Come on! You don't need a little break after the start you must have had? How have you been? Are you feeling OK?

*Démenti and Raiva do take it out of me but I'm doing fine. Some days are harder than... Will you stop that?*

I ask because I care. It can't be easy being the middleman to the actors and the Producers. Speaking of which...are the Producers joining us today?

<rumble> <flicker>

Glad to hear it! You guys are the best!

*Considering the role you're auditioning for, you have to forgive me if I'm a little suspicious. What's your angle, "Ver"?*

Fine, we'll get down to business. I don't think you, or even the Producers, will be able to turn me down this time.

Let's map it out: You're born, you live, you die, repeat. It sounds pretty straight forward, doesn't it? If it were that simple, maps wouldn't have all those colors and symbols for different routes to be taken. There's the freeway, the highways, the country roads: That's what makes life so wonderful! You don't even have to follow the map if you don't want to.

So who's to say it can't apply here? This is just a new road that's never been traveled. If you and the Producers put us back on that road, we can be a source of invaluable information.

*Plenty of Venues have done the life-after-death act. It's old.*

But this would be different. Those are more like, "Oops! It's not your time. Back you go." This would be a deliberate act. An experiment like no other.

And this Venue is a prime candidate. He lived like he didn't have a tomorrow because, somehow, he knew he didn't. What would happen if you gave him that tomorrow? What would he do with

the life he didn't plan for? Would he do good? Evil? Go insane? Not change at all? The possibilities are endless!

It could be the ultimate test of Free Will and we would be there to report back to you!

<rumblerumble>

*I admit, it's an interesting proposition...*

You're just dying (no pun intended) to find out what happens, aren't you? We're the cast to pull it off. We have the experience and the versatility. You have to admit, we're one of the best. Alas, along with experience comes comfort. This would give us the challenge we need to keep us on our game. There's no downside here.

*I don't know, Ver, you seem on top of your game today. This has got to be your best audition yet.*

See? Imagine where I could take my part if you go along with my idea! And not just me...there's the rest of the cast to think of.

*Exactly. Have you thought about the rest of the cast? Are you sure they are ready to go so completely off the map?*

What performer doesn't like to take a character in a completely new direction? Listen, you worry about convincing the Producers and I'll convince the rest of the cast – not that they'll need much convincing.

You know, this could work in your favor too.

*How So?*

It would get Démenti and Raiva off your back and you wouldn't even have to deal with the next two. You could go home early and get some rest. You work entirely too hard, you know.

*Yeah, I am a little tired...and my plants could use some attention...there you go again! Can we stick to the subject here?*

Just doing my job, CD. Just doing my job.

*And you do it very well, Ver.*

*Seriously, if the Producers were to allow it, other casts would want the same deal. Then we wouldn't have auditions at all. They would just keep going back to the same Venue time after time. The performances would get stale. Not to mention the population problems it would cause.*

Other casts didn't think of it, I did. This is a once in a lifetime deal (again, no pun intended). Besides, if it works, it could become a carrot to dangle.

*A carrot?*

Exactly! It wouldn't be the norm, it would be the exception. Every so often – say five or six centuries – there could be a Venue that would get an extended run. A completely different Venue from the last one just to see the reaction. All the actors will be crawling over each other to get to that carrot!

*I hadn't thought of it that way. This could be quite a project.*

Talk about your study of Humanity! It could go on for eons!

<rumblerumblerumble>

*Well, Ver, you've given the Producers something to think about. But they feel this Venue is not ready for a production of this magnitude yet. All the Venues will need to get a few more shows under their belts before we try it. It will definitely be a future project though. Thanks for the input.*

But...but...how about...

*It was a great audition though and you nailed the part! Congrats!*

Wait...I've got a great deal on some property on Avalon...wait!!!!

### **Tiefstand**

*Ha! That Ver! Where does he come up with this stuff? One of these days, we're going to have to take him up on one of his offers.*

*Let's see, who's next? Oooh, where's that tissue? Aaand...sound check.*

(BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEEEEE...)

THAT'S IT. LET'S CALL IT.

19:43

WHAT A WAY TO GO!

*Hello, Tiefstand. Ready to get started?*

I think you ought to know, I'm feeling very depressed.

*That's why you're here. You're the best!*

It won't work, you know.

*What's that?*

I know what you're going to say. I see it happen every day.

*What would that be?*

First you try to cheer me up – "You're the best!" Then you will try to show concern – "How are you feeling Tiefstand? Can I get anything for you?"...blah, blah, blah. It won't help.

*So what should I do?*

You could have left us with this Venue for a little while longer. Oh sure, he had his "appetites", but there was so much more to him than that. He enjoyed everything about life: music, art, literature. He was positively addicted to an author by the name of Douglas Adams.

*Yes, I've heard of him.*

He had a series of books with a character named Marvin, the Paranoid Android. Here was someone I could connect with. Even if he was a work of fiction, I related to him on so many levels. He's kind of my hero.

*Marvin? Really? I guess I can see that.*

Marvin had all the answers. No matter what you do in life or what you strive to be you will always...be asked to open a door for someone. Or in my case, be lying in front of it as someone steps through.

*You know that's not true.*

Do I? I'm going to request a costume change. Something with the word "Welcome" printed on it or maybe "Please wipe your feet."

Do you know what it's like being in this part of the auditions? I still don't believe what's happened but I know I have to pave the way for the next audition. Do you know what kind of pressure that puts on me?

*We wouldn't have given you the part if we didn't believe you could do it.*

Don't give me that! You gave me this part because you knew I wouldn't put up a fuss. This is one of the big reasons I want a costume change.

*I'm sorry you feel that way.*

No you're not. Well, maybe you are, but I have my doubts about the Producers.

<rummmble>

*Now, now, let's not get carried away. You know we're all working towards the greater good.*

And who determines that? How do they know this is for the better?

<rumble> <flicker>

I'm sorry but I was happy with this Venue! He was teaching me so much about enjoying life. Now I know it was for nothing. I'm right back to square one.

It's just so futile. What's the purpose of these productions when we know it will end and we'll be right back here auditioning?

*You've definitely grown into your role. You have to be proud of that.*

Proud? The more I "grow" the more likely I am to get one of those white jackets with the really long sleeves. I mean, look at the NAME of the role I'm auditioning for! You don't think it would have an effect on my outlook?

\* sniff \* I'm not bringing you down, am I?

*Not at all.*

Is there any tissue around here?

*On the table next to you. Sooo...how are you feeling? Is there anything I can do to help?*

Offering to help is the best help you can give. You'd be surprised what a tremendous effect just a show of concern has on a person who is suffering. You feel so alone and that no one will understand and then someone offers to help and over half of your burden is gone.

*I didn't realize it was that simple.*

Most things in life are. Listen to me talking about "life". There's some irony for you!

Let me try to explain: it's a vicious cycle. You start having all these feelings and, deep down inside, you know they are unwarranted. This just makes you worry even more. I mean, if you're having such horrible thoughts that you know are not legitimate, doesn't that kind of legitimize the fact that your feelings might have some substance?

So when someone offers compassion, you feel it's not just something you are making up and gives you the strength to deal with it.

Listen to me. I'm just a regular Angel of Sunshine and Happiness! Sitting there listening has to be so...

*Depressing?*

HA! You know, stuff like that reminds me just how good you are. How long have you been Casting Director anyway?

*It seems like forever.*

There you go again! Are you this funny with the others?

*Not as much. You're special.*

Well, thank you. Now that you've humored me into acknowledging the problem, are you serious about helping me work through it?

*I will as much as I'm able to. Did you even need to ask?*

I suppose I'm waiting for the time when you say something like, "Screw the rules! What do you want to know?"

*Now who's being funny?*

Touché! I suppose I'm just so confused about WHY it had to happen at THIS moment. I'm not an idiot, I know it has to happen sometime. But why was this particular time chosen?

*Do you have any thoughts about the answer?*

Oh, I have plenty of thoughts. Some of them I can even say out loud. Some of those I can say without the use of profanity. None of them without causing "effects" to go off.

*For instance...*

Well, you know when the Producers were known as...what was it...oh yes, Gods? They had a lot of fun back then: testing faith, disguising themselves as humans, setting rules that contradicted other rules, that sort of thing.

<rummmble>

See? I told you! Anyway, they were accused of toying with humans...Venues, if you will. I'm not entirely sure that's an untrue accusation.

<RRRRuuummble> <FLAAsh>

What am I supposed to think? It's as if there's no reason for anything. We're there helping this guy through the many deaths that you face every day – you know the end of one thing, the beginning of another – and then we abandon our Venue like an old house. If it's just going to end like this all the time, what's the point?

<rumblerumblerumble>

You can give me the Circle of Life speech all day but that doesn't explain everything. Believe me, I've given it a lot of thought. There's evolution, karma, the Circle of Life, the Grand Scheme or whatever it's being called this eon. None of it gives you a full explanation.

What else can I think at times other than it must be a game? And you know what? I think the Venues are onto us. Their religions, movies, books...you name it and a lot of it deals with what goes on here. They are just barely scratching the surface but it's there.

Have any of you thought about what happens when they finally figure it out? I, for one, hope I've moved on by then.

*All right, do you really want to know the answer – as Mr. Adams would say – to "Life, the Universe and Everything"? Do you want me to be completely honest about it?*

Yes! That's all I'm asking!

*You're not going to like the answer.*

I'm not asking you to tell me what I want to hear! I'm asking for an answer to a question. Let me deal with my reaction to it.

*Are you sure? I mean really sure?*

Yes! Just tell me!

*OK, but remember I warned you. The answer is: I don't know.*

...what?

*I don't know. I'm as much in the dark as you are. I have a function in the Big Picture but I don't know anything beyond that.*

...what? Who..what...? How can you do this job without knowing? Is this another joke?

*I wish it were.*

I think I need to sit down.

*You are sitting down.*

Now I'm really depressed.

*...Tiefstand?*

\* sniff \* What.

*I think I might have something that could cheer you up.*

Really?

*Could we continue the sound check please?*

(BEEP...BEEP...BEEP...BEEP...)

(BEEP.BEEP.BEEP.BEEP.)

HOW ARE WE DOING HERE?

THEY'RE BOTH DOING FINE.

YOU HEAR THAT, HONEY? YOU'RE DOING GREAT!

*Well? What do you think?*

Thanks...I needed that. \* sniff \*

### **Annahme**

*Last one people. Let's have one more from the sound check before we get started.*

(BEEP...BEEP...BEEP...BEEP...)

(BEEP.BEEP.BEEP.BEEP.)

UUUNNNGGGHHH!!!!

THAT'S IT. YOU'RE ALMOST THERE.

COME ON, HONEY, YOU'RE DOING GREAT!

DON'T YOU TALK TO ME! THIS IS ALL YOUR FAULT!!

*Annahme, am I glad to see you!*

Has it been that bad?

*There were moments.*

Well, don't take it too personal. This whole cast has been around for quite awhile. You can't have a role for this long without becoming your part.

*I know. When you're in the middle of auditions, though, it's hard to keep that in mind.*

Well, it's almost over.

*This is true. Tiefstand thinks we abandoned the Venue like an old house.*

No house is ever truly abandoned. There are memories, emotions and sometimes even entities that remain in a house long after the owners have left it. The same is true with Venues.

*You've got a point there.*

We no more abandoned this Venue than you would abandon these auditions – and don't tell me you haven't entertained the thought. The temptation is there but it's just not in our nature. If I remember correctly, we had to be pulled pretty hard to make these auditions.

*Another good point.*

Even with the five of us gone, the Venue is not abandoned. We were but a part of the whole. There were other parts who stayed after we were called here. When they finally accept the inevitable, the Venue will still become part of another whole. Depending on his beliefs, he will move on to what he thinks comes after. Even physically, he will become part of a larger whole and his body will be absorbed into the Earth.

*What did this Venue believe?*

He didn't think about it. This guy, he must have known how short his life would be. From the second of his birth, he just wanted to *live*.

Unfortunately – or fortunately, depending on how you look at it – he had a lively definition of "living". You hear about people who know they won't be around long and they usually fall into two categories:

1. They try to do all the good deeds they can with the time they've got. You know, helping others, rescuing animals, volunteer work...that sort of thing.
2. The other kind likes to have a good time and live life. By "good" time, I mean all the fun they can cram into their short existence. Usually things like morals, consequences, legalities and such are not a consideration.

Our Venue was in the second category. If there was something that sounded like a good time to be had, he didn't hesitate for a second. The only reflection he was aware of was in the kind he saw in the mirror.

No...I take that back. He may not have been the Humanitarian of the Year, but if any of his pursuits looked like it would harm anyone or anything else, he would not do it.

*You have to admire that.*

Oh, I did. He knew his own life was short so there were no barriers there. But in loving life the way he did, he also wanted the whole world to have the chance to love it as well.

Listen to me! I guess I'm his chance to reflect on things.

*I imagine he would appreciate that.*

Thanks. You're sweet. What do you think happens at our level?

*What do you mean?*

Everything has to end sometime. It's the natural order of things. I would think that applies here as well.

*I never looked at it that way. You've been through more than a few of these things, what do you think?*

Ha! You've been in middle management for too long. That was one of the best non-answers I've heard in a long time.

*Well, I've learned from the best!*

<rumble> <flicker>

*You're welcome.*

*Seriously, Annahme, I've never thought about that. It's a very interesting question. How did you ever think to consider it?*

I suppose it's part of my role. I realize that certain things happen. It just make sense that a lot of the same rules apply for us as well.

*This is just so fascinating. What do you think happens?*

I really do believe in the Circle of Life. We start as a Venue, accomplish what we are meant to, move on to the next level and repeat the process. I see myself as a Casting Director at some point, then moving on the Producer Level and then whatever's after that.

*And it just keeps going?*

I think we eventually become Venues again, but it's different. We have all this experience behind us and, even though we may not have conscious memories of past lives or levels, it's still a part of who we are. I think this Venue's gone through a few cycles as well.

*Really?*

Oh yes! His need to live life to the fullest had to be there before birth. He just knew things that only comes from ages of experience. Of all the Venues I've been to, this guy was in the Top Five. Even after death, I still feel so...alive! Does that sound funny?

*Not at all.*

Gads! Where did he get the energy? You've heard the term "Seventh Inning Stretch"? In this context, it usually means the third or fourth time. Not our Venue! He took it literally and meant the Seventh Inning! All I could do was sit back and enjoy!

Now I'm babbling...am I babbling?

*Not at all.*

Were you this insightful with the others? "Not at all. Not at all." You may get that break from auditions yet. Just hire a parrot to say, "Not at all."

*Now that's an interesting idea!*

<rumble>

Oh, leave the poor dear alone! Everyone thinks about a break every now and then!  
Do you have the rest of the cast chosen?

*You're the last one.*

Will it be the same ones?

*That's how it's looking.*

That will be nice. We got along well for the most part. Although a little variety would be nice.

<rumble> <flicker>

*Maybe at the next auditions.*

Let's hope that doesn't happen anytime soon.

(BEEP...BEEP...BEEP...BEEP...)

(BEEP.BEEP.BEEP.BEEP.)

HEE HEE HOOO...HEE HEE HOOO! YOU ARE NEVER TOUCHING ME AGAIN! DO YOU HEAR ME??

Oh...I guess that's our cue!

*It was nice seeing you again, Annahme. Have a nice life.*

## **Epilogue**

<rumblerumblerumble>

*Ha! You've got a point! There's never a question about who's in charge for Annahme's auditions...and it's not any of us here!*

<rumblerumblerumble> <rumblerumble>

*I'm sorry...did I just hear you **admit** to not being in charge? I'll have to mark this day in red!*

<RRRUuumble>

*Don't worry, it doesn't leave this room. Your secret's safe with me.  
OK people, let's bring the sound check home.*

(BEEP...BEEP...BEEP...BEEP...)

(BEEP.BEEP.BEEP.BEEP.)

WE'RE ALMOST THERE! YOU'RE DOING GREAT!

ON THIS NEXT CONTRACTION, I WANT A REALLY BIG PUSH.

UUUNNNGGGHHH!

THAT'S IT! I SEE THE HEAD.

COME ON, HONEY. WE'RE ALMOST THERE!

*Sounding good! Keep it going. This is what makes it all worth while.*

(BEEP...BEEP...BEEP...BEEP...)

(BEEP.BEEP.BEEP.BEEP.)

AAAAAAHHHHH!!!

GOOD GIRL! HERE WE GO!

WAAHHH!

CONGRATULATIONS! IT'S A GIRL!

SHE'S BEAUTIFUL! HELLO, LITTLE ANGEL!

*Good job everyone. "...another opening of another show."*