

A VOICE IN THE WIND

Copyright 2005 by Burdock (burdock@mac.com)

Originally published in *Whole News*; this article may be printed but may not be distributed digitally or in print without the author's permission.



and accept loss as a part of life.

"Life eventually takes away everything it gives." This line comes from the short story "Mudlavia," about a young boy who visits a rural Indiana health resort. Instead of a miracle cure, he gains something equally vital. During his adventures at the spa he grows up a bit by learning to listen to others

The story was appropriate as Hurricane Isabel destroyed some 10,000 trees in the Richmond area and caused untold disruptions for all of us. Ironically, my and Fern's sacred garden rode out Isabel's fury almost untouched, but then late summer and early fall were already taking from us the gifts of the summer harvest. I picked a last tomato even as the wind began in earnest. There was little for Isabel to ravage.

At the height of the storm, I watched our hand-made tuteur for Moonflowers flip over, while the tall stems of spent herbs, bare rose canes, and a fig tree did a dance of the seven veils all around it. I will not easily forget that stormy night, when giants walked over our town and shook it like a toy. As Calixto Lopez put it so eloquently in a post to the Richmond Pagans discussion group, "Hurricanes certainly remind me why there are so many Storm Gods in mythology. We may, in our Hubris think we dominate the

world. . .but a natural disaster should remind us that there are forces much, much stronger . . .in Nature."

Hubris is pride that blinds and may lead to self-destruction. In place of hubris we humans could use some humility, but first it's necessary to slow down first and listen. As a child, I felt an intimation of deeper, unseen things coming on the wind. I realized that the Maker spoke through wind in the trees—a sound that could be a rattling, a sighing, a whispering. Of course at that point I had no idea what was actually *being said* in this communication. Today I believe that it's always the same words, "this world is *yours*. Take care of it." During Isabel those words were shouted in the gale, even in the screams of splitting, falling trees. And those words will be shouted again and again until we find an ear to listen, or until we perish as a species.

Just before the storm, using words based on a Hindu prayer from the fine book Earth Prayers, Fern and I blessed every tree in and around our garden. We touched their trunks and twigs with love, lamenting the losses about to come in the storm.

We thanked all trees for shading us, feeding wildlife, and cleaning the air we foul:

May the axe be far away from you;

May the fire be far away from you;

May there be rain without storm;

Lord of Trees, may you be blessed;

Lord of Trees, may I be blessed.

I add "Blessed Be" at the end of this, and depending on the tree, say "Lady" instead of "Lord," to acknowledge my neo-pagan practice. But folks following any

spiritual path that respects the good earth may use the blessing. If this was a "spell," it seemed to work; we lost nothing, aside from a large limb from our sweet gum tree.

Part of my personal battle with hubris has involved planting a garden and in shady spots including, always including, lots of trees. A gardener constantly faces the reality of nature's will being stronger, of humanity's works passing. The garden sustains us—every harvest proves that to me—but it is a small patch of land wrestled away from what nature intends. Even if one gardens in harmony with the setting, a neglected garden usually turns quickly into a weed-patch. Except for those gardens with native plants that restore an area to the balance it had before humans changed the land, our plants pass as the seasons come and go, to remind us that all we do, have, and are is temporary.

Many neo-pagans reserve the time between the Fall Equinox at Mabon and the renewal of daylight at Yule for introspection and quiet planning. This season, when ancestors are thought to be especially close to the land of the living, is perfect for taking stock of what has been lost, what remains important and worth keeping, and what to be discarded. Even though, just south of our rebuilt Moonflower tuteur, we've laid in a small garden of greens and lettuce for a cold-weather harvest, Isabel reminded us to be ready for more stormy weather. So we listen to the wind's voice and remember its lessons before life takes the lesson away with the wind.

Works Cited

Stuckey-French, Elizabeth. "Mudlavia." Atlantic Monthly 292.2 (Sept. 2003): 121-134.

"Hindu Prayer." Roberts, Elizabeth and Elias Amidon, eds. Earth Prayers. New York:

Harper-Collins, 1991: 361.