

Miami Journal #2: Thursday, 11/13/03

Live At Eleven!

By Starhawk

A few thoughts on this writing process while I have a spare moment:

I wrote daily updates from Cancun, and when I got back, I was somewhat shocked to find out how many people actually read them. Many people told me they helped them feel connected to the actions, and I decided it was worth doing again even though it is difficult to find the time in the midst of everything else to write.

But there are other constraints as well. As a writer, I like to include honestly my own thoughts and observations and self-doubts and self-criticisms, imagining my own process taking place under the kindly and interested gaze of a supportive friend. That's what unleashes the subtleties and the texture that to me, makes writing illuminating.

But I'm aware, writing these posts, that they can and probably are being read by the very unsupportive forces we're contesting, that certain information could have unpleasant ramifications and even legal consequences for me or others, and I admit that creates a certain chilling effect as far as my own self-exposure goes. I struggle with it.

Also, the people I'm writing about are not characters in a story, but real people with opinions and perspectives and feelings of their own, sometimes easy to hurt. I have ongoing relationships with them and I'm aware that this process gives me a platform and a power to present my projection of who they are, and no place for them to answer back. It's so easy to want to get back at those who oppose or annoy you, and yet it is unfair to use a platform like this in that way. Avoiding offence, however, limits the bite and savor of the writing, so I struggle with that one, too. And I wish I had the time to write

an uncensored version for each day, with full descriptions of everyone who has irritated me, said something stupid, or pissed me off, so that someday when all the current players are dead and gone someone could put out the full story. But I don't--so all that irritation will have to pass on, forever undocumented. Probably good for my character.

At any rate, the day begins with a trip to the salvage yard, to look for tubs and barrels for the greywater system we will put together for the convergence space. I adore salvage yards. I love strolling through aisles of old toilets, pastel sinks, stacked windows, leaning doors, mysterious iron grates, and strange metal objects of various sorts. The guys--and I do mean guys--who run salvage shops seem to be a strange breed of their own, as dusty and grimed as their wares. We wander a long time trying to find out who is in charge. The various workers reveal themselves in order of size. First there is George, the slender, young Cuban who shifts things around but can't even give us the prices of anything. "You'll have to talk to Joe." Then we meet Dustin, big and hulking. Finally Joe appears, short but with a belly round as a boiler. We wait while Joe, the owner, looks at a truck full of junk being peddled by two guys who appear to have been mated with alligators, their skin creased and leathery, their clothes dank with sweat and grease and decorated with American flags. When Joe finally turns his attention to us, we have to do some hard bargaining as he wants thirty five dollars for a plastic barrel, but eventually we get him down to reasonable prices and pile Suzy's truck with barrels, a plastic table and chairs, and other lovely junk.

We went back to the Convergence Center, after buying lunch again at the Cuban deli a few blocks from the Convergence Center, that serves up absolutely delicious rice, beans, chunky beef or chicken in sauce, and fried platanos for \$4.00. The slender woman behind the counter doesn't ask what you want, just starts scooping, but it's all good and I haven't yet eaten anything today.

Back at the Convergence Center, Brush has arrived and he and Mike and Charles are putting up tarps over the parking lot.

They are anchored to the roof and supported by giant Ts of wood. I video the process and then we have a short Earth Cluster meeting to try to formulate our actions. We are putting out a call for a Truly Free Market or Bizarre Bazaar on the 21st.

Our idea is to go to the fence and set up examples of the world we want, a place where people can give things away that they no longer need, a Free Marketplace of Ideas where we can hold a speakout and invite the delegates to walk out of the meeting

and join us. We have a lot of creative ideas, but much will depend on what happens on the 20th. Then we move on to the 19th. In the middle of the discussion, Lisa arrives. She had been trying to get the occupancy permit the fire department says we need, but now the city wants \$585 for the permit and \$55 a day extra because we are temporary users. It's money we just don't have, especially as we will need to pay the same permit fees over again for the medic's space, and the conversation shifts to how to deal with the issue and whether we will be evicted. There's a certain oppression we're all feeling, a sense of being surrounded by hostile forces. The restrictive ordinance that bans any assembly of more than six people for more than half an hour has just passed the city council. Not surprising, but sad. The ordinance expires after the ministerial: it's just for us.

But there are supportive forces, as well. A local professor of religion drops in and gives me a pouch of shells. A slow trickle of people are offering housing. The Community Relations Board is helping us press for some exceptions to the permit fees. But the reality is, we now need about \$2000 more of the money we don't have. (Check that website at unitedforpeace.org--you can donate online and we do need help now more than ever!)

We gather up everyone who is interested, and do a cleansing of the space, circling around it counterclockwise to release negative forces while banging on pots and pans, drumming, and sprinkling a mixture of sea water and waters of the world, collected from sacred sites and rituals and actions. Then we go clockwise, inviting in what we need and want, and finish by chanting, "We are the rising of the moon, we are the shifting of the ground, we are the seed that takes root, when we bring the fortress down."

My eyes are closing as I type, so I'll have to finish in the morning.

In the evening, I go to Fort Lauderdale where I've been asked to do a talk and ritual at the Unitarian Church. Several print and radio journalists and three TV stations are waiting: apparently the "A word" has brought them out. I do three or four quick interviews, trying to remember my sound bites and not say anything that could be twisted or excerpted to be used against us, which is extremely difficult. Reporter number two has obviously read my website, and asks about the "W word"--Witch. "A Witch is someone who loves the earth, who believes nature is sacred," I explain. One sympathetic reporter keeps asking, "So your group is not planning anything violent?" It's a

trick question. If I say, "No, no, we're not planning anything violent," it implies that other groups are. Or it could be used to make me sound defensive, or even sound like a liar. Instead, I repeat over and over again what we **are** planning and doing, "Our group is planting a garden, to leave something beautiful behind for the people of Miami. We're calling people on the 21st to come downtown and create examples of the world we want, to set up a Really Free Market and give things away...." "But you're not planning anything violent?" she repeats. "What we're doing is creating examples of sustainability...." On and on.

It's hard to do that in an interview, but at least one of them stays to film the talk and it's impossible in a full-on talk about the FTAA to scrutinize every utterance for ways it could backfire. But that wary eye in the back of my brain is somewhat inhibiting. Also the lights are in my eyes and I can't see the people I'm talking to. But a short way into the talk, it occurs to me to ask the people there for examples of the most meaningful moments in their lives. "Giving birth to my child," one woman says. "Standing up for the truth." "Drumming" "Doing something that's hard to do." "Singing." I start to feel better, more connected and supported. I do my best to forget about the media spin and just talk, about the vision of the world that comes from understanding that the earth is alive, that it's a miracle and a mystery that trees use sunlight to make food, that they give off oxygen that we breathe and we give off carbon dioxide that they need, that our bodies heal themselves when we're sick, that we are born, that we grow, that we die. And out of that mystery comes the understanding that we are all interconnected, that we bear responsibility for each other, and that when those connections and that life is threatened, we need to stand up and defend it. And then I go into the details of the alienated world view the FTAA represents, where the earth and everything on it is nothing but an arena of profit making, where every resource is open to exploitation and every area of human service becomes fair game for profiteers. And then to the image of the rope the Koreans braided in Cancun, twined of many thin cords. I say that it's a symbol of the movement we are trying to build, that like those cords which individually are weak, none of us is strong alone, but when we twine our strength together, we become invincible.

I expect the media to leave as we've told them they cannot film the ritual. I rarely ever let media film a ritual--the power comes from our sense of connection, of being enclosed together in a protected space where we can lose self consciousness, and it's impossible for the participants to feel relaxed and at home under the cold media gaze. But some stay and watch.

Ruby has come with me, and she steps into the center and does a grounding meditation, helping us root our energies in the earth. She leads the group in creating the circle, establishing our sacred space. While I've been dealing with the media, she has recruited volunteers from the CUUPs chapter at the Church, the Council of Unitarian Universalist Pagans, to call in the four elements, which they do in loud, clear voices and poetic imagery. A wonderful cronelike woman leaning on a big walking stick steps forward and calls in the ancestors with a haunting song. I lead a meditation, asking people to feel the great transformative, creative powers around us as a wellspring of energy and healing, to imagine those springs rising, bringing us the personal healing we need, overflowing to our friends and family, joining together into community, and then flowing into a broad, deep river that flows toward Miami. We move into a spiral dance, singing, "We are sweet water, we are the seed, we are the storm wind to blow away greed; We are the new world we bring to birth, the river rising to reclaim the earth!"

As we are ending, one of the cameramen begins filming, though we've asked him not to. Helicopters fly overhead. It's Anarchist Witchcraft Ritual--live at eleven!

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