

Miami Journal #5: Sunday, 11/16/03

Plum Jobs

By Starhawk

Today is the big press conference at the Convergence Center, and I wake up in a high state of anxiety about the plants and the permaculture installation, and what might have happened to them over my day away. I grab a bowl of cereal and run over there. Tim is already there, planting some of the small trees and tropical plants that Suzy brought into our sheet mulch.

We'd wanted a second load of compost but Suzy hadn't been able to get it on Saturday, so we make do with what we have. I plant the big box with some cucumber seedlings and basil, and someone makes very cute pink signs on sticks that say what we've planted. It all looks pretty good by the time the media arrive.

Lots of media turn out for the press conference. Tim and Eileen take over being our spokespeople for the permaculture. I've already done more than enough media interviews for this mobilization. Lola and I are due to do a nonviolent direct action training which begins while the media are still here. We have about ten people--most of the people here this early have already had training. The Convergence Center is noisy and the media are still roaming around, but we find out who in the group does not want to be photographed, and begin with practice in grounding, staying calm and focused, learning to expand our vision and keep our attention wide and sharp. Of everything we do in training, this simple beginning work of attention and awareness is what has kept me alive in many tight situations. And it has profoundly changed my way of being in the world. Being by nature an intuitive, spacey, somewhat oblivious person, the sort who can easily walk into lampposts, I've had to consciously practice the discipline of awareness, of being present in physical reality, to learn to walk around in the forest instead of in a story in my head about me walking in the forest, or a long tirade about how so-and-so has pissed me off, or a long to-do list of all the tasks I have waiting.

The more present I am, the more interesting and beautiful everything is.

We have just finished the first round of role plays when Lisa comes over to say that the Pagan Cluster is going down to the fence both to scout and do some magic, tying ribbons onto it and decorating it. Most of the people now training are in the Cluster and want to go, so we end early, which frees me up to run off to the new campsite.

Thanks to pressure from our allies in the Community Relations Board, the unions, and the NGOs, and a certain amount of pressure from the fact that thousands of protestors are due to arrive very soon, the city and county have finally opened up some housing and camping space. The county has given us a five-acre lot where a homeless shelter is due to be built, just blocks from the Convergence Center. Our permaculture group has been asked to provide a site plan. Dr. Capp from the CRB is there with Stephan from Citizen's Trade Watch and Curly, Juniper, Mike, and Gloria. We do a rough map of the field, decide where the 27,000-square-foot tent they are providing should go, where to put the porta-potties and showers and a sleeping area. We don't have time or resources to provide much infrastructure ourselves, but we could do greywater filters and Curly wants to do a garden.

While we're finishing up, we get a call. Our friends down at the fence are surrounded by police who swarmed them just as they were getting out of the bus that the North Carolina group came down in, a converted airport shuttle. We hop into Mike's van and rush down to support them. By the time we arrive, the police have backed off, but they are still present, following behind us and circling around us like a wheeling pack of wolves. They'd threatened to arrest anyone who touched the fence, telling them it was a construction zone and a felony to interfere with it.

Two of the group, the youngest members of our training, have disappeared and we are worried about them. Finally they turn up--they simply left when the police came. I am pleased at how quickly the training in attention has borne fruit--but we explain to them how important it is to let other people know what you are doing and where you are going, or at least that you are going and haven't just been grabbed when we weren't looking. A very real-life role play.

We head back to the Convergence Center. Our group has a meeting about the joint Pagan Cluster/Anarchist plans. We firm

up plans to do a ritual together, but after a lot of thought we finally abandon our vision for the 19th, when the delegates will be taken to the Viscaya Palace Museum for a reception with the American Business Forum. It's an event just asking to be protested--but highly likely that any protest will lead to mass preemptive arrests and we don't want to lose strength for the 20th. We'll meet in the morning to consider new plans.

A wonderful local woman, a truly angelic being named Jane who teaches religious studies in a local university, brings me an incredible lunch: salmon and shitake salad and goat cheese and key lime pie. She's offered to cook me a home-made meal but has realized I'll never have time to eat it. I share the food around but fortunately most of the activists are vegetarians so there is plenty for me, and not just the dose of protein but the kindness and warmth of the support re-energize me enough to be in three meetings somewhat simultaneously, one to firm up our site plan, one to work on the agenda for the first spokescouncil, one for the Pagan Cluster to work out our own communications methods and plans. We will have a voicemail by tomorrow, a nightly 6 p.m. meeting/orientation for newcomers, a phone tree, our own central communications person for each major day of action. Many new tasks arise in the course of discussion, and someone takes each of them on. We are a full employment movement--there's a job for everyone. Between meetings I have fun dumping water from the sinks into our greywater system and watching water percolate out the bottom. It works! But still needs a bit of pond scum to get the right bacteria going.

The spokescouncil goes well, a gathering of the affinity groups, or the small groups that take action together. We hear reports from all the working groups, the usual constellation of medics, legal, food, security, coms, etc. but also some new ones that have come directly out of discussions we had in Cancun and ongoing discussions in the movement about how to bring in new people and better handle conflict. Friedl has set up a Vibeswatch group, to help deal with conflicts that arise in the space and to hear peoples' concerns. Every day at five there will be a General Assembly, where people can express concerns about the space, the community, the workings of the infrastructure. Brush has set up a Plug-In Group, to help new people step up to tasks and take on responsibilities.

It strikes me, listening to him, that work and responsibility are the prizes in our movement--not odious tasks to be avoided, but plums to be picked. Taking on responsibilities, making contributions, are how you start to feel part of the group, to

feel connected, to gain respect. So people want to work, to make their mark and give their own unique gifts to the process. And the work is so sweet--the feeling of everyone pulling together, the excitement of our co-creation--that no task is odious.

Oh hell, just got a call that our 9:00 a.m. meeting to direct the setting up of tents in the new camping space has been move up to 8:00 a.m. I will send this off, grab some cereal, and go!

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