

Solstice at Roslin Glen

June 23, 2005

I spent most of today in Stirling talking to Council members about greywater and compost toilets. We're coming down the home stretch—tomorrow is the final licensing meeting, and overall it's looking good. I have to say the Council has been very supportive and are quite genuinely interested in some of the alternatives. But I didn't get much sleep the night before. For some reason, dealing with all the physical realities and the details of these projects throws me into a kind of flashback to high school—staying up late trying to finish a term project—that awful feeling when you don't have enough time to finish and you have to finish anyway, and you can't find the fact or the reference you need and the library is closed. (Okay, I guess that dates me all right!) And while I can stand quite calmly in front of a line of riot cops I have to fight not to panic about exactly how many tank adaptors we need for greywater tanks—challenging to figure out when we don't know how many kitchens there will be or how many people are coming altogether.

The Council has a composting and recycling officer who had actually read my books and seemed a little surprised at my role in this.

"I can understand how you'd be drawn to the politics and the activism," he said.

"But how did I become the Queen of Compost Toilets? I wonder that myself," I admitted.

At Findhorn, I found myself thinking how easy it would be to spend my whole life at beautiful places like that, giving workshops, actually getting paid for giving workshops! And being treated in the way people do when they see you as an important person coming to teach them something. Instead of grappling with the problems of what to do with the shit of ten thousand people. And the answer that came to me is either:

1. I am deeply and nobly dedicated to the cause.

Or

2. I'm not very smart. But seriously, compost toilets are as holy and beautiful as anything else. What could be more magical than the transformation of something hated, feared, and considered a disgusting waste into a valuable resource, a source of fertility? When does it get better than that?

So my Summer Solstice began, appropriately enough, with a tour of the sewage treatment plant at Findhorn, which is actually a beautiful, lush greenhouse filled with tanks holding plants and organisms that treat the blackwater biologically. I was given

the full tour by Michael Shaw, the engineer who designed the system and who worked for many years with John and Nancy Todd, the originators of the method they call a Living Machine. Michael also gave me invaluable advice and help on our greywater and compost toilet plans, and was extremely kind and supportive.

Then I got a lift down to Roslin Glen, on the outskirts of Edinburgh. About thirty of us met outside Roslin Chapel—a small, fifteenth century chapel with many esoteric associations, made famous in the Da Vinci Code novel. It's set on a hill above a steep valley, and we hiked down through the trees to the river below. There some of us plunged into the water, to cleanse and release. It was cold and rejuvenating and wonderful to lie in the clear stream and let go of some of the tension I've been carrying.

Then we hiked uphill to a grove of ancient yew trees. Some of the people from the encampment at Bilston Glen had come to join us. Bilston is one of the long-term camps that activists have set up to block construction of a roadway that would destroy the integrity of the forest that still rings Edinburgh's urban spread. There's a long tradition of these camps in England and Scotland, and the land laws still retain some ancient features that allow camping on the commons and prevent them from being quickly removed, as they would be back in the US. In fact, they can last for years. The Faslane peace camp has been holding opposition to nuclear weapons in Scotland for many, many years. Back in the eighties, women opposed to US nuclear weapons in Britain camped at Greenham Common outside the missile base, and remained for over two decades. There's also a centuries-old tradition of the outlaws in the forest, those who can't or won't concede to the demands and oppression of society simply moving out and living in the woods. Robin Hood's Merry Men were the forerunners of the Bilston posse.

Some of us wanted to do some focused, somewhat formal magic for the solstice—at least, I did. Others wanted to hang around the fire, kick back, and celebrate in a much looser way. There was a certain disparity of energies that was resolved when one of the women present suggested we circle around a nearby tree, a giant chestnut that was full of eyes and faces. We did, and wove a web of connection to link with some of our Pagan Cluster friends in Philadelphia who were protesting against the biotech industry's annual conference.

At the end of the ritual, we did a Tarot reading for the action, and I wish I could tell you what it said but I didn't write it down and don't remember it all. Then we visited more of the ancient trees, huge chestnuts and oaks with trunks as thick as a house. The whole glen does truly have an ancient and magical feel to it.

The next morning I came back and visited the chapel. If Pagans, instead of Christians, had built cathedrals they would have built them like Roslin. Every surface is carved with images of nature, leaves, flowers, roots, branches, animals and birds. It's full of the Green Man—the mysterious face with foliage and leaves coming out of it that is, oddly enough, found in churches all over Europe. Roslin has over a hundred of them. I sat in the South doorway, where there are two faces, one upside down and one right side up, and meditated on the turning of the wheel and the shifting of powers.

-- *Starhawk*

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Starhawk is an activist, organizer, and author of *The Earth Path*, *Webs of Power: Notes from the Global Uprising*, *The Fifth Sacred Thing* and other books on feminism, politics and earth-based spirituality. She teaches [Earth Activist Trainings](#) that combine permaculture design and activist skills, and works with the [RANT trainer's collective](#), that offers training and support for mobilizations around global justice and peace issues.