

ACTION Winter Solstice 2004

SURVIVING IVAN

By FireWolf

When I had moved to Pensacola, Florida at the end of 2003, a friend allowed me to share a one bedroom apartment while I was looking for work. This worked fine for a few weeks until his girlfriend, and her three kids, started coming by frequently. The kids were unruly and she was an irresponsible slob. Things quickly became chaotic. At one point the kids broke into my locked filing cabinet and lost the engagement ring of my long passed away fiancé, my last keepsake of her. To me the ring was priceless and that was pretty much the final straw.

I finally found a good job, with decent pay, so I used it to get an apartment. It wasn't a big place but it was mine and suited my needs. I spent two hours negotiating it with the landlord because I was short of the deposit but the landlord was a good man and we worked out terms where I could pay the deposit over few months. With the keys I began moving in.

From May to September I worked two jobs to get out of debt and clean up my credit rating. I got myself a car and between working on two jobs, working on my car and

starting up with a girlfriend, life was looking good. I had only one debt left to pay. My friend was having some problems supporting himself and his girlfriend and asked if he could live in my living room for a couple of months and we would consider the debt, I owed him, paid. Well it seemed like a good idea at the time. After all, It would not cost me anything, save his finances, and would get one last debt off my back. He moved in with the understanding that his girlfriend and kids were not welcome to visit.

By this point hurricane Ivan was becoming a worry though it was still predicted to hit too far west to do the area much damage. Never the less in checking the expected evacuation zone, I found that my friend's girl friend's home was in it. Since I could get a hotel room free at my hotel, I made arrangements to hold two, a larger one for his girl friend and her kids and a smaller one that I would share with my friend. It is not so much that I was helping her, because she and I do not get along, as it was looking out for my friend. He had been there for me and I did not want to see him hurt by having to leave his girlfriend. So on the morning before Ivan's landfall I, my friend, his girlfriend and her three kids

moved in and prepared for a long night.

I had to work the hotel that night so I was up all night. I got to watch as a small tornado came bouncing down the street, right in front of the hotel, then turn and come up the back parking lot of the hotel and jump over interstate 10. I have to admit that it was a bit awe inspiring to watch this moving wall of air tear down the hotel sign and not touch a car in the lot. After it was over, I went back to my room to get some sleep. The storm had knocked out phones, power, and water, so there was little point at being at the desk any more."

I woke the next morning and went to talk to the general manager. He and I started coming up with ways to make our guests as comfortable as possible. The GM and I blocked off the pool and set out buckets for people to get water out of the pool for bathing, cooking, and what not. We put up signs that said the phones were out and call my personal cell phone if help was needed. Because the power was out the electric locks did not work, so the GM and I had to let guests into their rooms with a manual key. And I started arranging for Red Cross help for people at the hotel who needed it.

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From that day on, the GM and I knew it was going to be long days.

In the midst of the long hours I somehow found some time to check on my own apartment with my friend. As the apartment was outside the evacuation area, we were expecting no more than perhaps some broken windows and water damage. What we found was a little unexpected.

There was a tree leaning through what was left of my front window. Immediately I was stunned. I tried to open the front door, but it was wedged shut. So gathering my senses, I walked around the building to assess what I could from outside. There was a gaping hole in the wall where my bedroom window had been, so I climbed in. The first thing I noted was that my computer was now six inches tall and the monitor was clear on the other side of the room. Considering they had been where the tree now was, it was obvious they were a lost cause. My friend climbed in right behind me, but I was too stunned by the destruction to notice till I realized we were both cursing up a storm. We walked through my house picking up anything we could salvage and loading it into my truck. All my

furniture was gone, my TV, my stereo, my computer, and my entire CD collection were all destroyed. Heck, not even my pillows survived. In the next room my friend was sifting through what he had lost as well. His TV, his computer, his blankets, pillows, etc., all were a complete loss as well. Everything we had had, was now gone.”

Despite the shock of losing nearly everything, my friend and I shifted through the mess and put what little they could salvage in the truck and moved it all to safe storage. Neither of us had any money left. Once we got done and got back to the hotel, I wearily went to get some sleep knowing that I had to go back to work of taking care of the hotels guests in a few hours.

The next few day at the hotel were so busy, I did not get much time to think about my lost home. I was too busy trying to figure out how to keep the guests going and how I was going to survive the 22 hour days. I kept on the Red Cross about getting us food, water, and ice. I fought with our corporate offices to let me hook up a microwave to the generator they sent us, to feed the guests. I even brokered a trade with the hotel next store to tap

power off their much larger generators to get the phone system and computers up and running. In between, my mired of chores, I was also running out to buy gas for the generator, get food for my friend's girlfriend's three kids, make sure the GM took time to eat, sleep, and get out to get water, ice, and food. I had to schedule the staff for various unusual functions and keep all of them going, with what resources we had, get payroll to corporate without power for e-mail or fax, and all the while try and make whatever comforts I could for our guests. By this point, the guest list was growing faster then we could keep up. Thankfully, I have a good team to work with and we all work well together. There were refugees from all over the state arriving in droves and we had to find places to put all we could. Then the Red Cross showed up needing places for their staff, as did FEMA.

In and among all this, I had to take care of my own case with FEMA and it took weeks to even get answer, four weeks for the inspection and two more weeks for the grants that FEMA. In the mean time, I talked with my landlord who offered to give me my security and two months rent back. He and I talked

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for a quick ten minutes and we bartered yet another deal. It seems that my landlord and his wife really like me and did not want to lose me as a tenant. So, instead of giving me my money back, we cut a deal for a new apartment.”

Meanwhile my friend lost his job, and both he and his girlfriend both got evicted from their homes due to the storm. So now they are all dependent on me for their sole support until they can get on their feet. So we all will move into my new little two bedroom apartment and try to make the best of things. I try to handle all this extra responsibility with great difficulty. So now I am not sure what I will do now, but as I have been doing and will continue to do, I will just keep going and figure it out day by day and trust that the Goddess is watching over me.

DARLA WYNNE, AN INCIDENT AND A FORUM

by Christopher Blackwell

If you noticed, I have not reported on the third call to action. There was little news from that council meeting as nothing untoward happened and Darla got to spend some time with her supporters at Tiffany's. This must have been one of the most

pleasant get togethers yet and would that I have nothing more to report but pleasant gatherings, Darla would no doubt be most happy.

But at the end of October, the 30th there was another incident as Darla was let her her outside about 11:20-30PM. This included her older dog, fourteen year old Yorkie, who had been blinded in one of the past vandalism who was becoming a bit deaf as well. When the her dog Harley did not seem to hear her when she called, Darla went out to get her.

Wynne said “There was a car coming down the street. It didn't seem threatening or anything, so I didn't pay much attention to it. It got closer to me and I thought I heard them speeding up, so I looked up about the time I went to call Harley's name. The next thing I know I was hit in the face with a rock or multiple rocks, to be honest I don't know because I felt this searing pain in my right eye.” This was an eye that she had a retina repair on in the past in Seattle. Wynne continued, “I of course was focused on my eye because I have to be extremely careful with that eye because I am already legally blind in it and the doctor stated that the stress of that eye could affect my

sight in my left eye.”

Wynne at first didn't realize there was more damage. Wynne explained “I didn't realize it at the time, but my front upper teeth are gone and I have several cuts on my right eye and I was going to have a helluva black eye.” Not having insurance she felt she could not afford to go to the hospital and take on any more bills.

The police were called from her neighbor's house, as Darla had gone there so her neighbor could check on damage to her eye. As Wynne noted, “Officer Rick (don't know his last name) was the officer on the scene and he had some young guy for a ride along. They looked around for the rocks and 3 were found. I don't know if they kept them or not because it became a social party in my yard and I got really frustrated. EMS didn't even clean my damn eye up. They shined a flashlight in it once I told them what they were looking for and did my vitals. I asked the cop if they needed anything else from me and they said no, so I went in the house and a few minutes later everyone was gone.”

What made it more untimely was the fact that Darla had accepted an invitation to speak at a

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Religious Diversity Forum at the College of Charleston on November First. With missing teeth that would be problematical at best.

Darla called the emergency number for her Dentist and was able to be scheduled as their first patient that next Monday morning, November First.

The dentist was able to make up a temporary partial that Monday morning. She was able to get some ground work done on them for repair of an old partial. Even so Wynne said, "I thought my day was going to go down the tubes they as it had gone so far." Wynne was a bit later surprised to have a friends, who had owed her some money, phone her offering to pay her back. In letting them know what had been happening, the friends decided to overnight the money and she would have enough to take care of her dental bills.

Meanwhile Greg Liotta, Director of Diversity Initiative of the College of Charleston invited her to come over to the forum even if she was late, so she went off with her friend Jodie and the trip was perhaps surprisingly a very pleasant one.

Wynne reported, "The campus was truly beautiful

with old houses from the late 1800s that are now turned into offices and faculty houses. The forum went well, or at least that was what Jodie, Greg and the students also thought and we had about seventy-five students. I thought I could have done better as usual."

Wynne continued, "I thoroughly enjoyed the atheist, Dr. Herb Silverman and he stated the college is putting together a bunch of discrimination cases for the Congress and asked if it was okay for him to give him my contact information and I agreed."

After supper in Charleston, Wynne and her friend Jody got back Darla's house about midnight and everything was okay at home. So it had turned out a good day after all. Though with still a black eye from the attack in November and her vanity a bit bruised, Wynne felt she was going to be okay.

Editorial **THE LACK OF SUPPORT OF PAGAN IN THE COMMUNITY**

by Darla Wynne

Every morning I get up, make coffee, turn the computer on, get the raccoons some water, let the dogs out, lift the covers

off the bird cages and then sit down at my computer with my first cup of coffee to read the news up on the Witches Voice.

When I find an article that catches my attention, I even read the comments section to see if I want to post my views on the subject. What I have noticed is an alarming amount of pagans on the Witches Voice that are never for the Pagans that any article is written about.

I find this alarming for the simple fact that it is no secret we have always been indifferent to our own kind, a little harsh in judging them, but now with the internet, we get to share those opinions with the world which may or may not be Pagans reading them up on the Witches Voice.

I keep hearing a little voice that says over and over again in my mind, "to conquer the enemy, one must divide them." Yes, I do see us as the enemy to some and it is not our choice to be their enemy, but that they have declared it and do so on a regular basis with their demonization of our faith.

I see and feel how divided our community is over issues. So many of us don't see the bigger and personal picture of what

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the media feeds us on a daily basis. A woman going to jail for 2 days over a OWI, is automatically the one in the wrong for wanting a religious book. Even my case, I am the one in the wrong for requesting an injunction to stop my town council from saying it's prayers in a Christian form.

When our community does see something as an outrage, soon afterwards those that don't jump in the middle of the program and redirect it into a flame war not only at those that want to do something, but at those that are experiencing the problem or wanting to correct the problem.

This troubles me because the ones doing the redirecting are always seeing the other side, which I think is good, but when do we stop and see things not from sides, but the bigger picture?

Our country is in trouble right now, in more ways than one. There are books being taught in school, grant it a Christian school, that gives slavery a "new light", of Christian theology that they believe the Southerners used in support of it when they refused to give up slavery. The war on terrorism has drifted into our daily lives to where the government has the right to check our e-

mail, chat groups, wire tap, put names on a list that are not distinguishing from one person to the next, and I strongly believe that George W. Bush is in an attempt to make our country a "Christian" nation. In 2000, he publicly stated that he did not believe that Witchcraft should be seen as a religion, so what does that tell you has in store for us?

I can see us as a community, having different view points, but is it necessary to judge our people in such a public manner that we forget that they are of our community, understanding that people make mistakes, don't always do the right thing, and are just human? I have read statements up on the Witches Voice of people wanting to educate jails to inform them we are not all like that one person, and etc. Why do we feel the need to distinguish these facts? People are people, in every faith, color and class. We all make mistakes, it is human nature to do so. There is good and bad in every faith.

When the Catholic Church faced it's biggest obstacle in centuries, the child molesting scandal, not one of them came forward to separate them from the norm of their kind and yet, someone gets an OWI and we got people

wanting to jump on that band wagon!

Have we forgotten our own history, our people and what a community actually is? I fear we have. We have become so individualistic that we judge others even more harshly now, than we ever have out of our own fears of what will be if we support anything. I keep reading on the Witches Voice, we need to choose our battles and stay hidden because all of these bad things are going to happen if we stand up for anything. Is doing nothing, going to make things better for us?

When Nazi Germany was in it's momentum, none of the Jewish people believed that they would do what they did do, and the majority of them felt a peaceful practice was better than a resistance. Six million people died and today, the Jewish people feel they need to protect themselves with force when need be.

What has to happen to us, before we decide that taking a stand is good thing? When can we get past our own fears and prejudices to be able to see the bigger picture, not just the problem or our opinion of the problem? If you really believe that always seeing the other side's point of view and

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agreeing with it will stop what is happening, I feel bad for you. It only leaves you for the last to be taken down, and from what I have read up on the Witches Voice, when that day comes, you will turn your back on your faith and tuck away the pentagram to replace it with a cross and I pity you even more because somehow you believe that will save you, but only you can save yourself and lacking in the ability to see the bigger picture or an issue worth taking a stand, you won't have the courage to save yourself alone.

ON FIGHTING FORCED RELIGION

by Vivian G. Harriman, "Ivey"

Bio:
As a "military brat" and the daughter of a power plant construction manager, the majority of my childhood was spent moving around the country. I attended at least ten public schools in ten different states. This upbringing allowed me to experience the various culture differences in the United States and revealed to me the toxicity of religious intolerance, emphasizing the importance of church-state separation.

As an adult, I spent a few

years at a community college in Tennessee and eventually moved to California. In 1991, a divorce forced my move to be near family in Texas (where I began a search for faith). My father encouraged me to stay in this affordable area and eventually, I bought a home.

Unfortunately, East Texas is considered the "buckle of the Bible Belt" and my spiritual solace was (and is) found in Wicca. Local Baptist churches are maintained by county inmates. Christian literature stands are placed at each entrance of the courthouse. Seminars on "devil worshippers, witches and Satanists" are given (free of charge). Bible verses are written on the blackboard for children to recite at the public elementary school. The Constitution has been put on a cardboard roll and is hanging in the bathrooms of the "religious right" in this area!

The Lord and Lady gave me a "thump on the head", and I have been fighting for religious and civil rights ever since. I've written editorials, given public speeches, confronted public officials and am now engaged in a

legal action against the State of Texas.

After Governor Perry and Senator Staples staged that Baptist prayer over the children at the middle school in October of 2001, the Associated Press called our local newspaper (Palestine Herald-Press) and wanted to know if they knew of a parent that was upset by the incident. As I had written a "letter to the editor" in objection to what these officials had done, my name and phone number were given to the AP. Both my daughter and I were interviewed and an article was nationally released. This led to the ACLU contacting me and suggesting that I go before the school board to publicly protest the district's endorsement of this constitutionally illegal activity. (Had the district continued to support public prayer at the school, we were ready to sue.)

Local religious radicals were outraged by my objection and a "prayer rally" (to get Jesus back in schools) was held in (what was then) the largest church in town (Southside Baptist). Members of the American Atheists drove in from Dallas, Houston and Austin to protest the rally and support me! Naturally, the Herald-Press gave a VERY SLANTED report of

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the events; but the publicity led to speech invitations.

Our forefathers once emphasized, "Freedom isn't free!" Religious discrimination has cost me a job. Friends and some family have disowned me. My mailbox has been smashed, twice. I've gotten a few "debating" phone calls, and garbage has been thrown in my yard.

Yet, there have actually been more "we-are-with-you" phone calls. I have several "anonymous supporters". There are even a few brave individuals that are now openly taking an "Understanding of Wicca" course in my home!

- Vivian G. Harriman, "Ivey"

The 2002 Separation of Church and State Rally (which was held at the steps of our state capitol in Austin) was the result of combined efforts by Americans United, the Freedom From Religion Foundation, the American Atheists and the Ethical Society of Austin.

Austin Rally Speech

January 12, 2002

My name is Vivian Harriman. My daughter was locked in the Palestine Middle School gymnasium, along with every other

student in attendance on that day. She was required to participate in a prayer contrary to our family's beliefs. I am neither an Atheist nor a Christian. Regardless of my faith, Governor Rick Perry, Senator Todd Staples, Judge Bascom Bentley, Reverend Roy Duncan, Superintendent Jerry Mayo and other Palestine Independent School District officials had no right – legally or morally - to push their doctrine on my daughter and the other children of Texas. They violated The First Amendment and placed themselves above the law.

They exclaim, "How could anyone object to a minister voicing a short prayer in front of a school assembly?" If that public prayer had been of the Pagan persuasion, my guess is that there would be a large and sudden increase in the number of Christians from Palestine supporting this rally. As Samantha Smoot stated, ". . . Texans are not going to all be comfortable with the same prayer."

Some fundamentalists claim, "We are the majority, and the majority rules." At one time, the Nazi party in Germany was a majority. Being a majority does not give any religious group the authority to violate the rights of others. (I'm not so

sure that they are a majority.)

There is very real danger when ANY specific religion infiltrates our public schools and/or governments. Many times, the doctrine is or becomes perverted, causing the government to become radical, and persecution and violence follow. Afghanistan's terrorist government, Ireland's religious bloodshed, the Salem Witch Trials and the destruction of the Native American faith/culture are the results of this. Initially, the churches introduced into these governments were peaceful. The First Amendment was enacted into law to prevent these unintended atrocities. In the words of George Santayana, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

Robertson, Falwell and Bin Laden claim that the events of September 11, 2001, were the results of "America's sin". These atrocities are not the results of sin, however. They are the results of terrorists, backed by a country that has no separation of church and state.

My father fought in World War II and in the Korean War to protect and preserve The Constitution.

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He fought along the sides of Catholics, Atheists, Muslims, Jews and probably some other religions. These soldiers put their butts on the line for the freedom to worship and to raise their children in the faith of their own choosing.

Thank you for allowing me the privilege to speak here today. I am honored and grateful for all of your actions in defense of our Constitution.

The second speech was at the Ethical Society of Austin.

What Kind of School Prayer Was That?

April 07, 2002

“Good morning” to a fellowship with integrity, one that understands “deed is more important than creed.” It is my pleasure and an honor to speak before the Ethical Society of Austin.

On October 18, 2001, my daughter was forced to listen to a prayer (contrary to our faith) that was staged by State Senator Staples, School Superintendent Jerry Mayo and Texas Governor Perry. The event was held in the Palestine Middle School gymnasium, and a Baptist minister was

personally selected by Senator Todd Staples to broadcast the prayer over the captive children. Along with every other student attending school on that day, my daughter was required to participate in this assembly.

After blatantly breaking The First Amendment and encouraging others to do the same, Senator Staples then asked, “What is the difference between state legislators opening each day of the legislative session with a voluntary prayer and ‘voluntary’ prayer in our schools?” What kind of question was that?

The prayer show by Senator Staples at the Palestine Middle School was not a “voluntary invocation”. Attendance for the event was compulsory for every child at school on that day. When the gymnasium became full, the doors were literally locked. The kids were told to keep their places. A fundamentalist preacher projected his personal doctrine over all of them. Adult-led prayer over school children, especially little ones, is NOT voluntary.

State legislators actually have the option of getting up and leaving at an invocation, if they feel uncomfortable, pressured

or oppressed. Legislators are adults, who are given and are aware that they have the CHOICE not to participate. There is a big difference.

Personally, I believe that the opening prayers held at legislative sessions are unconstitutional. To me, these indicate that our state leaders are “respecting an establishment of religion,” which is contrary to separation of church and state. Despite this, our country’s courts tolerate these prayers.

The judicial system has another opinion concerning public educational institutions, however. Prayer is prohibited at mandatory school functions. The coerced invocation at Palestine Middle School was and still is illegal.

Our tax-supported schools are not to be used as a platform for religion. That is the purpose of privately funded churches. Todd Staples had no right to push his Baptist doctrine on my or anyone else’s child. These beliefs are not only contrary to our family’s beliefs, but violate my rights as a parent to raise my child in the convictions that we hold dear.

The First Amendment was designed to harbor

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ALL faiths. I cherish the protection this law guarantees us, the right to pray to "the God [Goddess] of our understanding" or not to pray at all, in or out of public school. Equally important, however, is the protection it provides our children from being coerced into other religions.

Samantha Smoot said of the Palestine Middle School incident, ". . . at a time when so many people are striving for religious tolerance and compassion, this is a particularly poor moment to overlook the fact that Texans are not going to all be comfortable with the same prayer." How would these presumptuous politicians feel if their children were required to attend and listen to a Pagan invocation?

Extremists have insisted that the "Christian majority" should rule, that this is a "democracy" and that those of other persuasions should simply submit to publicly led school prayer. As Jay G. Powell wrote, "If the God-fearing, white, Christian majority was the rule of law here [in East Texas], schools would not be integrated, jobs would never be offered to people of color, and racial minorities would have been kept on 'their side of the tracks'." The Nazi party

was "majority" in Germany, at one time.

It is important to remember that the greater number is not always right, can oppress and persecute the minority, and that The First Amendment was created to prevent this type of abuse. After four Quakers were executed by a "religious majority" in the Massachusetts Bay Colony for practicing a "deviant" religion, the Pennsylvania Colony adopted the "Charter of Privileges of 1701", which is the model for today's separation of church and state.

I've been told that I am "in the minority of the minorities." There are many people in Texas that back my principles, however, and these are not just folks of non-Christian beliefs. Seventh Day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses and several Christians from many other denominations have approached me in support of my stand. Current Supreme Court decisions uphold my position. There is a real possibility that this so-called "moral majority" may be neither moral nor a majority.

What kind of prayer was that at the Palestine Middle School? It was a prayer, forced on children. It was coercive, unethical and illegal.

Thank you for allowing me to share.

ON BEING A WRITER by Christopher Blackwell

I never intended to become a writer. Certainly my written assignments at school were not much loved, nor did I show any special talent for writing then. Even in Vietnam my letter writing was sporadic at best. No, instead I was a reader, at least I was from beginning in high school and beyond. I devoured books, mostly novels, but also on such diverse things as railroad history, ghosts, UFO and soon every other curious and odd things I came across. Short of money, I literally lived for libraries and I would at a later time come to have library cards in five different towns in three different states once I started mining and roaming. My lack of official residence never seemed to cause the librarians any problem when it came for me to getting a library card

It was not till the ripe old age of thirty-eight years that I had much reason to write and that not until I met some Wiccans at the first of four Pagan festivals that I would go to and become a Wiccan myself. Since I rarely stayed for long, I

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could only keep in touch by writing letters. Not that these letters were all that much, for I found it difficult to even fill a page and a half at a time. Never the less, it was my first regular writing. My handwriting was not the easiest to read, but that did not seem to deter my new letter friends.

As I never did get to know large number of Wiccans locally, most of my knowledge of the Pagan community came through one of the Pagan quarterly newspapers of the time. It was through them, and a warning by post card, in that pre-Internet time, that I took part on my my first letter protest to a rider that Senator Jesse Helms tried to put to a Post Office appropriations bill, denying reduced rates to non profit groups only if they were either Witch groups or Satanist. We won that one causing the rider to be dropped even before the bill came out of committee. It was a rather heady experience to see the power of the written word help stop one of the most powerful men in Congress from getting his way with a rider he had thought that no one could politically dare object to in Congress in the glory days of the Moral Majority.

As it would happen, the Pagan newspaper started

a new letter writer's club that I soon joined as a way to find more letter friends. My numbers of letter friends would increase as I wrote introductory letters to other Wiccans. I soon learned it would take about five of my introductory letters to get one actual response back. Of course my letter friends would last different periods of time, from a few months, to a year or more, so I was nearly always writing new introductory letters. Sometimes what I would learn about from one letter friend would go into a letter that I wrote to someone else and I noticed often one friend would ask a question that another person would provide information about. It was odd how my network of letter friends would pass information back and forth and I never knew what I was going to find out or pass along.

I learned that over half the letter could be made by commenting on things that my letter friends wrote about. It appeared that nearly everybody was interested in hearing opinions about their ideas. My letters began to grow in size until five and ten page letters were normal and occasionally fifteen and twenty page letters. I noticed that the oddities about my life seemed to seem exotic to my "town"

and "city Wiccans. Soon my ordinary happenings became curious regional stories that I would tell, sometimes to my letter friends facination and amusement. Well there is always the suggestion to write what you know about and certainly my life is what I understood the best.

The Pagan newspaper soon started a quarterly newsletter for its letter writers club and on suggesting a subject the editor would then encouraging people to write whatever they could about the subject. Some subjects I knew next to nothing about and that is what I would write or perhaps what the subject brought to mind. But on subjects I had some feeling for, then I would write first a couple to three paragraphs on it and eventually begin have around a half page in print in the newsletter.

It was about this time that I began to discover other Pagan newsletters and began to try my hand at writing articles. Certainly their difficulty of finding writers for these little newsletters worked to my advantage and though my articles were by no means journalist masterpieces, they were, thanks to all my letter writing, not dull. I began to write pieces not only for this country but for England and South Africa

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as well, for which I was usually paid a copy of the issue that my articles came in. As I said, seeing my articles in print certainly encouraged me to write even more.

It was about this time the local library had a computer for the patrons to use and, as few did at first, I began my trial and error learning of computers and the internet. Little did I know that my partner would soon need to get one for a book project he was about to get started on, which became a five year project. I began writing on online Wiccan forums, sometimes as many as twenty a day. This also kept me up in various issues of the day as I was soon on a variety of e-mail lists on human rights and the environment that then had me adding faxes and E-mails to the letters I was writing to my Congressmen, Senators and the President and other government officials. I also became active in several Pagan groups which is how I eventually became asked to start this newsletter for AREN, which requires me to learn a whole slew of new things as I go.

So what is this to you? Well I hope if you are a non writer, or rarely write, that it would give you an idea or two of how to begin doing a little writing

yourself. Nearly everything you learned in school, or every great speech you ever heard, started with some person writing down a few things and perhaps giving their own conclusions to the subject. We are a community who needs our own story tellers, our own reporters, our own song writers and novelists. We have need of our own philosophers, historians not to mention our own script and story line writers for TV and movie productions. Who knows that you or I might not in time find ourselves to be part of that written wealth for our community someday?

I also have a more selfish reason. I am always going to need more people to write articles, or to provide me with stories to edit or rewrite or publish as sent, if this newsletter is to retain the quality I would like for our members. Lets face it nothing encourages writing like seeing your own story in print. After all that was how it worked for me as I became a writer myself.

THE FOURTH CALL TO ACTION

by Christopher Blackwell

On November 15th, Darla Wynne and her supporters gathered at the City

Council meeting in Great Falls, SC. This included supporters from Denver, North Carolina, who would afterward follow Darla Wynne home to make sure she arrived safely. Pete LaRiveri, from ALabama representing Pagan Unity, who drove nine hours to be there to collect evidence and information about what was happening.

Darla Wynne Wynne said, "We all went to the town council meeting. I was on the agenda to discuss the possibility of creating a diversity committee and I shared the diversity pledge I picked up from the College of Charleston when I went down for the forum, and to also drive home the point that bad things were occurring, I provided them with copies of the police photo of Little One's murder and reminded them it wasn't just about religion, but also other forms of diversity due to the race riot last year that resulted in the death of a young man with a bright future. They didn't review the material, nor did they seem interested in it either. I was given my 2 minutes and sat down."

Also at the meeting was Richard Pope from Charolette, NC, the person who had accosted and harrassed Ms. Wynne, a

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couple of months ago, at the city council meeting back in September. This time he and a friend were wearing decorated in gaudy yellow and red flames with wording grouping together the fearful, the unbelievers, the abominable and whore mongers, and sorcerers and idolaters as people who would be thrown into the flames of of Hell. However, Wynne noted, "For some reason, he was not in my face screaming or attempting to harm this go around, so we have made some form of advancement with him I guess to some degree."

Wynne continued, "The council went into executive session and when they came out, they came out and stated that they made no decision regarding a criminal case, but that was not listed on the agenda for executive session discussion, but they voted to go forward their appeal to Wynne's suit the Supreme Court, with the exception of Councilman Earl Taylor, who openly opposed it."

Councilman Earl Taylor cast the only dissenting vote in the six to one vote to go forth with the appeal to the Supreme Court. Taylor said, "The town has appealed it three times and each time it has been knocked down," Taylor

said. "If I felt the town had a chance for it to be heard by the Supreme Court, but I don't believe they will listen to it. By feeling that way, I don't think it is right to jeopardize taxpayers' money." Taylor felt there are other areas in the community that need to be addressed, but with so much focus on the lawsuit that it is hard to devote the necessary time and energy on other community issues.

"I hope we can accept what the court decides, put this behind us and go on," Taylor said. "It's like a cloud hanging over us. I'd like to see us get it behind us and go on. It's taking all our time, energy and resources to fight this. There are other areas that need to be addressed."

Taylor realizes that there are some people who are glad to see the council's decision to continue the appeals process to the Supreme Court, but he feels that he was elected to serve the people in the way he sees best and that he feels that ending the appeals is best.

According to Marshall Dayan, an assistant professor of law at N.C. Central University in Durham, N.C. "What the council is doing is endorsing one religion over another." He referred to the 1971 Lemon v.

Kutzman case which ruled that government officials can't act in such a way as to make people feel coerced to one religion over another. Dayan said, "What the court is concerned about is making religious minorities uncomfortable to a point where they can't participate in the community.

Eldon Wedlock, a University of South Carolina law professor, thinks that the court is unlikely to side with Great Falls, but may agree to hear it, just to affirm Wynne's position and make a distinction between a generic reference to a god "officious piety"-- and a sectarian reference to a specific deity.

Wedlock said, "The court has said for the last 30 years states cannot favor one religion over another, religion over non religion, or non religion over religion. The First Amendment bars the establishment of religion. A government can't take one sect out of religious beliefs and endorse it in some way."

The town's attorney, Brian Gibbons, says Buhl has requested \$38,500 for his fees. The town Gibbons says is opposed to the request [though they lost their appeal] and U.S. District Judge Cameron

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McGowan Currie will decide if the town must reimburse Buhl for his fees.

Wynne said her attorney, Herbert E, Buhl II, Wynne said her attorney, Herbert E, Buhl II offered to forfeit his fees following the first appeal if the town did not go forward to the full court. The city council turned it down. Wynne said that Buhl made the offer because she is not suing for personal monetary relief and because the hardship the cost would impose on the town.

The 4th Circuit Court ruled that the entire court of 12 judges would not rehear an appeal from the town of Great Falls. In July, a three-judge panel from the court ruled in Wynne's favor.

Gibbons said that the only cost to the town has incurred are expenses for he and Mayor H.C. Starnes Jr. to travel to Richmond during the Appeal process. The town initially pays costs associated with litigation and the the State Insurance Reserve Fund will reimburse the town up \$15,000 a year.

Wynne will not receive any of the funds that the attorney has requested, which just covers his fees. AREN (Alternative Religions Educational Network) will be

reimbursed the original filing fee of \$150. The cost of the appeal process continues to increase and will add another \$20,00 to \$30,000 to her lawyer's fees if it goes to the Supreme Court.

FEDERAL APPEALS COURT SAYS A RELIGIOUS GROUP CAN IMPORT "ILLEGAL" DRUGS FOR CEREMONIAL USE.

by Christopher Blackwell
November 30, 2004

Setting en banc, that is, in a larger than usual panel representing the Circuit as a whole, the US Court of Appeals for the Tenth Circuit addressed the claim that drug laws do not apply to a particular church.

The O Centro Espirita Beneficiete Uniao Do Vegetal (UDV) was importing a tea like substance called hoasca which it calls the "vine of the soul", the "vine of the dead" and the "vision vine" from Brazil to the United States to use in its religious ceremonies. Hoasca contains a Controlled Substances Act, Schedule I, banned drug.

The Tenth Circuit ruled in favor of the UDV. The ruling (on the likelihood of success on the merits in context of a preliminary

injunction request) purports to foreclose the government from enforcing the drug laws using the Free Exercise Clause of the Constitution. This may seem to vary from the Supreme Courts Free Exercise jurisprudence. However the case was brought under Religious Freedom Restoration Act. The panel included Judge Michael McConnell, who as a law professor was highly critical of current Free Exercise doctrine and highly supportive of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act.

Generally, of course, we all must abide by the federal drug laws and international treaties prohibiting the importation of illegal drugs, the use and international trafficking in drugs into the country. But this case was decided under the Religious Freedom Restoration Act. The Tenth Circuit used RFRA as the basis to enjoin the federal government's enforcement of the drug laws in matters of religious ceremonial use.

Background on the UDV, Hoasca, and the Case Before the Court

The UDV was founded in 1963 by a Brazilian rubber-tapper who discovered that hoasca, a

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liquid tea like mixture, could be made from several plants indigenous to the rain forest. Hoasca is made from psychotria viridis and banisteriposis caapi. Psychotria viridis "contains dimethyltryptamine (DMT), which is listed on Schedule I of the CSA and the Convention."

The UDV is a blend of Christian theology and indigenous American beliefs and Brazil, it has approximately 8,000 members. Such blending of religious beliefs is not that uncommon in Brazil.

One of its UDV leaders arrived here in the United States in 1993. As of now, there are 130 members in the United States. The UDV's ceremonies using hoasca last roughly four hours and occur at least twice a month. Hoasca is prepared by church officials in Brazil and they ship it here for the UDV's ceremonies.

The case arose because United States Customs Service officials seized approximately 30 gallons of hoasca in transit, and has threatened prosecution. In light of the threat, UDV has ceased using hoasca in the United States.

The UDV filed suit, after the seizure, asking for

injunctive relief and a declaratory judgment that its practices are protected under the U.S. Constitution and the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA).

Because the subject was a preliminary injunction, Technically what the Tenth Circuit held was that the UDV was substantially likely to succeed in its claims. But if presented with the issue directly, the court's analysis made clear it would rule for the UDV - and thereby undo neutral federal criminal laws.

The Free Exercise Clause

While the right to religious belief is absolute, but Constitution's Free Exercise Clause has long been interpreted to allow neutral laws that regulate conduct to be applied to religious persons and institutions, along with everyone else in society. Religious belief is sacrosanct under the Constitution, but religiously motivated conduct is not sacrosanct- when it violates civil law.

In the Supreme Court's opinion in *Employment Div. v. Smith*, Native American Church members, who used peyote, in their religious ceremonies, were held subject to the state and federal drug laws. The

Court concluded, they were prohibited by law from using hallucinogen, even in religious ceremonies, like everyone else,. The Court further noted in its ruling that their remedy was to ask the legislatures - not the court - to modify the law. The Native American church had already succeeded in some states, as the *Smith* decision explicitly noted. They went on to secure legislative exemptions for the sacramental use of peyote in many states and from Congress.

After *Smith*, though, a torrent of criticism rained down on the Supreme Court--while accommodations for peyote were being secured. The argument was put forth that legislatures could not be trusted to grant exemptions for religious practices. Congress, through unanimous consent in the House and a near-unanimous recorded vote in the Senate, passed the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA). In effect, RFRA gives religious entities the power to challenge the application of every law in the land - and in so doing, it runs would seem to run contrary to the Supreme Court's Free Exercise past doctrine, as embodied in *Smith* and other precedents.

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While in *Boerne v. Flores*, the Supreme Court struck down RFRA as applied to the states, so far, the courts have upheld RFRA's application to federal law. The Supreme Court reasons that a government can place whatever restraints it imposes on itself.

Some would say that the RFRA places courts into the constitutional shoes of the legislatures. RFRA appoints courts to become the primary drafters of public policy, when that is the province of legislatures. They would say that it infringes on the Supreme Court's - and lower federal courts' -- power to interpret the Constitution by displacing the Court's own interpretation of Free Exercise Clause, and replacing it with Congress's preferred interpretation. Never the less at this time the Supreme Court has allowed RFRA to apply to federal law.

RFRA's Three-Part Analysis

A court applying RFRA must go through a three-part analysis:

First, it must ask whether the religious institution or person has shown that the law imposes a substantial burden, which is to say that it must make the practice

"effectively impracticable." That was obviously the case with the UDV and hoasca: If the church couldn't legally import the drug, it couldn't use it in its ritual.

Second, it must ask if the government has proven its law satisfies a compelling interest. The interest in keeping illegal drugs out of the U.S. is compelling, though that may leave the question whether the reasons for a drug being illegal are logical or not as some may also argue.

Third, and most important, the court must ask whether the laws enforced are the least restrictive means the government can opt for, with respect to *this particular believer*. This third step was crucial in the UDV/hoasca case.

The Key, The "Least Restrictive Means" Step

The Controlled Substances Act, and the United Nations Convention on Psychotropic Substances[which provides for the cooperation of nations in their attempts to eliminate the illicit use and trafficking in psychotropic substances] were the laws at issue. It is interesting that as treaties are considered part of US law that the UN Convention on

Psychotropic Substances therefore affects us here in the United States.

Whether these laws were the least restrictive means the federal government could have chosen, with respect to the UDV believers was the question that the Tenth Circuit had to ask.

Judge Murphy, in dissent, said yes. But Judges Seymour and McConnell said no in separate opinions, neither of which garnered the support of a majority of the court.

In so holding, Judges Seymour and McConnell assessed the evidence from a hearing before the district court and concluded that by their lights there should be an exemption for the UDV.

Judge Seymour pointed out that the relevant Convention permitted signatory nations to obtain an exemption from the treaty for prohibited substances "traditionally used by certain small, clearly determined groups in magical or religious rites."

Her opinion, though, did reveal that UDV had two other options open to it. Free exercise doctrine permits exemptions in the legislatures and the

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Convention permits an exemption as well.

Needless to say this case will most likely be appealed the Supreme Court. There are still many important questions about the future use of the RFRA. Regardless of what Congress may have said there are still Constitutional Questions about how the law allows religious organizations to by pass legislators by way of the court.

So it will be interesting if the Supreme Court decides to hear it and what they may decide about both the law and its present use. A lot may depend on what the make up of the Supreme Court we have at that time. It is still possible that the Court could declare the RFRA itself to be unconstitutional. Meanwhile many alternate religions may watch the case with interest.

Latest breaking news :
December 4, 2004

Meanwhile the Bush administration has won Supreme Court stay that blocks UDV from using the hoasca tea. The church having won a preliminary injunction in a lower court, the government asked the Supreme Court to intervene. Acting on behalf on the full court, Justice Stephen Breyer granted a

temporary stay to give both sides time to file more arguments.

The government's argument for the temporary stay was written by acting Solicitor General Paul Clement. "Compliance with the injunction would force the United States to go into violation of an international treaty designed to prevent drug trafficking worldwide, which could have both short- and long-term foreign relations costs and could impair the policing of transnational drug trafficking involving the most dangerous controlled substances."

Earlier the Supreme Court heard arguments from the Bush Administration on another drug appeal which asks whether or not the Federal Government can prosecute patients who smoke marijuana on doctors' orders and in states with medical marijuana laws.

Latest breaking news:
December 10, 2004

The Supreme Court has ruled that The O Centro Espirita Beneficiete Uniao Do Vegetal (UDV) has the right to use hoasca, a hallucinogenic tea, in its services and rejected the Federal government's argument that the tea is illegal and potentially dangerous. This brings to

an end a long running battle between federal officials and and the UDV over the churches' use of a tea brewed from plants found in the Amazon River Basin.

The Federal government had asked for a temporary stay of the church's use of the tea while both sides had more time to present their arguments, which was granted in the name of the Supreme Court. the full Court lifted the stay when they ruled for the church on Friday.

The church Attorney Nancy Hollender said, "They are delighted. They are delighted that they can celebrate Christmas for the first time since 1998.

Hollanders explained that the tea is drunk in a ritual not unlike the Catholic Communion and that it is the the church says the tea is the central sacrament and believes that the tea brings its members closer to God.

The tea contains DMT, which the federal government claimed was an controlled substance under international treaty. Even Bronfman's complaint contends the tea is "non-addictive, is not harmful to human health and poses none of the risks commonly found with the use of certain

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controlled substances."

Bronfman and attorneys for the government did not return calls seeking comment.

The UDV had drawn parallels to federal protection of the members of the Native American Church and their using of peyote, which also has hallucinogenic properties.

LIVING THE CRAFT

by Lady Athena

The more I grow in the Craft I see that there is no set curriculum for "Advanced Wicca". The three "advanced" books I have purchased "Advanced Witchcraft" by Edain McCoy; "Advanced Wicca" by Pat Telesco; "The Twelve Wild Swans" by Starhawk offer interesting ideas, guidelines, activities, and advice... but even those authors stress the personalized experience of our religion. Wicca is an experiential path as it is, and the more one delves deeper into its mysteries, the more personal the experience becomes.

I began my journey 13 years ago as a self-initiated Witch, and although I requested and underwent a blessing and symbolic scourging by a community Craft elder before my initiation, I have done my dedications and initiations

myself, just me and the Divine. Some of us thrive on ritual, and some of us love to improvise. Some of us work with general god and goddess energy; some of us call upon specific archetypes and pantheons. My husband and I are both Witches and have different ways of approaching things, but we can work together in our circle.

"Living the Craft" is a theme I have read about often. When we are living the Craft, we are empowered. We are doing what we can to improve our lives and our world. Ritual and magick can be done mentally as easily as using tools in the physical realm. We act as role models, even indirectly. You can tell people are Witches living their Craft by looking into their eyes and hearts, not at their jewelry. This is an inward, ongoing transformation. If you believe in reincarnation, imagine how many lifetimes it will take to progress on this path of becoming!

I feel the current political atmosphere can easily foster hostility toward non-Christians, especially people like us. I am a public school teacher and I have been "in the broom closet" with respect to my students for a while now. However, that does not mean I am cowering in

secrecy. My colleagues know who and what I am, and if anyone looks closely enough at the real me and what I care about, they will have a good idea where my heart is. I have done more work behind the scenes now than I did when I was a new Wiccan, babbling about how excited I was to have found my path.

What work can we do when we live the Craft? The obvious would include honoring the seasons and the turning of the wheel of the year working magick for positive change clearing up cowan's misconceptions about Wicca helping others by using our talents, healing, divination, etc doing healing work for Earth all of this done as a part of daily life. What else can we do? Supporting organizations that fight for human rights and equality; environmental concerns; civil liberties; religious freedom; support for the poor and homeless volunteering in our communities where needed staying informed on vital issues lashing out against prejudice and intolerance when we see it.

My view of spirituality has taken on a new understanding of the humanist perspective since my husband and I read about the American

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Humanist Association. I view the soul as a part of the gods. If it turns out that we have no souls and this life is all there is, then what we celebrate is the triumph of the goodness in humanity and the joys of making a positive difference in the world.