

# HERMANA CRISTINA'S WELL

Hermana Cristina is a tiny woman, and every day she must draw the water for her family up from a deep well. The crank is stiff and the bucket is heavy and though she is pregnant with her sixth child she does not complain. She feels lucky, for she does not have to rise before dawn and walk the shoulders of the new highway for hours to find water, like many women do. Though her possessions and those of her husband and children would fit into two or three shopping bags, she has a home. It is far away from the town where she was born and the family and friends she grew up with, for she and her husband fled as refugees during the war. The war was waged against those who could tolerate hopelessness and injustice no longer and so made a revolution against the rich and the powerful. But the revolution, like so many things, ended inconclusively. All the blood and pain and sacrifice could win only a partial victory against the death squads and the massive military might supported by the great corporations.

Hermana Cristina never learned to read, and though she is worn and tired from bearing children, she has nothing else of beauty with which to fill her home. She lives not far from the great road where women like her walk every day in the dust, searching for water. The road was financed by corporate interests through institutions whose name Hermana Cristina does not know. The World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the institutions of global corporate wealth lent money to some government she never voted for, in private negotiations never ratified by the people. They built the great road, which is dotted with gas stations like palaces, gleaming and clean, complete with glass-box fast-food stops where affluent visitors from the north could find comfort in familiar brand names: Ritz crackers, Hershey bars, Oreos.

Hermana Cristina feeds her family



*Hermana Cristina at the permaculture farm.*

tortillas and beans. She feels lucky because many are hungry. They are hungry, though she may not know it, because in order to pay the interest on the loans that built the great road and the beautiful gas stations and the shops full of brand names she cannot afford, her government (which she did not vote for) must encourage the production of food to be sold in the countries of the rich, and must allow those same corporations to build the great *maquiladoras*, the factories where her children may someday labor to produce the jeans and cell phones and computers they will not be able to afford on a wage of four dollars a day. While she is burdened with too many children, her daughters may not have children at all because the *maquiladoras* produce wastes that eat away at ovaries and wombs. In order to service the foreign debt and attract the same corporations, her government has suspended the laws

that she never had a chance to vote for which could have protected her daughters' health.

Her sons will dream of the rich countries to the north, of following the great road up through Guatemala, Mexico. If they reach their goal they will stand on a street corner hungry and desperate in a foggy dawn, hoping for work. If they find great success they may someday ride to a laborer's job down the avenue where every stoplight is the turf of another beggar poorer than even Cristina:

This man was broken long ago when he was sent to fight an unjust war to protect those same corporations.

This woman has just come out of jail: she lost her children when she turned to drugs to ease the pain of despair.

This woman has AIDS and no money for a hotel room for the night, let alone medications.

This man still has a light in his eye and a smile, but he cannot find a job because the factory that would have hired him has moved to El Salvador where the people work for four dollars a day.

The avenue is lined with the gleaming storefronts that sell jeans and computers and cell phones. An administrative assistant spoons sugar into her coffee and thinks herself lucky that she still has a job, when half her department was laid off when her company was bought out by a larger company. Her salary barely covers the costs of childcare and her credit-card debt and the rent on her apartment which is high because for twenty years the banks have encouraged speculation and because so many people want to live in this city which is headquarters for many great corporations. She does not yet know that she has cancer from the chemical residues in the food she eats, the same cancer shared by those who made the long journey north on the

great road and now pick the crops and administer the chemical sprays which the banks require farmers to use because the banks have made loans to the corporations that make the chemicals.

that it is not enough to name the connections and identify the problems. It's not enough even to put our bodies on

**WHILE SHE IS BURDENED WITH TOO MANY CHILDREN, HER DAUGHTERS MAY NOT HAVE CHILDREN AT ALL BECAUSE THE MAQUILADORAS PRODUCE WASTES THAT EAT AWAY AT OVARIES**

Nor does she imagine that she will lose her job when she cannot work and lose her health insurance, which in the name of freedom is not provided by her government, and that she will not live to see her daughter grow up. Or that the same chemical residues which have contaminated her breasts are seeping slowly toward the groundwater that feeds Cristina's well.

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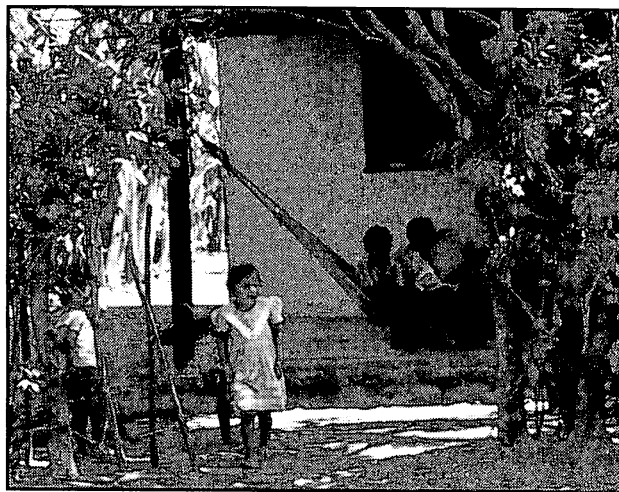
These connections are why we went to Seattle to shut down the WTO and why in the Spring instead of planting our own gardens we will go to Washington DC to shut down the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. We are no longer willing to acquiesce to institutions that do not cherish Hermana Cristina and her children and the beggar on the street and the administrative assistant stirring her coffee.

Because we are Witches, we know

the line to stand against injustice. We must work magic. We must hold a vision.

So let us imagine a world in which the health of Hermana Cristina, the well-being of her children, and the purity of her well were the prime concern of every institution of power. We could relax in such a world, for we understand that if Hermana Cristina's interests are cherished then so will ours be.

Let us imagine that the great economic powers of the world wish to free the slight and pregnant Cristina from the task of drawing water, in the way that will most benefit her children and later, her grandchildren. Instead of loaning money to her government to pay a big corporation to hire engineers from the United States to build a giant hydroelectric dam that will flood the fields of small farmers, they decide to give her a solar panel and a pump. Instead of sending her equipment made



*Children of El Salvador. Photos courtesy of Starhawk.*

in the United States, the economic powers will assure the future jobs of her sons and daughters by funding a small company in El Salvador to make the equipment locally. The company will pay a living wage and will hold to strict standards of safety for its workers and its environment. They will train young men and women to install and maintain the equipment, and these young men and women will be able to afford good food for their families, and dress-up clothes to go out in, and sometimes, a meal in a restaurant. With the water from the well, Hermana Cristina can grow a garden, and feed her children on papayas and bananas and fresh vegetables as well as beans, so that they grow bright and healthy and eager to learn. The extra fruit can be sold to the young men and women for their families, and with the money she earns she can buy a new dress for each of her daughters and a new shirt for each of her sons, which are made by the woman down the street who no longer works in a *maquiladora* but has a nice little business of her own, where she can step outside in the afternoon and enjoy the sunshine.

Because the purity of Hermana Cristina's well is the prime concern of the world's political and economic structures, the chemical factory down the way has been closed, and the men of her district no longer travel out to cut cane on the large plantations which



*Niños con Niños, "Children with Children" program, El Salvador*

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choose and let the rest go. Chances are by the time you cycle back through as a mother, this book will either be given to you as a family heirloom, or at least be in paperback.

## Book: Pilgrimage

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has already found its way to my stack of books to read again, just as soon as I get it back from the friends who have borrowed it.

A year ago, I found a quote by Mark Twain in my local newspaper. The message grabbed my attention, and I cut it out to display in my kitchen. It's not quoted in Cousineau's book, but it has a similar message:

"Your road is everything that a road ought to be—and yet you will not stay in it half a mile, for the reason that little, seductive, mysterious roads are always branching out from it on either hand, and as those curve sharply also and hide what is beyond, you cannot resist the temptation to desert your own chosen road and explore them."

May we all strive for such distractions.

*The Art of Pilgrimage* is published by Conari Press.

## Masks in Meetings

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masks."

I know that for me, as the main person in the hot seat during those long meetings, their presence was reassuring. I believe that even those who criticized using them could agree that their beauty enlivened the room.

Mask-wearers themselves said, "It was a wonderful way to do service and decreased my own tendency toward impatience with the slow process of consensus. Thank you for the opportunity to do service and to experience those primal essences." And, "Of all the things I remember about MerryMeet, I think that doing quarter duty was probably one of my favorite things. I would recommend it to everyone."

I look forward to taking a turn myself at our next Grand Council, when I will not be committed to active, verbal participation in every session. This was clearly a collaborative effort among the maskmakers of Coven UL, the overseers, tenders, sitters, and packers. I think there's much more to be learned from this work.

*Macha is a Witch-at-Large who travels the broomstick circuit and loves to co-design novel rituals with Witches of the many diverse tradi-*

*tions of contemporary American Witchcraft. For more about her work, see <http://>*

[pwp.value.net/hoodiecrow](http://pwp.value.net/hoodiecrow) or her brand new guided learning experience at [HungryMinds.com](http://HungryMinds.com)

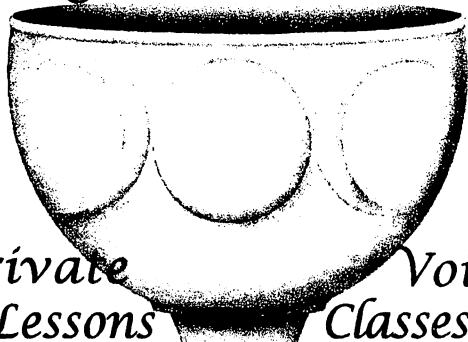
## Starhawk: Hermana Cristina

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service foreign debt (which has miraculously disappeared). Instead they till their own small plots of mixed fruits and vegetables for their families, with some left over to sell, and use nothing which would contaminate the soil. For everyone knows that the health of a people depends upon the health of the soil. And the papayas, the mangos, the coconut palms sink deep roots that hold the soil and make it a spongelike reservoir, and so the springs return to the hillsides and Hermana Cristina's sisters no longer have to rise before dawn to walk the dusty roadside searching for water.

If her sons and daughters take the long road to the north, it is for adventure, for study, for fun. And there they might sit, in a cafe on the avenue, stirring their coffee grown under shade trees that harbor thousands of birds, beside the administrative assistant who is now the administrator of a healing center where those who have been wounded and broken by life are cared for. She's lunching with the former drug addict who is now a nurse. They're eating salmon from restored streams and flourishing fisheries, and wild mushrooms from extensive forests, and drinking organic wine, which she can afford because she lives in her own, modestly priced home built by the man with the smile and the

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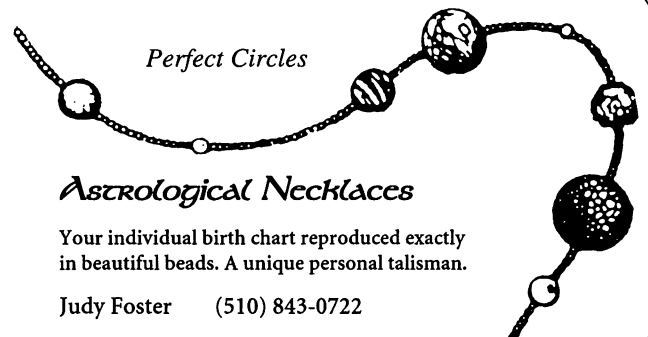
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light in his eye. Because the health of the soil and the health of the people is the prime concern of every political and economic structure in this country, too, there are no chemical residues in her food, no cancer in her breast, and she will live a long and healthy life and see the daughters of her daughter grow up in a world devoted to the well-being of the land, the waters, the children.

\* \* \*

This is a modest and possible vision. It requires no unknown technologies or new inventions. We already have the knowledge, the skills, and the resources we need to make it come true.

What we need now is the will and the fortitude to confront and transform the structures of political and economic power that currently govern our world. A simple "to do" list:

- Dismantle the structures of globalization
- Revoke corporate power
- Rescue government from the influence of wealth
- Restore democracy (or maybe we never really had it)
- And after lunch — the hot tub.

It's not new, the call to revolution. It's really kind of a nineteenth-century or maybe a 'sixties thang. And hey, we've had a few revolutions, and they mostly went rotten or proved inconclusive.

But maybe those were just for practice. This time, let's get it right.

*Starhawk is the author of many published books on Goddess religion, from "The Spiral Dance" to "Circle Round, Raising Children in Goddess Tradition." She is a feminist, activist, teacher, Witch, gardener, drummer and one of Reclaiming's founders. For Starhawk's schedule of appearances, see page 45.*

## Oak: Postive Activism

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the stars, the millennium energy, a cycle that was ready to turn by itself, the 13 moon spell, the target magic, the magical activism retreats, our success in Seattle, or more likely a combination of everything that has re-energized the interest in magic and activism. Whatever it is, I have learned a valuable lesson, a lesson that I suppose I will continue to learn again and again. Love is more powerful than hate and certainly feels better. Focusing on bringing into being what you want is more productive than focusing on what makes you crazy. In these strange times where every place on this earth is beginning to look like every place else, it will be challenging to hold on to a vision of what can be instead of despairing about what is. The despair is real, but I am learning to drop below it and breathe energy into to what I hold sacred and true.

In the spirit of what I have learned, I plant these seeds in the spring soil of this quickening. I would like us to figure out how to fund a spiritual and material revolution without sacrificing right livelihood. I would like to see more Reclaiming witches at the Ruckus Society trainings. The Ruckus Society holds workshops throughout the year and in different locations across the country. They are essentially

Witchcamps for activists. [See info, page 10.]

I also want to work towards creating a Witchcamp that is organized around magical activism. Imagine a camp where we work magic, prepare for a magical action and then create it together. Perhaps we could do magic at the Nevada test site, or in the middle of the nation's capital. The possibilities are endless. This year I have learned the power of focusing on what I want to see happen, versus focusing on what is happening that I do not like. Thank you, Reclaiming community. I am sure I will continue to have cranky moments of negativity. But thinking of what we could do together elicits yet another grin from this Witch's face. Using all my tools as a Witch; my body, my breath, my Witch's eye, and a simple spritz of the power of the rose, I commit to actively working on coming from a place of love, the first step in actively creating the world of my dreams. So mote it be!

*Oak (aka Deborah Cooper) is a seasoned Witch, psychotherapist, aromancer, and artist. She has been a San Francisco-based Reclaiming Witch for almost two decades and is a complicated Aquarian.*

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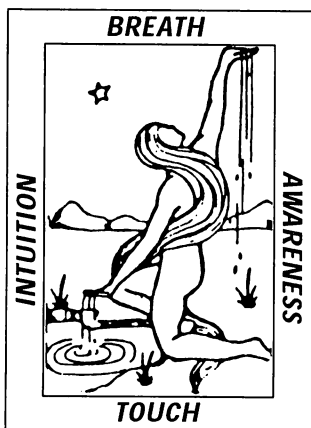
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