

Feeding the Fire

Theme 2006-2007

Fire... even when the word is whispered off the tongue, one can feel the depth and power in this element. When the Editorial Circle first sat down to brainstorm about this year's theme **Feeding the Fire**, the discussion instantly became charged with excitement, passion and possibilities. Currently, The Circle is in an active process of transformation, evolution and change, therefore it is so fitting that we contemplate fire during this development.

The element of fire seemed to strike a primordial cord within each of us. Through our discussion we were able to acknowledge its infusion, literally or allegorically, throughout all life. We discussed the physical manifestations and consequences of fire, as well as its metaphysical attributes and its role in human consciousness. And lastly, we talked about the myriad uses within spiritual symbolism, metaphor and ritual used throughout the world and throughout time. Within all three aspects, the physical, mental and spiritual, we recognized that incredible power of fire is that it is transformative.

With its immense energy, transformative potential and fundamental role in the creation and functioning of life, fire is critical to every aspect of earthly existence. In actuality, fire is life. Every organism on earth is fuelled by solar fire: we are all solar-powered. Plants convert the sun's energy into sugar, a viable form of fuel for the plant itself or through ingestion, for animal life. This "solar sugar" sustains our bodies or sustains the bodies of other animals which we then eat. Without the sun's rays there would be no viable energy on earth.

In nature, fire is like a wild woman: it is its own authority and asks no one for permission. Whether through lightning, a volcano, etc. it is a force that holds the potential to rewrite the story of a landscape and the lives within it. It is capable of sustaining or destroying life at the same time. For example, forest fires while destructive, can provide a necessary function in the lifecycle of that ecosystem by taking away that which is no longer serving the whole and creating space for new life to be born.

Fire also has a mental/intellectual aspect that is critical for humankind; fire allows us to know ourselves. Light is what allows us to observe life, to distinguish between "this and that", to see colour. It allows our awareness of life to

deepen as we view and probe the world around us. Fire is consciousness. Light gives humans the potential to constantly view things in a new way. It inspires our constant questioning and the evolution of the consciousness of humanity.

The amount of symbolism and imagery related to fire is immense. Fire represents vital energy, passion and will. The element of fire has symbolism and meaning that stretches across cultures and time and is a consistent part of many rituals throughout the world.

Fire as metaphor for spirit, energy and emotion is one of movement and action. It represents our will to persevere despite the odds. It is the spark in our bellies that flares at injustice. It is the hope we hold on to in dark times, providing warmth, comfort and light.

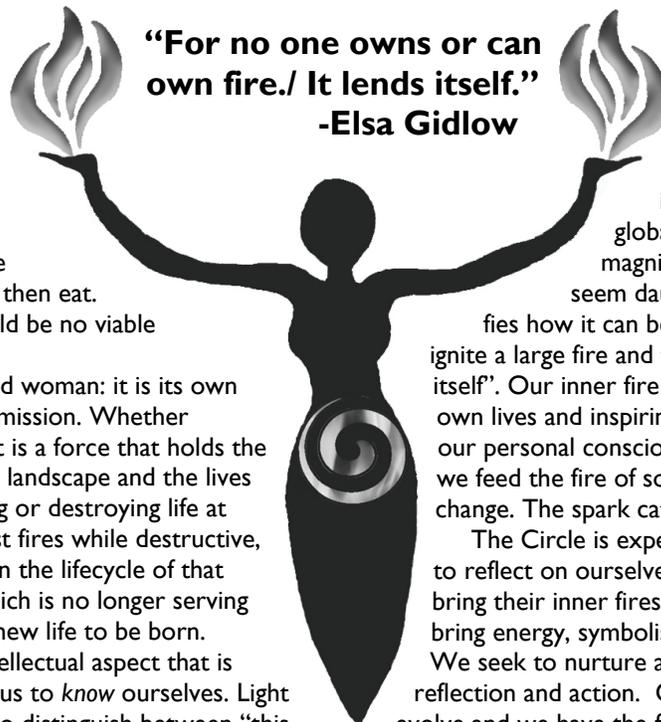
As mentioned, fire can represent transformation. Many of us have had experiences in our lives, both tragic and joyous, that are so transformative, we cannot go back to our old ways of living, thinking and being in the world. Within these events, something of the old self dies away and a new spark is ignited, a new consciousness that transforms us. Fire energy

makes change possible, within ourselves and the world.

Change is desperately needed in our current social, environmental and political situation. The earth is in need of transformative fire energy! This change is needed within individuals and within our local and global communities. Although the magnitude of the world's problems can seem daunting and overwhelming, fire exemplifies

how it can be done: for it only takes one spark to ignite a large fire and then as Elsa Gidlow says "it will lend itself". Our inner fire can be that spark, transforming our own lives and inspiring us into action. As we transform our personal consciousness and bring it out into the world, we feed the fire of social, political and environmental change. The spark catches and soon a blaze begins.

The Circle is experiencing a spark. We have taken time to reflect on ourselves and feel the need to help women to bring their inner fires out in the world. The Circle plans to bring energy, symbolism and light into Open Circle ritual. We seek to nurture and sustain a balance between reflection and action. Our consciousness continues to evolve and we have the fire to continue to bring change to the community. Our flame is bright.





Using the Sun's Energy: Solar Cooking Helps Women in Developing Countries

Women in developing nations are responsible for cooking and the collection of household wood, the most commonly used biomass for creating a fire. Terribly, they are facing a serious and growing shortage of wood (at many times due to the clear-cutting of forests to grow cash crops for western nations). They are being forced to travel further and further to find sources of fuel and in many regions they face the daily threat of rape and assault as they travel outside the safety of their communities or refugee camps.

At the same time, there are many health risks associated with traditional methods of cooking with wood, (the effects of smoke, flame and ash) and other biomass fuels such as dung or crop residue, which can cause serious respiratory diseases and other health problems. Often one-pot meals are made so that proper weaning food for young children is not made, adding to the numbers of children who die of malnutrition every day.

There is a growing need for alternate fuel sources and it is solar cookers that are providing a solution to this problem.

For many years now, organisations such as Solar Cookers International have been providing solar cookers to women and families in many countries throughout the world. A solar cooker is a very simple, safe, durable and low cost way to use the sun's energy for cooking purposes.

According to Solar Cookers International "solar cookers are a win-win technology in sun-rich, fuel-scarce areas: they reduce smoke and lung diseases, pasteurize unsafe drinking water, and

spare women and children the burdens and hazards of collecting ever-scarcer firewood for cooking" (www.solarcookers.org).

India and China are the two countries with the largest known use of solar cookers. However given the size of their respective populations, the number of solar cookers needs to drastically increase if real fuel reduction benefits are to be realized. Rural areas in South America, such as Bolivia have many solar cooking projects. They are being slowly, yet increasingly accepted by aboriginal people, originally hesitant to change their traditional ways of cooking.

Solar Cookers International uses public demonstrations and hands-on workshops to teach women the proper way of usage of a solar cooker. A successful project in a Somalian refugee camp in northeastern Ethiopia in 1999, showed an acceptance of various new cooking methods using either a solar cooking box, a funnel shaped cooker and a home-made retained-heat cooker.

Many developing countries are at latitudes where solar radiation is best for use of solar cookers throughout the year. Solar cooking provides health, environmental and economical benefits, mostly economic because they spend less money on fuel and less time to collect fuel.

For more information on solar cookers, photos, projects & funding:

Solar Cookers International – their goal is to introduce solar cookers to developing countries, to reduce deforestation, and improve health through water purification and less wood smoke. There are many solar cooker designs, and they encourage people to make them out of local materials.

www.solarcookers.org

Would you like to receive our newsletter by email? We would be happy to send a full colour .pdf version of our newsletter to your inbox. Please email us at circle@uwo.ca with your request putting "Circle e-newsletter" in the subject line.



On Our Shelves.....

The Circle's shelves are full of interesting and alternative magazines that offer unique insights, stories and perspectives. All magazines are available for lending. Check one out today!

Herizons– Canada's feminist magazine, aiming to reflect a feminist philosophy that is diverse, understandable and relevant to women's daily lives.

Sage Woman - Celebrating the goddess in Every Woman. Articles, reflections, rituals, book & music reviews

The CCPA Monitor– the publication of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, a non-partisan research institute concerned with issues of social, environmental and economic justice.

Utne Reader: Understanding the Next Evolution - Utne believes that personal evolution is the key to social change. This mag seeks out & illuminates the essential information, people & trends that will inspire people to take action to make the world kinder and greener.

Plenty-dedicated to exploring and giving voice to the green revolution that will define the 21st Century.

Peace Magazine- news stories, book and film reviews, letters, etc. on disarmament, conflict resolution, non-violent sanctions, peace institutions, conflicts and crises around the world; profiles of activists and researchers; and controversies about development, population, and environmental protection.

Yes Magazine-showing the possibilities & practical steps that can lead to a more positive future...book reviews, practical advice for living more sustainably, special features & columns.

New Internationalist– a workers co-operative reporting on issues of world poverty and inequality, the unjust relationship between the powerful & powerless, debating & campaigning for the radical changes necessary to meet the basic needs of all.



The Circle would like to thank the contributions of **Jill Payne** and **Louise Hord** to the Editorial Circle. We are grateful for the creativity, insight and wisdom they brought to our newsletter. Blessings for your time & gifts!

Upcoming Events at The Circle...



...a tapestry of ritual, spirituality, activism and the mystical experience of women gathered to reflect on the sacred in our lives. Last Wednesday of the month, Merici Lounge, Brescia UC, 7:30 p.m. Members: free, Non-members: \$2.00
All Women Welcome!

29 November
31 January
28 February

The Many Faces of Brigit: An Introduction to Brigit of Ireland
The Talking Marks: Honouring the Written Word
Balancing the Fire Within: Spirituality and Healing

An Eclectic Emporium of Gifts, Art, Crafts & Books

More
 Than Just a Book Sale



Sat. 25th November
 10 am- 3pm
 Brescia Auditorium, Free Parking

Books to Donate? Call The Circle 432-8353 x28288

NATIONAL DAY OF REMEMBRANCE
 AND ACTION ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Ritual of Re-Membering

Wednesday December 6th at Noon
Brescia University College Auditorium
Free Parking

A SOPHIA SERIES EVENT



Festival of Light:
 A SOLSTICE CELEBRATION

Friday 22nd December 2006, 7:30 pm

Brescia Auditorium, All ages are welcome

Suggested donation:

\$2/person and/or donation to the food bank

Wear seasonably warm clothing

as part of the celebration will be outdoors.

Sponsored by: The Gaian Spiral & The Circle

For more information, contact: Pat Mooney 519-473-9011

Keeper of the Flame
Exploring Brigit of Ireland

An All-Day Workshop

Saturday 3rd February 2007

BRESCIA AUDITORIUM



Stay Tuned for More Information!



...and Beyond

December 6th Events in London

- ☞ **A Morning Gathering**- 7am, 379 Dundas St., Suite 121, Sponsored by Sexual Assault Centre London
- ☞ **Memorial**- 3:30 - 5:00pm, 606 First St., Sponsor: CAW Local 27
- ☞ **Candlelight Vigil**-5:30 pm, Women's Monument, Victoria Park,

- Speaker: Kate Wiggins & a presentation by London Abused Women's Centre staff: **Remembrance of Women and Children Killed in London.** Sponsored by Women's Events Committee
- Reception**- After candlelight vigil, 520 Wellington (by City Hall), Sponsor: CUPW
- ☞ **All Women's Music, All Day**, CHRW 94.9FM Radio Western

18 November- **WomenSpiritSong's** "Women With Wings" concert, 7:30 pm, Aeolian Hall, \$20, fundraiser for My Sister's Place. Info: 519-672-7950

22 November - **Women's Events Committee Charity Dinner**, Alex P. Keaton, 580 Talbot St., seatings at 6pm & 8pm, call 435-0259 for reservations

26 November- **Follow Your Bliss & Intuition** - A Dance & Movement Workshop for Women with Lorenna Bousquet-Kacera, 10am- 5pm, The Living Centre, \$75-\$95, 652-9109,

9 December- **Under an African Sky: Songs & Stories of Hope & Heroes featuring Stephen Lewis**, UN's Special Envoy to AIDS in Africa, John Labatt Centre, 7:30 pm, \$26.75, fundraiser. Tickets: 1-866-455-2849 or www.johnlabattcentre.com

12 December- **Embrace Your Essence: Daring to be Alive** workshop with Juna & Sabine, 11am-5pm, Kiwanis SCC, \$75 until 18 Nov., \$85 after. Info: 519-690-1479 or www.synergy-in-motion.info

31 December - **New Year's Eve**, Medaille Retreat House, \$15, prayer, reflection & ritual with facilitators Suzanne Chevalier, csj & Kathleen Lichti, csj, Info & tickets: 519-641-1379

Principles & Practice...

Principles and Practice is a column dedicated to highlighting women's efforts to create change in the world. Whether it be individually or collectively, these are women dedicated to living their vision, putting their beliefs into action, their principles into practice...

Fires of Change—A Woman in the Fire Service



It somehow seemed fitting that I sat down on Sept. 11th to speak with Tricia Young about her experience in the fire service. Trish is one of 6 women firefighters on the London Fire Department. She walked a long road before getting hired onto her home department but every step of the way was infused with her passion for the job and her commitment to serving her community.

During her third year as a political science student and varsity basketball player at UWO, she became aware that her heart was no longer in what she was doing. She struggled to find a new area of study or career path that would be fulfilling. One day, her godfather suggested to her that she consider becoming a fire fighter. She had an instant reaction. "To be cliché, it lit a fire inside me – I could see myself doing this, being proud of it – I just *knew*."

One year later, she left London for Vermillion, AB to attend one of the three fire colleges in North America. She was the only female out of her 255 classmates. An innate feminist, she was never daunted by the gender issue – she knew her performance on the fire ground would lack nothing because of her being female. During this period she learned a lot about herself, about being independent and trusting her instincts, about being strong physically and mentally. She graduated at the top of her class.

Unfortunately, the top marks weren't enough. There are still departments that have sexist views of women in the fire service and Trish struggled to find one that would hire her or accept her within their ranks. After applying, she was often given flimsy excuses as to why she wasn't hired, at other times they were remarkably blunt: in one city, the fire chief flat out told her reference that he does not hire women. Period. At a volunteer department, some of the male firefighters threatening to quit if she was hired and on still another department there were captains who asked that she not be placed at their hall because they do not work with women. Sadly, she has also met negative attitudes from a small portion of the wives/girlfriends of firefighters who don't like women at the hall with "their men". They feel threatened and worry about the close quarters, sometimes requesting their partners move to a hall without women! Through it all, Trish tried to remain positive, hoping that at least some of her gender struggles would help make it easier for the next woman to come through.

Finally, Trish was hired onto the London Fire Department and has been grateful for the warm welcome and acceptance she has been given by her colleagues. She is now living her passion. When the alarm goes off, her adrenaline kicks in and everything changes and becomes charged. "There is nothing like seeing fire! Think of how captivating a campfire can be and multiply that by 1000! Feeling the heat through your gear...having fire surround you when in a building, over your head, around all sides...the power of it is amazing. It is an incredible feeling to have fire raging and then to bring it under control."

Trish also expresses that she finds satisfaction in her job because

at the end of the day that her finer goals weren't about profits or money or clout, but contributing to the safety of her community. She is happy to be fighting the elements and not people; to not have to offer judgment to a scene, but simply offer help. Firefighters are often seeing people in some of the worst moments of their lives and she works hard to make those moments more manageable. "It is an incredible feeling when you squeeze into the back of a crashed vehicle and hold a person who is being cut out of a car. The gift is being able to speak to a victim and give them some peace of mind by letting them know that everything is being done to help them. I might not have had to use the extrication tools or put out the fire that day, but I held the hand of another human being who was in a horrible and frightening situation and offered them comfort, myself, my voice, peace as much as possible. That is an amazing feeling."

On this 5th anniversary of 9/11, she feels sadness and anger for the families the fallen firefighters. "They chose in their profession not to fight people, but to save them ...this job doesn't reflect anything violent, so for them to be killed through such violence is sickening." Her husband Corey, who is also a fire fighter, was at work that day and all she thought was "that could have been my husband, that could have been me." She honours their memories and prays for their families, but at the same time she understands that death is a risk one takes in this job. "As a firefighter, you learn to live for the moment because you see all the time how lives are taken instantly." She says this awareness makes her appreciate every minute, live in the Now, love her family every moment she gets. It has taught her to live consciously and with intention.

For Trish, firefighting is a way of giving back to the community. She also tries to do this by being active in schools, visiting classrooms. While teaching them fire safety, she gives attention to girls so that they feel it is a viable career option and to boys so that their definition of a firefighter will include females from the onset. For Trish, the word "fireman" does not exist.

She looks forward to the rare opportunity of getting to work with another woman firefighter during her shift. She was delighted when the first LFD "girls night out" was organised because they don't see each other very often, so it is a way for them to form solidarity and support each other. She is also getting used to the attention she receives by the public when she is out on the truck or at a call. She loves surprising people, hearing them gasp and say "it's a girl!" Her favourite moment had to be when she was sitting on the back of a truck at a stoplight on Richmond and a carload of young women pulled up. From this kind of group, it is usually her male colleagues that get the stares, attention and admiration but she was excited to see the young women in the car give her the thumbs up and shout to her captain "We like her!" And to that, I have to agreed. I am so proud she is my sister.

- by Kim Young Milani