



# The Circle

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## Power in the Pause... Being Betwixt and Between

As the earth orbits around the sun and the northern hemisphere tilts closer to its wonderful warmth, the anticipation of the approaching spring becomes palpable. As the days lengthen, the ice and snow begin to recede and once again we await the witnessing of the miracle of rebirth. We are in a time of liminality, a time of being betwixt and between. It is a time of anticipation, of preparing to plant our seeds, where power is drawn from the pause on the threshold.

We move through cycles of perpetual generation, degeneration and regeneration. Nature shows us over and over again that spring *will* follow winter, but one still needed to make it through the winter in the first place. Many of the ancient peoples died during those long, cold, barren months. Huddled together around a cherished fire our ancestors must have ached for a harbinger of spring. They would search for signs amid nature because before our ancestors could feel spring's approach in their cold bones, the plants and animals felt it. As the sap rises in the trees, the blood of hibernating animals warms and draws them out of their burrows in search of something to eat. Poultry begin to lay eggs. Domestic farm animals begin to calf and milk flows, providing new sources of nourishment for bodies hungry for fresh food.

We can only imagine the celebration and gratitude our ancestors must have felt at these signs of winter's demise: when the Earth herself would begin birthing new plants and animals would spill from the holes in her body where they had burrowed during the dark winter.

What will you be birthing this spring? What will your coming alive look like? What seeds will you choose to

sow? Planting time can be a personal metaphor for making intentions – planting the seeds of what you intend to bring forth. What truth germinates inside you? What new light can you share from your own experience? What inner fire are you willing to unleash into the world?

One of the most wondrous and powerful components to human existence is free will. If we choose to seed negativity then we will bring negativity into the world, yet if we choose gratitude, we birth new grace into our lives. In each moment, we have the power to choose...to choose our actions, our thoughts, our words. By imagining the extraordinary realm of life's possibilities, we can recognize the status quo as an illusion and construction. We can know there are no "shoulds and have-tos." We

can birth new revelations at any moment and choose wilful action at any time. In this way, we create ourselves and our reality.



It is wise to recognise that it takes great courage to speak and live by our own authority and will. Often we must fight against or repair the damage caused by the will of others: those

who wish to harm instead of heal, to take instead of give. As such, we need to nourish the self we place into the outside world. Like mothering a newborn, we must provide love, support and encouragement to ourselves and surround ourselves with friends who do the same. We are each mother, child and midwife to each other's authenticity. In this way, we can create a genuine and compassionate culture

# BRIGIT Festival Report

## FORGING COURAGE, MIDWINTER WISDOM

### 1-3 FEBRUARY 2008



The Circle's Brigit Festival was a wonderful success and we wished to share the richness of the weekend with our members. Here is a collection of the feedback we received from our participants, organisers and our facilitator, Mary Condren.



**Mary Condren**

"I wanted to thank you for all your cooperation and the tremendous hospitality you gave me while in Canada. It was an experience of a lifetime to work with you all, and I don't know that you appreciate what a tremendous resource you have together, and what a privilege it is to work with a group that has undertaken the kind of journey you are all on! The work would not have been possible without your generosity of spirit and willingness to trust."

-Mary Condren

## Participant Feedback

Thanks to all in the Circle for a wonderful weekend. It was as amazing as any I had attended in Ireland in the past. I loved the rituals and the energy of the group. The small groups had a special place and allowed us to get to know each other on a deeper level. -Kitty Stafford

Since the Brigit Festival, I have felt a personal connection to Brigit as Goddess for the first time. She cast her cloak over me in the Sunday morning ritual! -Norah Fraser

I cannot thank you enough for the work you put into the weekend, your ability to have Mary Condren come made the event very special to me. The opportunity to take part in this festival came to me at a time when I was in Soul need. My heart left rejoicing. The spiritual nature of the weekend, the ritual, the energy of all the women together was a very special time for me. -Donna Gray



As a part of the celebrating Brigit traditions, a cloak and other fabric are left out overnight so that it may be blessed by Brigit as she passes by.

I thought the weekend was absolutely amazing! It was great to be in a community of women who are all interested in the same things – I enjoyed learning about Brigit as it was new information for me. I felt very inspired and the weekend really was transforming. -Kim Tremblay

I found the Brigit Festival very powerful and moving. I felt that the organisers had created a safe container in which I could pursue transformation and the other participants could be open and honest.

Veronica Hauser, M.A.Psych.



by Lynette Richards

It was simply the best experience of ritual that I ever participated in. - CDargo Ritchie

# Reflections on the Brigit Festival by Valerie M. Nielsen

Offered with gratitude to all the wonderful women present.

I come as a pilgrim  
slogging through snow,  
determined to be here  
with a hundred women  
honouring Brigit,  
longing to wake up Spring!

We chant a processional  
and enter a dark auditorium  
transformed into a sparkling sacred space,  
walking under the welcoming protection  
of Brigit's scarlet cloak.

Four bodies lie prostrate  
around a blazing altar.  
The women rise and dance  
us into a lively celebration.

We call spirits of the directions  
to bring us home to ourselves,  
facing artistic altars:  
Tables draped in blue,  
yellow, red and white  
hold flickering candles,  
evocative sculptures,  
bowls of water, earth  
and fragrant hyacinths.  
In the centre, tulips wait  
encased in shimmering ice  
on cloths of orange.

We invoke the strengthening presence  
of our ancestors, loved ones  
and imagined future generations.

We dance the elements -  
stepping firmly on the earth,  
dipping our feet into the water,  
twirling freely in the air,  
and rushing into the centre  
with fiery whoops of joy!

Time for the gift of Mary's presence,  
support from many countries

sent to bless our weekend.  
We sit rapt  
drinking deep wisdom,  
scintillating scholarship.

The heart of our learning  
is mercy not sacrifice,  
mercy as its own reward.  
We're challenged to notice  
"the crime of the eye",  
to follow vision with action.  
We claim the resources we need,  
power of the *crios* around us,  
balance of masculine - feminine,  
rich - poor, slave - free,  
acknowledging liminal space.

Brigit, goddess of poetry  
rings her bell  
to summon us bards,  
brings healing  
to our fractured souls,  
forges steel of resolve  
for our waiting hearts.  
Brigit as life force,  
lodestone of feminine wisdom,  
a paradigm for our times.

We invite her to our circle.  
As Brigit heralds her entrance,  
we shout "You're welcome  
you're welcome you're welcome!"  
And she flies in dancing,  
her cloak offered to the altar.

Community deepens  
as we join hands  
and become the dance.  
Hearts beat as one  
as we sing the goddess songs,  
break bread together,  
cherishing the gifts  
of soul friends  
we find in each other.

As we are warmed and awakened,  
courage and creativity burst forth,  
like lowly snowdrops  
pushing through icy earth.  
So we blossom in our songs,  
stories, poems, and play.  
Boldly we obey the call  
to share our gifts.

Rituals of fire and ice,  
drumming and dancing  
empower us to leap over flames  
as our names are cheered.  
Joy erupts in spontaneous sparks.  
Our shawls decorate the sturdy pine,  
left for Brigit to bless  
for our journeys.

Cleansed with healing water,  
we feast on Brigit's bread,  
succulent honey and nurturing milk.  
We step through her *crios*,  
moving in meditation  
left, right and straight ahead,  
knowing what we need to leave,  
to celebrate and to discover.  
We're gifted with a sacred fragment  
of Brigit's garment  
to share with those in need,  
and a shrill whistle  
to summon safety and support.

Community fuels the cauldrons of conscience,  
blazing for justice making.  
We're connected, gentle and strong,  
filled with sweet rivers of mercy  
to pour out  
onto our waiting world.

Blessed be!

3 February 2008

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## A Brigit Toast

This is our toast for all here present  
For bounty, For gracefulness  
For generosity, For hospitality  
For all who are hungry  
For all who are thirsty  
For all who are on the edge  
Longing for the Feast of Brigit.

-Kathleen Quinn

## The Circle would like to express our deepest gratitude for the work, dedication and time contributed by each member of the Brigit Festival Circle:

Frances Abley  
Ardath Finnbogason-Hill  
Sheila Horrell  
Pat Mooney  
Jean Walmsley  
Kim Young Milani

Cheryl Ebel  
Mary Hagan  
Pauline Maheux  
Margie O'Connor  
Jennifer White

# Upcoming Events at The Circle...



**Open Circle**...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, 7:30 p.m. Members: free, Non-members: \$2. **All Women Welcome!**

26 March

Celebrating Spring

30 April

Beltane: the Flowering of Life

28 May

The Healing Power of Praise

25 June

Mindsummer Night's Enchantment



## Michele Landsberg

**The F-Word: Fearless, Funny, Fast- Forward and Fabulous...Feminism!**

**Thursday 6 March, 7:30 pm**

Articulate, tenacious, progressive and persuasive, award-winning former Toronto Star columnist Michele Landsberg is one of Canada's best known feminists and social justice activists. A fearless advocate for women and children over many decades, she uses words, in print and in person, to fight injustice, to attack oppressive power structures and policies, and to champion the cause of human rights, race and gender equality, peace and pluralism. She will challenge us to rethink the status quo, get involved and create a more equal and engaged society with a new understanding of the potential for human progress. All Welcome. A Sophia Series Event.

**Brescia Auditorium. Free Lecture & Parking.**



## Women Making Change Conference

**Friday 7 March, 9 am - 5pm**

From gender studies in Rwanda to pioneer women poets of London, the *Women Making Change* conference offers presentations and discussions on a wide range of topics. Students from UWO and from universities as far away as Ottawa and Brandon, Manitoba will present papers on topics as diverse as Sunday School teachers and social reform, young women and education in Pakistan, gender and rock music, and feminist filmmakers. Roundtables on community-university partnerships such as Bridges: Women, Education and Change Project, the Women's and Gender Studies Mini-Course at Crouch Neighbourhood Resource Centre and The Breakfast Club: A Brescia-VON Partnership, will be featured. Local women working in anti-violence agencies, along with invited London politicians, have prepared a special presentation and report card on Canada's observance of the UN Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. They will present at 4 PM to conclude the conference. **Drop in anytime all day! The conference & parking are free.**



## Exceptional Woman Pins - Circle Fundraiser. On Sale Now!

Honour the special women in your life—mothers, sisters, friends, mentors, daughters, etc. by awarding them with an Exceptional Woman Pin in honour of International Women's Day. Each pin was created from low-fire, red earthenware clay and press moulded from four original carvings. Depicted on each pin is the image of a phoenix rising from the ashes through the fires of rebirth. This design was chosen as a symbol to honour the transformative power, wisdom and strength of women. Like a phoenix, every pin has been fired, reaching a temperature of 1100°F to complete the glazing process. This year's pin was created by ceramic artist Kimberly Davy, [kimberlydavy@hotmail.com](mailto:kimberlydavy@hotmail.com)

**On sale at Mandala Book Shop, Curiosities, The Village Bookshop-Bayfield and The Circle. \$8.00 each.**



## Circle of Friends

**Thursday 10 April, 7:30 pm**

...An annual event to share & celebrate this past year...to plan & create for the year ahead...

\*This event will begin the process of determining The Circle's future long-term goals, programs, aspirations and direction. All voices are needed to create a rich and diverse plan to forge the year's ahead! Please mark your calendar!

**Merici Lounge, Free Parking, All Welcome**



## Katherine Ashenburg

**The Little Things That Count**

**Wednesday 14 May, 7:30 pm**

Katherine Ashenburg is the award-winning author of three books of non-fiction - *Going to Town: Architectural Walking Tours in Southern Ontario*, *The Mourner's Dance: What We Do When People Die*, and *The Dirt on Clean: An Unsanitized History*. Readers often remark that her subjects -- 19th-century architecture; mourning rituals and customs; and a history of washing our bodies -- seem to have little in common. But Ashenburg says they all spring from her interest in the ordinary, everyday lives of people in the past and present. She wanted to know, for example, why 19th-century bedrooms have slanted walls, why people wore certain colours in mourning, why we are obsessed with personal cleanliness in 2008. Rather than the history of kings, queens and generals, she is fascinated by the history of the forgotten details of daily life. As the old saying that Divinity is in the details. All Welcome. A Sophia Series Event.

**Brescia Auditorium. Free Lecture & Parking.**



**Maiden, Mother, Crone Ritual and Celebration**  
**June - date tba**

Honouring the life's thresholds and cycles for women. More information coming soon!

[www.brescia.uwo.ca/thecircle/upcoming.htm](http://www.brescia.uwo.ca/thecircle/upcoming.htm)

**Your membership is important to us! Please renew!**

**The Circle would like to honour the life and passing of long-time Circle member Rev. Phyllis Barnes. Her wisdom, humour and spirit will be a lasting legacy in our community**

