

**Official newsletter of
Alternate Religions Educational
Network
Founded Samhain 2004**

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Chieftain, Kindred and Asatru Interview with Vincent Enlund

By Christopher Blackwell

We have Heathens in the city, but also spread out here in the South West. Vincent Enlund is chieftain of The Wanderer Kindred. I asked if I could do interview and he was kind enough give me his time.

Christopher: Could you give us a little background of yourself?

Vincent: My name is Vincent, on line I am generally known as VikingJack. I'm 39 years old, married with 2 wonderful kids, living in Arizona. I am the Chieftain of the Wanderer Kindred of Arizona, Chieftain of the Asatru Alliance (www.asatru.org), and associated with many other local, national and international Kindreds.

I have been Asatru for more then 20 years (since 1989). My wife and I are very active in the Asatru and Heathen community. We founded the Wanderer Kindred of Arizona (www.wandererkindred.org) around 2000. I have been active with the Asatru Alliance for about 10 years, and working with other national and international organizations and independent kindreds for more then 6 years.

In 2009 My Kindred began hosting an open Heathen event called the **Southwest Frith Moot** (www.southwestfrith-moot.org) that this year brought almost 100 heathens from the Southwest region together for a weekend of community

growth, education and fun.

I started the serious research for the **Krigarenve** (A Northern European Martial Arts System) about 10 years ago. I started teaching the Krigarenve (www.krigarenve.com) to the city and public community about 7 years ago and now I am working on expanding the Krigarenve out to other cities and states, as well as a Handbook and Video series to help students with personal training.

I have an AA in Graphic Design, BA in Visual Communications and an MA in Cultural Arts. I am a professional Graphic Designer working full time for a national technology company as well as running my own Design Studio (www.longshipstudio.com).

I manage several open discussion groups on several forums, including Facebook, Yahoo, and Pagan Space, that can be found simply by looking me up on any of the forums. I also help to manage a heathen preparedness forum called the Raven Readiness Forum (<http://ravenreadiness.yuku.com>).

I have several lectures that I have given about Asatru that are open to public viewing on Youtube and myself and some other Asatru friends of mine have recently begun work on a Asatru and Heathen educational video series that we hope to begin releases of in early 2013 that we hope will be geared more towards Asatru and Heathens that have been a part of the

community for a few years rather than to the new beginner, in an effort to better expand Asatru folks understanding of community growth and interaction.

I have also begun the work to produce a new all digital magazine publication called **AsatruNOW** that we hope to release this year in 2012 for distribution to Asatru and Heathens all over the world.

I served 2 years with the USMC. I have had a lot of different training and experience but I would consider myself a jack of all and master of very little, but I am always willing share what I know and always eager to learn more from anyone that will share with me.

Recently I have started teaching and helping others in my local area to learn how to be better prepare themselves for hard times and emergencies and may even start doing some local wilderness teaching as well with a friend of mine (a much better trained than me, friend of mine) to folks in the community that want to learn.

I enjoy keeping up on the activity of the community and add my 2 cents when I think it's worth being heard, or someone asks. I know that this probably sound more like a resume than an intro but I suck at this kind of thing so this is what I got.

Christopher: How did you come to be Heathen? Why **Asatru**?

Vincent: I made my first personal Profession to Asatru, while camping in the mountains of the Black Hills of South Dakota, on May 1st 1989. I felt no connection or truth to any other religious faith. I felt a great calling back to the traditions and old beliefs of my ancestors and European culture. I had a desire to truly live my life by an ideal that was both a part of my life and family and not just what someone in authority told me I was supposed to be like, because everyone else is that way to.

I was raised in South Dakota in a very Swedish, Norwegian family. I grow up with many of the old stories, myths and legends. I came to know well in my childhood many of the old scandinavian cultural practices and ideals. So when I decided that I was going to live like my ancestors I tried to learn as much about them, that I did not already know, and try to apply the things that I thought they believed in then into my life now.

At that time I didn't know there was anything called Asatru, I just did what I thought my Heathen ancestors would do in my place. Later I found out about the Asatru and Heathen movement. I found out that there were many other people that wanted the same thing as me. To better understand their Heathen ancestors and how we could live today in a manner that honored them.

Being **Asatru** is a part of everything in my daily life. Being Asatru is not about doing something on Sunday or special holidays.

Asatru is how you live, behave and interact with your community and other people all of the time. If you are only honorable to other Asatru folk, then you are not really honorable. If you are only hospitable in your free time then you are not really hospitable. If you are only industrious at work then you are not really industrious.

Please keep in mind that we have no expectations for folks to be the best all of the time, after all we are all only human. All of our ancestors were just as flawed as we are today, and as our children will be tomorrow.

We do however expect Asatru folk to live the way we say we are going to live and to treat people in our community appropriately no matter who they are. If you insult me, I will demand an apology whether your Asatru or not. If you give me a gift I will gift one back to you whether you are Asatru or not, and so on and so forth.

We are Asatru because we choose to live that way not because we read a certain book or go to a certain building on the weekends.

Christopher: In one of your videos that I watched you discussed **tribalism**, what a tribe meant to our ancestors and what it could mean to us now. Could you give us some examples?

Vincent: The Dictionary defines a **Tribe** as “a social division in a traditional society consisting of families or communities

linked by social, economic, religious, or blood ties, with a common culture and dialect.” Tribalism is defined as “the state of being organized in a tribe, chiefly recognized by the behavior and attitudes that stem from a strong loyalty to one’s own social group.”

To our ancestors this meant Life. Being a part of a tribe and maintaining loyalty to that tribe was a part of how you stayed alive. Being a lone person in the wilderness meant starving to death, or being robbed, or being killed by marauders, or the wilds of the world. Outcasts very seldom lived very long by themselves.

To us today it means a little something different. Obviously we don’t need a tribalist community to just stay alive, but it does help us to live better. It allows us to have a support group when we are under hard times. It helps us in times of need, like depression and hardship, both personal and social. It can also stand as means of assistance in financial hardships such as social and economic recession and depression.

It gives us a social means of outreach, friends to talk to that we know we share a family like bond with. It gives us family when we don’t have blood family to be with and share with especially around holidays and special occasions. It is a means to meet others close to our tribe that we may share life goals and desires with, such as possible future spouses and close friends.

Christopher: Then is that like a kindred now?

Vincent: Yes it can be for many Heathens and Asatru. Now some Kindreds are more like discussions groups then small tribes but most are prime examples of modern tribes.

There are others though. Many people don't realize how many modern tribes there are around us. There are group like shooting clubs, camping clubs, close knit condo groups, many sub cultures like re-enactment groups and historical societies, that all share close bonds that unit them like tribes as well.

But most Asatru Kindred do stuff to create these types of tribal / family like bonds that hopefully will last a lifetime.

Christopher: How did **The Wanderer Kindred** come to be and how large is it now?

Vincent: **The Wanderer Kindred** started for just this Tribal like idea. We were all Asatru folks here in AZ that saw the community as growing. We all realized how isolated we where when we started out on our paths as Heathens and how much work it was for us to learn and eventually realize that we where not alone in our beliefs.

We decided that we wanted to make a place for our children to learn and grow, and know that if they decided to be Asatru,

that they where not alone or strange or any kind of outcast. We wanted to make a place for all of our families to truly feel like they had a community where they could be themselves without fear of strange looks or feelings of isolation.

Our Kindred, Like any others, varies in size form time to time. New folks come in once in a while and sometime members move on to new lives in other place and start kindreds of their own. But right now we have about 20 members. We are also very close with a couple of other kindreds in the area that are similar in size and active with the general Heathen and Pagan community here both in Arizona, and the in the Southwest in general.

Christopher: In another video you were discussing the importance of **Social Debt in Heathen society**. Could you explain how that works?

Vincent: As Heathens we don't really believe in Charity (at least not in the true sense of the word), so all relationships within Asatru are built on what I see as **Community Debt**. What a lot of Asatru like to call a gift for a gift. When someone new comes along we extend Hospitality. In exchange we expect that same hospitality to be returned. This starts a relationship of Debt. At all times there is some type of expectation that when I do something for someone they will in some way return that debt or favor. This cycle builds until some type of higher level friendship is built.

But even then, if at any time, one side is constantly putting in and the other side is constantly taking with no return of the debt, then that relationship is doomed to fail and they will soon find themselves pushed (or sometimes thrown) out of the group or community.

When we think of our Heathen relationships as a type of community debt, that can help to build our community worth and luck, then we are less like to take advantage of those relationships and work harder to maintain stronger community bonds.

Christopher: How does that idea apply to your position of Chieftain? What is your responsibility as the chieftain of your Kindred?

Vincent: My responsibility to my Kindred is one of counsel and management for lack of a better term. I am here to help with questions as to proper behavior. I am here to address folks that get out of line or misbehave. I am here to offer advice to those that want it, not just about Asatru but many times just general life questions as well.

It is my responsibility to make sure everything is ready for Kindred events, such as location, food and what not. I make sure we have any or all of the appropriate paperwork if we use a rented space, or are an outdoor location. I make sure we are not interrupted by things when we are in ceremony. I make sure new people understand the rules and guidelines of attending

any of our events, and that people keep the peace while at any of our kindred ceremonies.

As far as debt applies to me as Chieftain I rack up a lot of debt both to others and from them. I ask for favors a lot to help me get things done, and therefore I give a lot of favors out to those folks that have helped me in the past.

It is important that maintain a good public image for the Kindred, my family, and friends. People need to know that I am good for my word. When I say I will do something, I need to follow through with it. People do need to remember that I am just one man and many times I need help to get everything done right. Debt becomes a tool that needs to be both used and paid on a very regular basis.

Christopher: Aren't you also a chieftain in a national Asatru group?

Vincent: I am. I am also the chieftain of the **Asatru Alliance**. The Asatru Alliance (AA) is a US Ásatrú group, succeeding Stephen McNallen's Asatru Free Assembly (AFA) in 1987, founded by Michael J. Murray (a.k.a. Valgard Murray) of Arizona, who is a former vice-president of Else Christensen's Odinist Fellowship.

The AFA seceded into two groups, the other one being The Troth. The Ásatrú Alliance was for the most part a reconstituted AFA, dominated by prior AFA members, and acting as a distributor of, previously,

AFA publications.

McNallen's group was revived (as Asatru Folk Assembly, AFA) in 1994, and the two organizations have existed in parallel since, temporarily united within the International Asatru-Odinic Alliance (1997–2002). Gardell (2003) classifies the AA as folkish. The AA defines Ásatrú as “the ethnic religion of the Northern European peoples”.

The Ásatrú Alliance is recognized as a 501(c)(3) non-profit religious organization, or church. The AA was formed on June 19, 1988 by seven kindreds, which were members of the disbanded Ásatrú Free Assembly, who ratified on this day a set of by-laws to preserve and promote the beliefs of Ásatrú in the United States of America.

Christopher: Beliefs create cultures, especially among Heathens. How much is recapturing the old culture of our ancestors and how much is adjusting it to fit present and perhaps future conditions?

Vincent: I would say about 40% ancient and 60% modern. We are always working and learning to better understand our ancient ancestors and how their world view was a part of their day to day life, and then we take that information and try to apply it to our lives today. But there are some obstacles in this.

When Asatru started in the 60s they had much less information then we have to-

day, so Heathery is going through a major changing movement right now. Next we have to always remind ourselves that our world view today cannot be the same as it was to our ancestors because we live in a totally different world then they did.

The more we learn about them, the more we have to try and see what works today that worked then, and what doesn't work now that used to work for our ancestors. When something doesn't fit in our world-view today then we have stop and make adjustments to fill that gap.

Sometime we have to fill gaps in our modern world view with guesses because we don't have enough information about certain things from our past. Asatru is very much a living and changing thing both grounded and driven by the community as a whole.

Christopher: What skills have you provided yourself since becoming Heathen? Are Heathens encouraged to learn old and new skills?

Vincent: There are so many skills from leadership skills, to historical knowledge, to ancient crafting and martial skills. Its different for everyone, but most people do end up learning a lot. Many people say that Asatru, and Heathenry in general, is the religion with homework.

Its because so many of us come into Asatru wanting to know more about our past and our culture that we end up reading

and reading. The next thing you know we have learned more than we ever thought we would.

Heathens push each other to learn, I think, because we want so much to keep our old culture, ways and traditions alive. So we end up wanting to learn how our ancestors did things, and then see if we can learn to do them ourselves.

That starts to push us to learn more modern things as well, to be better at our jobs, to be more skilled than the average person at whatever we do for a living. When we learn about what our ancestors did to earn glory for their names and families, it makes us want to do the same thing now.

Christopher: What kind of person is likely to benefit from Heathenism? What is expected of new kindred members?

Vincent: I think anyone can benefit for learning more about Heathenry and Asatru. At the very least you learn more about the world and people around you (there are a lot of us around these days).

For many people it may open a new way of looking at the world around you, an older more traditional way. For many people it is a more comfortable way of seeing the world. I like to say that for many people, that chose to live their lives as Asatru or Heathen, it feels like coming home. It feels comfortable.

For new members to a Kindred, hospitality

and patience is expected. There must be a willingness to learn, not just about Asatru or Heathenry, but about the other people in the Kindred and the community. They must learn the guidelines that will help everyone to get along well and understand each other. They learn the rules of being a part of a new kind of community and how everyone interact with each other.

Christopher: Where can people learn about Asatru, your kindred and you?

Vincent: There lots of books, essays. There are places all over the internet to learn about Asatru, as well as podcasts and blogs. Here are some on line links that I share with lots of folks that can be a good starting point for those that want to know more.

Websites and open groups with resources:

<http://www.asatru.org/>

<http://www.runestone.org/>

<http://www.thetroth.org/>

<http://heathengods.com/> (open Asatru Site with lots of resources)

<http://www.asatruore.org/> (Reconstructionist Heathenry Site. Very much more Academic view point)

<http://asatru-u.org/beginner/asau-beginner-outline.htm>

<http://ravencast.podbean.com/>

<http://www.ravenradio.info/index.html>

<http://www.hurstwic.org/>

<http://www.worldofthevikings.com/>

<http://digital.lib.upenn.edu/women/hall/viking/viking.html>

<http://www.wandererkindred.org/> (My

personal site)

http://home.earthlink.net/~jordsvin/young_heathens.htm

<http://www.odins-gift.com/>

<http://www.viking.no/>

Yahoo Groups:

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/odinsfolk/>

http://groups.yahoo.com/group/south-west_heathens/

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/warriorsofasatru/>

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Asatru/>

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/heathen-nation/>

http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Heathens_of_the_Desert/

http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Norse-folk_2/

I also have several groups setup for discussion on facebook.com that can be found under my profile (Vikingjack or Vincent Enlund).

Christopher: Is there anything else you would like our readers to know?

Vincent: I cant think of anything right now, but thanks for asking.

Serious Threat to Vodou and Religious Freedom in Haiti

By Mambo Racine

We are in trouble deep! I never expected this.

The Haitian Vodouisant community is alarmed, and with good reason. This post appeared on a Facebook forum - "Mambo Racine there a lot going on now in Haiti, where the vodou community is under assault, they are trying to put another "re-jete" in place. A group of people coming from Israel working at the radio Station Shalom are promoting violence. The constitution is under assault. They are buying kids body tortured them and put them on the street and make it look like the crime come from vodou priest. You should try to contact other voodooizan to have some more informations."

Meetings are being held, and Mambo Carole Demesmin is one of the leaders of the Vodouisant community working to protect our rights.

RIGHT NOW - sign the petition at <http://www.change.org/fr/p%C3%A9titions/les-responsables-de-l-%C3%A9tat-ha%C3%AFtien-supprimer-l-article-297-de-la-constitution-de-1987>

There is a pro-evangelical, right-wing President in power in Haiti right now. Although the Haitian Constitution mandates freedom of religion, there is a perception, at least among evangelicals, that Vodou

is now “fair game”. The “rejete” (rejec-tor) campaigns of the early 1900’s, led by Catholic priests shoulder-to-shoulder with US Marines, caused the destruction of temples and artifacts, and the murders of Houngans and Mambos.

This can not happen again - we are vigilant, we are informed, and the advent of instantaneous world communication will make it difficult for any sort of anti-Vodou campaign to take place in secrecy.

The first rumblings of this new anti-Vodu campaign were heard a few weeks ago, and documented in my note (<http://www.facebook.com/#!/notes/mambo-racine-sans-bout/vodou-is-banned-in-haiti-again-says-the-haitian-internet-newsletter/444071412290301>) “Vodou is banned in Haiti again!” - says the ‘Haitian Internet Newsletter’. The crux of the matter, as described by the Haitian Internet Newsletter, is as follows:

On September 5, 1935, the government of President Stenio Vincent issued a “decret-loi” (a presidential decree) banning “les pratiques superstitieuses” (superstitious practices in Haiti).

What this basically meant was that the vodou religion and vodou practices, which were ranked as superstitious beliefs and practices, were prohibited by law across the land.

Then, in 1987... Vodou was once again LEGAL in Haiti! The Haitian Consitu-

tion of 1987 repealed president Stenio Vincent’s ban on the practice of Vodou with the introduction of Article 297 which states:

All laws, all decree laws, all decrees arbitrarily limiting the basic rights and liberties of citizens, in particular: a. The decree law of September 5, 1935 on superstitious beliefs... (b, c, d, etc...) Are and shall remain repealed.

After 53 long years, the practice of vodou was once again legal in Haiti.

It seems that the newly amended constitution of Haiti abolished Article 297 of the constitution; and some felt that this was equivalent to bringing back the ban on Vodou in Haiti.

I wrote, at that time, “Vodou has not been ‘banned’. The Haitian Constitution mandates freedom of religion.

The definition of Vodou as a “superstitious practice” has gone out the window, that’s why the amendment regarding the prohibition of “superstitious practices” is no longer needed. In fact even at that time, Vodou service never stopped. Of course we can not tolerate any legal impediments to the practice of our religion. But it is erroneous to suppose that during Vincent’s administration Vodou ceremonies ceased.

Vodou will never die, Vodou is the majority religion of Haiti and there are thousands and thousands of non-Haitian Vodouisants

in the USA and Europe.

We must, however, remain vigilant. Although freedom of religion is guaranteed in Haiti, there are constant efforts by American-funded, right-wing evangelical Christians to attack, even physically, our temples, clergy, membership and ceremonies. It is vitally important that we enforce the Constitutional guarantee of freedom of religion. And as international Vodouisants, on these Facebook forums, we must increase our efforts to find ways to support our Haitian brothers and sisters, politically, materially, and in every other way.”

Now, it seems, things are getting worse. A genuine persecution campaign has been launched in the media. It is ironic that the Haitian right wing, which in the days of Francois Duvalier subsidized and subverted Vodou, now has been led by Michel Martelly to turn against the very religion that they supported in the past!

The text of the petition, translated into English, is below. The first thing we all need to do is sign it! What comes after... will be determined by how far the right wing and their violent Christian cronies will go to destroy us.

Sincerely,

Mambo Racine Sans Bout

TEXT OF PETITION, in ENGLISH:

The Vodouisant sector noted with surprise

the repeal of section 297 of the recently amended Constitution of 1987 which annulled the right of a majority of Haitian citizens to exercise their right of spiritual and religious expression, deeply rooted in their African origins.

Vodouisants question this drift, which seems to be in clear collusion with the project designed for some time, consisting of a return to practices of socio-political-economic ostracism dating from before 1946.

The methods applied in the time of the Inquisition in Europe, banned by the Declaration of Human and Citizen Rights in December 1948, were commonplace practices in Haiti.

They consisted of regular attacks, systematic or episodic, against Vodouisants, their places of worship and their residences in order to repress them, prevent them from celebrating the legacy of African deities, and force conversion to Judeo-Christianity, in a word to take away their right to religious freedom.

The Vodouisant sector raises its voice against this attempt to criminalise, in the 21st century, with the help of legislation inspired by fascists, the traditional religions of Vodou; while wondering if this deliberate desire to force the machine to the national history in reverse, is not part of a broad conspiracy to recolonization of the African peoples, whose current holders of power in Haiti, have deliberately mounted,

both as instruments and as accessories.

The Vodouisant sector represents the womb of the Haitian nation, which all the plots concocted by the state, throughout history, has always been prevented from being an active player to participate appropriately alongside other sectors, in the management of the problems of our beloved Haiti.

The failure of the political, economic, administrative and intellectual elite is the result of this stubborn determination to ostracize the Haitians who remain wedded to old traditions.

The head of state is detached from his body.

The Vodouisant sector invites the plotters against the nation, at the national level, to rethink, to avoid stagnation and stalemate. Five centuries of colonization, Inquisition, and persecution of all kinds could not overcome the Vodou that demonstrates today, in many countries in Africa, North America and Latin America Latin, its ability to meet the existential issues of women and men, regardless of skin color, sexual preferences, gender, or social status.

Vodouisants remind us that it was by relying on their spirituality and identity, inspired by their rituals, philosophies and traditions, that the African heroes of Haitian independence were able to end the barbarism erected in said system which was called civilized: Slavery and colonization.

This has helped to put an end to the evangelical Christian Gospel message of inferiority in words and deeds, of black men and women on the planet.

The Vodou sector invites all citizens affected by this institutional drift, particularly, the Houngans, Mambos, hounsisis, servants, students, wise women, herbalists, intellectuals, leaders of grassroots organizations, etc. ... to observation and mobilization, to demand of the current representatives of the State a clear commitment to the following:

a) Regaining, by public communication, Vodouisant trust that the State will never be complicit in passively or actively aggressive acts usually motivated by Christians (Catholics and Protestants) against the lives of Vodouisants, that of their families, their places of worship and property.

b) To instruct the relevant bodies responsible to put an end to verbal attacks, thinly veiled calls to violence that are given daily by some Protestant leaders in their sermons, in songs and choruses in their temples and broadcast on CBC radio and television to their services.

c) Commit in full to the constitutional provision defining the Haitian state as a secular state, strengthening the provisions contained in the Presidential Order of 2003 ... through the granting of a National Day of Traditional Worship in Haiti.

Therefore, the Vodouisant sector requires

the official proclamation of August 14 of each year, the date commemorating the “ceremony of Bois-Caiman” the first major Vodou ceremony, the “first congress of black people” which allowed our ancestors, led by Houngan Boukman, to tap into our African energy to permanently break the mental chains of slavery.

The Vodouisant sector invites concerned citizens, particularly, Houngan, Mambos, hounsis and all defenders of the African tradition, to take preventive action to force state officials to effectively represent all Haitians and not only those designated as those worth of protection by the designated racist national and international order.

Made in Haiti and the diaspora, August 3, 2012.

Pagan Pride Italia **Interview with Vanth SpiritWalker** By Christopher Blackwell

While many of us are aware of Pagan Pride Day, some of us may not beware of how international it has become. I was advised of a branch over in Italy and was introduced to Vanth SpiritWalker just as he was taking off for a trip to the Pagan Summer Camp at the Temple of Diana at Lake Nemi. But he was kind enough to promise time for the interview once he returned.

Christopher: Could you give our readers a bit of background about yourself?

Vanth: Well, I am 49 years old, a web designer by trade although, like many people in these times and in this country, I have to juggle a couple of jobs to try to make ends meet. I live in Rome with my cat Gigi, who is the actual ruler of the place while I am just his obedient servant (isn't it always like this?).

Christopher: How did you become Pagan? What path do you follow?

Vanth: Like most people in this country, I was raised a Catholic, but I soon felt it was not the thing for me: at the age of 10 I refused to continue attending church and take Confirmation and so on, since they were not answering the questions I was asking them.

At the same time I was developing a keen interest in history, which led me to join an

amateur archeological society during my teen years, and in religion and anthropology. I have always been an avid reader, and devouring tome after tome I came to recognize that the ancient paths were actually those that were calling me, giving me the answers I was looking for.

I have investigated several paths over the years, was initiated in a Celtic Fairy Wicca tradition in the US (for a while I have been traveling quite a bit for my former job) during the very early 90s; I have been studying (and still am) with the European Branch of the Foundation for Shamanic Studies and have finally built my own way, which is shamanic in its operational methods and dedicated to the Mysteries of Britain, which I call Arth Teulu. I have gathered inspiration from a number of sources for this, starting from the works of the Matthews, and have elaborated upon a number of sources to create this system that I have recently started to transmit to a very small number of people.

Christopher: How and when did **Pagan Pride** come to be started in Italy?

Vanth: At the end of the 90s there was absolutely nothing for pagans in Italy. I had come across several different people through my trips in the US and UK, and I have been one of the early users of the Internet, so I happened to run into the Pagan Pride Project fairly soon after it was started and volunteered to organize an event in Rome. We first started in September 2001, so this year we will be celebrat-

ing our twelfth anniversary.

Around 2003 we also created the Pagan Pride Italia Cultural Association, which allowed us to move a little more freely and to do a number of additional things on top of the main event.

Christopher: How long have you been with **Pagan Pride Italia** and what role do you play in it?

Vanth: I have been one of the founding members in 2003, and I am president of the association. For the **International Pagan Pride Project**, on the other hand, I am Local Coordinator for Italy and Regional Coordinator for Europe

Christopher: What is it like to be Pagan in Italy at this time?

Vanth: These days things have improved substantially. There are now a number of events all over the country, catering for different kinds of pagans and a growing number of groups practicing together.

The more numerous issues we have to deal with derive not so much by a deliberate will to discriminate, but rather from the simple ignorance of the fact that pagans actually exist. I think this is actually the main problem everywhere, so our focus is mainly in trying to educate and inform correctly

Christopher: How has Pagan Pride worked on changing the public image of

Pagans in Italy?

Vanth: Our main focus has always been in trying to create a relationship with the media, in order to give correct information and reach the largest possible number of people with it, and to educate the pagan community in knowing its own ways better and in knowing how to better convey this correctly to the people around them

Christopher: Pagan Pride starts with Pagan Pride Day. What is its purpose?

Vanth: The Pagan Pride Project is aimed at fighting discrimination through education. As I was saying, most of the issues that pagans have to face are originated by the fact that most people 1) don't know that pagans exist and/or 2) don't know what they actually are and do.

Having public events where people can come and meet pagans will help them understand who we are and what we do, and solve most of the problems. Personally I have seen that most of the people, that run into us at the events, show a marked change in their attitude and are generally pleasantly surprised by what they see

Christopher: Since Pagan Pride Italia formed in 2001, what have been some of its achievements?

Vanth: Well, we are quite happy at the way the event turnout grows steadily, from the 50 people of the first edition to about 350 of the past year; we are also proud of

having massed quite a substantial press review in the past years, which surely helps. Still there are so many things that need to be done that it is difficult to be satisfied with what has passed.

Christopher: I note from the website that it has branched out in several other activities. Could you tell us about some of them?

Vanth: We have been adding activities over the past years: workshops to help the community grow and the Summer Camps, in Borgo Taro at first, and now the one in Nemi. This event is especially dear to me, since the place is so ancient and sacred: we literally live yards away from the ruins of the ancient Temple of Diana, the energies in the area are simply astounding

Christopher: How have other Pagan groups in Italy reacted to Pagan Pride Italia?

Vanth: We try to have a good relationship with all the groups: having been amongst the first to come out with a public activity, we have actually helped most of the groups in their startup. Sadly there are always instances where someone doesn't like you, but you need to learn to live with it

Christopher: What would you like to see accomplished in the future?

Vanth: I would like to see the movement grow more and acquire more courage. Too

many pagans still hide in the shadows, mostly out of fears that are not completely justified. We need to keep informing people, helping those who hide to come out in the sun and practice freely. We will keep organizing events and workshops, to provide correct information and generally to do our best to create opportunities for the community

Christopher: How can people learn more about Pagan Pride Italia?

Vanth: We have a fairly extensive website, both in Italian and in English, at <http://www.paganpride.it>, and we have a social presence on both Twitter and Facebook with updates and events broadcasted constantly.

Heathen, Godi, Shaman, National Coordinator PFI Interview with Sigurd

By Christopher Blackwell

Through one of my Russian friends in the **Pagan Federation International**, I was advised that the national coordinator Sigurd would be an interesting person to interview. As I did a little research I found that there were a variety of things of interest and contacted him. He provided me with time for this interview.

Christopher: How did you end up becoming Heathen and which type of Heathen are we talking about? How long have you been practicing?

Sigurd: I became interested in the paganism in my childhood without realizing it at that time. At age 16, I became interested in magic and almost immediately discovered the existence of the Elder Futhark runes and galdr. After that, I tried a lot of other magic schools, but for me the runes were the most interesting to study and practice. I went through the runes to paganism - naturally to Asatru, because the runes are a part of this tradition.

After some time shamanism appeared in my life, I have chosen for myself (or I had no choice) Siberian shamanism, namely the tradition of Tuva. I have been practicing for 6 years.

Christopher: What is Skidbladnir? How and when did it come to be and what is

your position in it. Where is it located

Sigurd: Skidbladnir is a Moscow Asatru community (we call it godord). I was one of the creators of this godord. It all started with a group of friends, who just got together and celebrated the feast of the Troth Wheel. On the feast of the Winter Nights in 2009, we decided to create a community and bring people together, because in Moscow, at the time, there was no Asatru community. Thus for the feast of the Winter Nights in 2012, our community celebrates 3 years. I served in the community as a Godi from its foundation to the present day.

Christopher: What is your community doing and what are your hopes for the future?

Sigurd: Our main line is to make rituals of the Troth Wheel, provide initiations (on request of people). We can say that our work in real life is quite closed, because in order to get to the ritual, you must at least visit a ting and introduced to the members of the godord. However, we see ourselves more as an open community, because there is no strict criteria for people.

In addition, we have recently launched several pilot thematic meetings to discuss some of the elements of mythology and beliefs of Northern Tradition. Maybe we will continue to do so in the fall. Our activities on the Internet more educational, we answer the questions, give information, posts and repost interesting events about

paganism.

Our hopes for the future are the same as hopes of many Russian re-enactors and pagans - the creation of the village with pagan temple and re-enactors village. But it is quite difficult to do because Asatru is not officially a religion in Russia. We need our own funding, so we can't talk not about religious activities, but instead social and cultural activities, in the case of the creation of re-enactors village - about tourism. Of course no one is saying that the tour will be conducted in the temple, but the theme of re-enactment offers a variety of tourist opportunities, which will at least help to pay for the land.

Christopher: Where can people learn more about your community?

Sigurd: You can view our website - www.skidbladnir.ru but the section with the English language has not been updated for a long time. Maybe after this interview, it will be necessary to do it. In any case, the translation of articles takes a lot of time and effort. We also have a public in VK - http://vk.com/skidbladnir_gestur we are ready for communication in English and Russian languages.

Christopher: Could you tell us a bit about the Asatru Free Union? How and when was it formed? What Heathen communities does it connect?

Sigurd: Asatru Free Union was created quite recently, and has existed for too

short a time to tell a long story about it. AFU (we call it FAU) was established this summer because of the split in Russian Asatruar society. In 2009, the Commonwealth of Russian Asatru was created, but it has not had time to gain many members, as most of the Russian Asatruar expressed dissatisfaction with the policy behavior of some of the leadership and their followers.

The Asatru Free Union was created after the split. The main essence of the FAU is that there is no collective membership, we do not see ourselves as an organization, but rather as a community of people with leaders of various projects. In FAU there is representatives from more than 5 Asatru communities from Russia, Ukraine and Belarus.

Our main task is implementation of both social, more faith related projects, and spiritual development. Some examples of such projects we have a magazine Gylarhorn, a project for the production of jewelry and amulets, a project to rebuild the folk dolls of different traditions, a project for the translation of the texts on the Old Norse and works of foreign authors, and more.

Christopher: What are your hopes for the Asatru Free Union?

Sigurd: The basic idea is to create some common ground for communication in the community of Russian, Ukrainian and Belarusian Asatruar such as on the Inter-

net and in real life. In the Commonwealth of Russian Asatru, and before that in the Asatru community "Ragnar" (one of the oldest communities in Russian Asatru), practiced convening of the Althing, but after the split this event cannot be named Althing.

At the same time the allies of FAU, and the moderates, speak of the necessity of a certain general meeting once a year. We are going to organize similar events. On the Internet, it is planned to create a variety of information resources for the achievement of both the main goal of creating a yearly general meeting and the secondary one of providing information about paganism, creating different FAQs, giving information about the events and other things.

Christopher: Have you been able to form ties with other Heathen groups in Europe!

Sigurd: Of course, I'm the national coordinator of the PFI:) I met with the pagans from Ukraine, Belarus, Sweden and the Netherlands. Unfortunately, apparently, there is a certain taciturnity and a wish that all will leave you alone in not only Russian Asatruar, but also Asatruar from other countries. Wiccans, in my experience, much more talkative and ready for contact.

Christopher: What about the rest of the world?

Sigurd: I do not know whether to call the

Republic of Tyva a part of Russia (legally it is certainly true, but in fact, in the west of Tuva Russian language is very rare), but it is the only Asian region with a tradition of which I am familiar with personally rather than by hearsay. I have never met with American, Australian and African pagans .

Christopher: How could other, learn more about the Asatru Free Union?

Sigurd: FAU was created recently, so we still have no website and the only way to contact us - group on VK http://vk.com/free_asatruar_union

Christopher: How did you become part of **Pagan Federation International**?

Sigurd: It's a funny story. Some time ago, I had a pretty close contact with the magicians of the Western tradition in Russia. One day a girl friend of my friend decided to move to Amsterdam, to get higher education in music. I decided to visit her in Amsterdam, and I found it very interesting to see this famous city. By the time I arrived, Maya (the name of the girl) had met with Morgana, the international coordinator of the PFI. Knowing my active role in paganism, she decided to take me to one of pubmoots organized by Morgana.

It turned out for good reason. There I learned the story of Guidon, former national coordinator PFI (by the way he recently contacted me and now we work together). He almost completely disappeared for a while for personal reasons, and I was of-

fered to take his place during his absence. However, when Guidon returned, he did not want to return to his post, but was prepared to cooperate actively.

Christopher: Have you had a chance to travel and meet with any of the other members?

Sigurd: Except Morgana and a few people I saw once on the same pubmoot, as well as several members in Russia, I have not meet with anyone.

Christopher: What are you trying to accomplish as National Coordinator?

Sigurd: The idea with the creation of a general Pagan Information Center collapsed, the Russian pagans are not ready, or is it just not necessary due to the nature of their thinking. For a long time, I helped to Wiccans to organize themselves and perform some routine work, along with thinking about how we can develop PFI in Russia. The appearance of Guidon was for me very useful, he has a lot of experience in organizing events of European pagans (same pubmoots, we have don't even have such a term). He immediately suggested to me ideas about publishings and meetings. We can say that at the moment that I only coordinate activities, most of the activities are made by gradually appearing activists.

Christopher: Where can people learn more about Pagan Federation International and your part in Russia?

Sigurd: There is a Russian section of the PFI site, which is now beginning to be updated. There is also a group of VK http://vk.com/paganfederation_rus

Christopher: How did you learn to about the Tuva Shamanic Tradition? Isn't it a bit unusual for them to be willing train an ethnic Russian in their traditions?

Sigurd: I faintly remember a time when I got my first drum. I Think it was 2007. At that time I had no idea for what I might need a drum, I liked the sound of it, I liked to meditate with it, I liked the essence of shamanism, which at that time I could not fully comprehend.

In early 2011, I met with Lyudmila Kara-Oolovna Oyun, hereditary Tuvan shaman. Then my friend and now colleague, organized her seminar in Moscow. From that moment my real journey through the world of spirits had started. In the summer of 2011, I first went to Tuva, where I received the blessing to work in the Tuvan tradition. and began my three-year training.

Now Tuvan shamanism is experiencing quite a sad time. Knowledge and power still remain, but they existed for a long time and gradually lost their value. The rituals have been simplified and some have disappeared. More shamans tend to be more interested in making money, then in developing spiritually, so don't be surprised that they would want to conduct seminars and teach the basics of their

craft.

Spirits of the land are still strong and powerful, but if they die, all there will become a lifeless desert.

WE demand the right to marry in any ceremony!!

Interview with Larisa Hunter in Ontario, Canada

By Christopher Blackwell

The last time I interviewed Larisa Hunter it was as an Heathen Gyðja of Kenaz Kindred and author of the book, FULL-TRÚÍ, Working With Patrons In The Ásatrú Pantheon. That was back in the Imbolc 2011 issue of ACTION when she used the name Mist. This time we cover her being an activist, and under her own name.

Christopher: Any particular reason that you are using your own name this time?

Larisa: Well it's an odd thing to say this, but I was somewhat led to choose a name that had significance to the god I was working with. When I took the name 'Mist' I did so to honour Odin. Mist being the name of one of the Valkyries that serves mead in Vallhalla it seemed kind of fitting as I was originally drawn to heathenry by Odin and felt that I needed to give up my birth name for a bit. It was part offering part protection as at the time my husband and I were not outwardly heathen. We were still 'testing' the waters and therefore both of us used alternative names.

At the time (ten years ago) it was almost standard for heathens to take a heathen name, and I think part of it was just trying to accommodate the community. But whatever the real reason behind our decision, I kept Mist for a long time. However, three years ago things began to shift for me.

I was pregnant and given to Frigga. Spending over three years with her has been the most nurturing but also the most frightening because it led me in a completely different direction. It almost seemed that she was more interested in unmasking what I had hidden...and this included my name. There came a point after my surgery last year when she asked for it back.

I have never really denied the gods anything, but this request was hard for me to understand. I had no idea why it was so important to give back a name that I used for such a long time but then it hit me. I was no longer allowed to be masked, I had to live my life in the open! Now that I sit here on the precipice of a second book that declares my life as openly heathen, I figured it was a good idea to do as Frigga wished and give it up! I retired the name three months ago and felt liberated! To be free and openly heathen without fear is extremely empowering.

Christopher: In our last interview, you mentioned that your mother was something of a feminist and an activist. It sort of looks like it may have rubbed off on you. What is the problem with the rules

on who can marry people now, and what is its affect on minority religions?

Larisa: It's more that the laws are wrapped around laws of incorporation. In Canada it's very complicated but to put simply you have to be a 'non-profit' first. Which means you have to incorporate. Now, that does not seem like a big thing really, but it is. It means having thousands of dollars for lawyers and registration with the Federal and Provincial government.

After that you need to spell out specifically what your entire faith group believes in, what the ceremonies are etc...as well as provide a list with names and address of 25 members and proof that you have been here for 15 years. Even after all that, your fate is in the hands of one person.

That hardly seems democratic to me! The issue comes down to the fact that they assume that religions are non-profits, that all of us accept donations, or run on donations, and that all of us have millions of members. The law does not allow for minority religions in that it does not understand them. The needs of minority religions would not be the same as those of major ones and this is where the law fails us.

I did not really intend on being an activist, it just happened. I took this fight personally as year after year I saw my religious beliefs squashed like an ant and found myself pondering why?

The thing is you can get hand-fasted in Canada if you don't mind doing it for a big whopping fee. But the issue to me is not simply about marriage. Anyone could join an already existing agency that would allow you to marry heathens, pagans and druids. But the fact is that no one that you 'want' can marry you. Marriages are often performed by complete strangers who don't know the couple, don't really care about the ceremony they want (unless they are really nice) and often again inflate fees to accommodate 'special' requests.

The issue is the government gets to decide 'who' is authorized to marry you. You cannot get married by your high priestess, by your heathen priest, by your Elder, you have to get married by someone that the government says is legally allowed to marry you. For many people that does not allow them to marry 'how' they want. Many people don't get a custom ceremony or have to have 2 weddings to accommodate the 'legal' and 'desired' elements.

Even when and IF you find someone who is registered there seem to be a lot of costs associated with their services, what if you just wanted your BFF to marry you? What if you just did not want a big wedding and wanted to marry in the backyard? Wouldn't you rather do that for little to no cost? I am not saying people have to work for free but for example, people in our kindred could have me marry them without worrying about a big surcharge and instead give a more modest donation.

To me it makes more sense to be able to marry wherever, whenever and whoever you want without having to go through the work of finding a registered minister or Justice. The law does allow pagans, heathens and druids to get married as long as they get married in the exact ceremony authorized by the Minister who is appointed by the government, hardly that free is it!

To me it's like saying well you can get married as long as you get married the way we (the government) want you too. Hearing the complaints of people who wanted a ceremony that they 'crafted' is enough. It is a big deal for couples to get married on their terms in the ceremony they want because marriage is an important act. I don't know if people really understand this as an issue, but to me it violates the freedoms that I believed I had in Canada. To me, the loss of freedom, any freedom, is a violation.

Christopher: What would you like to see changed to make it possible for minority religions to marry people?

Larisa: Well it would be great if we could get the government to understand that religion and non-profit are not always in synch but that is likely not to happen. The best I think we can hope for is for an amendment or clause added to the law that states that people could have a ceremony by anyone. Maybe just a new way of looking at what a marriage is, because the current laws are so restrictive, it makes

me wonder how anyone has a ceremony anywhere except inside a church on Sunday.

What I am going to ask for is this (with thanks to Austin Lawrence who suggested this alternative):

1. The people who are applying for the marriage license would indicate the person they wish to perform the ceremony

2. The person performing the ceremony takes the number issued by the Marriage License office to same office and applies for a permit. This permit would allow said person to marry the couple who initially applied to marry

3. The license given to the person performing the ceremony is then signed and witnessed by at least three witnesses of legal age to prove the ceremony had taken place.

4. As proof the marriage application and the 'performing' application are submitted together.

To me it's silly not to provide an 'alternative' when there are people out there who are atheists, what then? Outside of having a judge do the marriage parts, you are kind of out of luck! This would provide a way for people to get married by anyone they wanted allowing much more freedom for all of us!!

Christopher: What made you want do something about it?

Larisa: I was just getting tired of having so much denied to us. It's not just about us Heathens, it's about everyone! So many of us have our rights violated and do nothing about it, but for me it began to bother me when I went into the hospital last year for an operation. I was asked who I would like attend me should I need 'last rites'. I said well I want someone in my faith. When asked what my faith was, I replied Asatru. After a long pause, the woman looked at me and said 'that's not one of our approved faiths'. It was the way she said it.

Approved? Approved by whom? That's when I realized that nothing in my country had changed. The last time I brought the issue of non-recognition forward it was squashed as easily as any little voice, but this time I did not give up, I kept calling and e-mailing and being a pain in the you know where until the Minister of Provincial Parliament agreed to meet!

Christopher: How have you decided to make this happen?

Larisa: I am going it alone. I decided it's going to take all the patience I have to win this! I am investigating the law and have found some interesting sections that will help our case such as the Minster having the authority to appoint people to perform marriages and such. Mostly this is going to have to be done using our own laws, rights and rulings. There is no other way to attack this issue, other than to get someone in office to bring it to Parliament.

That is the only way!

Christopher: Who all is involved in this effort?

Larisa: So far the ADF has offered support and some WCC members and a few Heathens. None of the big Heathen org's seemed to show up to help, but I have seen a lot of activity on the petition which makes me think that there are 'supporters' out there just not as vocal as me. I think mostly its very silent, behind the scenes support.

Christopher: Isn't it a bit unusual to get Pagans and Heathens working together in Canada?

Larisa: Yes it is! At least for me it's odd to see them wanting to help me. Maybe because I was Pagan once it is easier, but I was actually surprised to see some of the supporters coming from various places!! It was kind of heartwarming to see that our communities are perhaps not as fragmented as one would think!!

Christopher: Who can take part in this petition?

Larisa: Unfortunately only residents of Canada can sign it. And it has to be 'printed' then signed and mailed back to me. Apparently Canada does not accept 'electronic' petitions which is ridiculous, but in order to fight this I have to work within the guidelines of the law.

Christopher: As you need actual signatures, where can people find the copy of the petition to download to sign?

Larisa: The **petition** can be downloaded here: <http://www.kenaz.ca/wp-admin/post.php?post=8100&action=edit> or on the Kenaz Kindred Facebook group here: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/kenazkindred/> If all else fails e-mail me at mist@kenaz.ca and I can email you a copy.

Christopher: Once signed where should they mail the petition?

Larisa: I put my mailing address on the first page of the petition but if people want to read the petition and gather up lists of signatures then please make sure to mail them all to: 705 Reserve Ave S, Listowel Ontario Canada N4W2L3 Attention: Larisa Hunter

Christopher: How many signatures do you think are needed to make this happen and how much time happen?

Larisa: We are guessing 500-1,000 but since there are not many pagan, heathens and druids in Canada we will take as many as we can get!! The important thing is that people sign this! Without a formal petition to the government we will not win. So signatures are crucial to this succeeding!!

Christopher: Anything else that you would like our readers to know?

Larisa: Just this. It is not just about marriage, it's about the fundamental rights that we don't have! Minority religions will never been seen as legitimate unless we can make them that way. This is not about conformity either it is about bringing light to the minority faiths allowing people to find us, bringing more people in our doors rather than being unable to find us. To me it is about something far greater.

Finally we can all stop living in the shadows and be able to walk with pride saying I AM HEATHEN, I AM PAGAN, I AM DRUID or whatever, it is about freedom for all of us to live openly, without fear and without restrictions!

My prayer is that one day we walk down the street and see heathen temples alongside other churches, that druid groves have a permanent home, the WCC can have a place where people could just 'walk in'. I see this as bringing something that very few know about or 'have seen' into the open. Maybe it would bring more understanding in regards to these faiths and that to me is very important!

We are also fundraising to make an incorporation in Canada for heathen, pagan druids. The funds will go to incorporating a non-profit charity called the HPD Collective. In order to fundraise we will be doing the following.

1. We will be putting 50% of all profits from Friggas Loom a custom embroidery shop that creates hand made

embroidery for the gods

2. Auctioning off a \$300.00 tapestry (hand embroidered) in an online contest with tickets starting at \$5.00

3. Lastly 10% of any profits from Fulltrui: Patrons in Asatru or Embracing Heathenry (coming out in November) will be donated!!

Anyone who wants to support us financially should consider dropping by and checking us out!!

Order of the Circle of Stones South Africa

Interview with Marius Silverwolf Heath

By Christopher Blackwell

I have been in contact with some Pagans and Heathens in South Africa as they worked through the process of getting and protecting religious freedom. Recently I learned of another organization The Order of the Circle of Stones and decided to interview its Arch Priest Marius Silverwolf Heath.

Christopher: Could you give us a bit of back ground of you as a person?

Marius: I started in seriousness at the age of 18, now being 54, now looking back I realize just how difficult it was to find any information in those days. Luckily I bumped into a practitioner from Europe, a professor in the occult, this perchance meeting gave me a good start to defining my path.

Back then it took a lot of hunting to find anyone with the same mindset and there were very few that would “come out” and be available for sharing, this was mainly due to the law’s at the time and the inherent dangers with being associated with the craft.

Such association was punishable by an immediate jail sentence in those days, the applicable law in fact is still in existence and has not been removed from

the law book as yet and is now called the “**Mphumalanga Witchcraft Act**”. In fact there recently was an attempt at revising and re-empowering this act, the Pagan community objected to such an extent that this law and the re-empowerment of it has been placed on hold.

So, most of my early years was spent in solitary practice for the reasons of it being punishable by law and none willing to share with. As I progressed throughout the years, and started meeting up with more people, a little “circle” started to develop, very hidden from public awareness and confined to the privacy of private homes behind curtained windows.

In the year 2000, I decided to start an official coven, I felt it was the right time with the laws then being relaxed and as there was more acceptance or rather “tolerance” of who we as Pagans actually are. After the start of the coven and the growth experienced, and the attraction at the time gained from actually publicly advertising, a risk I took of which paid dues the coven took on a dynamic of it’s own.

During 2005, I met up with Circle of the African Moon and met up with Donna Darkwolf Vos of whom is locally seen as being the first to challenge the laws in term of freedom of religion for the Pagan community. We soon became very good friends and I started aligning my coven with The Circle of the African Moon and progressively started working together with them.

Eventually, I progressively started doing open public ritual on their behalf and was appointed as regional chair. Late 2008 Donna approached me about taking over the Circle of the African Moon's operations in Gauteng. I accepted and was then appointed, in addition to regional chair, as national secretary and elder.

In the end of 2011, I resigned from Circle of the African moon in order to continue with my own coven and tradition. During my time with Circle of the African Moon, I was instrumental in numerous advancements and in discussions with the government and interactions among other groups. By the time of my resignation, I instituted the final documentation to the department of correctional services to gain official recognition for Pagan clergy to do counseling with Pagan prisoners.

I then changed my course and the coven then became an official group with a complete postulancy and study curriculum as a tradition in it's own right. Since the onset of being a group, I have expanded operations to an international level. Currently I have representatives starting up in Holland, New Zealand, Australia and Germany.

In relation to a specific path identification, the group of "**Order of the Circle of Stones**" identifies with all paths under the Pagan and Heathen banner and we are in the process of having "branches" that will be concerned with each individual path. In a recent newspaper interview my re-

sponse to a question of "Am I Wiccan, no, am I a Shaman, no, am I Asatru, no, am I Druid no, Luciferan no, then what am I? I am none of the above but yet I am all of the above, I practice the craft as I see fit with no limitations or dogma's attached.

Christopher: How did you become Pagan and what path do you follow?

Marius: Besides what I covered in the above answer, my personal following is more "**Odinism**", not Asatru, but Odinism because I do not subscribe to the dogma attached to Asatru. I have been Pagan since my early teens, but as I explained above, I started in serious practice at the age of 18. Even though I am an "Odinist" I do practice, teach, and present public ritual for all paths. I do not believe in dogma or limiting myself, I walk the gray path, gray in the sense of having knowledge and the practiced experienced of both the left and right handed paths.

I do not see myself as having "become" a Pagan but rather that I "am" a Pagan. I have always had this seed within me, even before the age of 18 there was a realization, not of identifying myself as anything other than being different to those around me. From the onset of me identifying myself as being Pagan at the age of 18, I refused within myself to be subjected to any form of dogma in the spiritual sense and as such I carved my way through many growth pains and perceptions that I came across and none of these perceptions did I just accept without question.

Every step I took, and every step I still take I insist that every point of the ways of old must be definable and I must satisfy myself that I can define and validate each point and concept in order for me to accept it and move onto the next. This to me is of crucial importance and that is why I do intense investigation and research to achieve this unforgiving urge to be able to not only validate things for myself, but with me teaching others I must be able to validate to those questioning me, and I must be able to answer each question that may be asked.

This ongoing quest is done not only by research on the mundane surface but more importantly by communicating with my deity's and in close "conference" I satisfy my thirst for what I consider to be the truth and even though I follow this manner of validation, I nevertheless challenge my students to not just accept what I say, but, if need be, to question the validity of what I share and this allows me to give utterance to my conviction of the truth and as such I continually refine and grow within my path

Christopher: What is it like practicing in South Africa?

Marus: I don't actually ever think of what it is like, as a Pagan / Heathen (PS Pagan-Heathen in definition is the same thing and both are names that were given to us by the Christians), I subscribe to the laws of the land as it applies to daily living and the mundane existence. But when it

comes to my spiritual path, I perceive it to be above the laws of the land of which is largely based on the Christian teachings. I do not transgress any mundane law, or walk with an "in your face" attitude in everyday life, and as such, I find the "Freedom" to practice my craft, and live according to my belief system, obviously within the constraints of the mundane law of the country.

I don't walk around with a sword ready to cast circle, according to the law it can be considered a lethal weapon and should not to be carried in public, simple. Yes it always has been difficult to get venues for larger functions because of who we are and how people outside of our following perceives us, but I merely work around this. It is amazing how easy it becomes to find Pagan friendly venues when one doesn't attract the negativity of stressing about it. Even so most practitioners including myself are still to an extent reserving our practice to private home and backyards.

I have never had any problems with any neighbours when presenting open ritual in my own "front" yard and no community interference even though there is a Christian Afrikaans church three blocks away from me. I even have Christian clergy friends that know exactly who and what I am, and we have great chats and compare notes. Life I believe is what you make it, choose to see it as a difficult path and difficult it will be, walk with confidence and amazingly the path becomes much

more less rocky. In simple terms, the law of attraction.

The most common interference does however come from the larger Christian communities and the resulting condemnation as a result, but this is a fact of life, not only in South Africa but so too in all Christian dominated countries. This must be realized and accepted due to the fact that we go against the very grain of the Christian religion, and to not realize this is to deny myself the inner freedom and confidence to continue with my religious practice without hinderance.

Christopher: I noted the Circle of Stones web site mentions was to **Service the Pagan and the Heathen community.**

Marius: At the time that I started the group initially as a coven, it took two years of planning, pre 2000 and the designing and writing of many of the documents and study materials of which is still ongoing. As you state the web mentions "service to the "Pagan and Heathen" community and this is done by the offering of open public rituals, education relating to any path, spiritual guidance and counseling as well as a full postulance and degree system with registered clergy qualifications. The result of intense research and the resulting study material born from this research has made this possible, an ever ongoing and growing process.

Responsible and correctly applied methods of teaching is crucial to the develop-

ment of a sustainable and strong community, we as Pagans and Heathens adhere to the concept of "freedom", freedom for the individual to practice as they see fit and utilizing personal methods of expression, this is how it should be and it is crucial that we protect this "freedom". However this freedom can only be truly realized and practiced with success when a solid foundation has been laid down and this is where organizations such as The Order of the Circle of Stones and other's becomes key players in the laying of these foundations.

Now as I have expressed that we do not adhere to dogma, these teachings or rather sharing of knowledge to those that seeks it must never be put across as a dogma and having said this I validate why I state this, there are some that within their group they attempt to create this dogma condition and there are those that falls into the pit of following like sheep, thankfully these followers soon realizes that they are caught up in a dogmatic group and move on.

Unfortunately there is the small pocket that will continue to bow down to this unfortunate condition. As I stated, small pockets of such groups, covens, circle, or whatever the identifying name. Why does this happen? Over many decades the human race has been indoctrinated to act and think in this way. It will take many more years to diminish this influence and to gain the individuals right of freedom in that sense to truly manifest on a large

scale.

Christopher: Why is there five stages in training? Could you tell us a bit about it?

Marius: I decided on the five degree system, the same in context to the system used by Circle of the African Moon, and with my involvement with them and in the act of the re-structuring and re-design done during my time with them I naturally maintained many of my own designs and adopted some of theirs structures.

This system I find to be very balanced in relation to the path that the student walks and differing levels of gaining what is needed in order to complete this degree system with substantial gain. Between each degree there is a minimum year and a day before consideration of the level that can be achieved. In few cases, where people with extensive knowledge join the group, obviously credit will be given for the level of these people are at and as a result they will “fast track” to the degree that they should be at.

I firmly believe that in order for the correct growth of the individual to manifest it is crucial to have a path were the growth of such an individual can gain the true understanding of each level of which is very defined in the sense of expected outcome of each level and the resulting pattern of growth, but as mentioned above this by no means is cast in stone and is dependent on the individual. Each step in life in general must be gained with a solid footing

in order to gain a solid foundation as well as the sense of achievement within the individual being so much more profound, to shortcut this understanding in life is to deny strength of character and of standing of a personal position within the larger picture.

Christopher: What services are provided by the Circle of Stones.

Marius: This is done by the offering of open public rituals, education relating to any path, spiritual guidance and counseling as well as a full postulance and degree system with registered clergy qualifications.

Christopher: How often do you meet, and what seasonal ceremonies are practiced? Are these private or public ceremonies?

Marius: We work on the eight spoked wheel of which in essence is the celebratory festivals tied to the changing of the seasons as well as the solstices and equinoxes. These periods are also linked to the mythology of the god and goddess, of which the mythology is the depiction of the seasons and it's many aspects relating to the individual and their life path as well as their seasonal paths. So, public open rituals are offered for all eight festivals called sabbats.

We also meet for the full moon happenings of which is called esbats. These are by invitations but not exclusively, there are a few full moon rituals that are open to

public attendance.

The main festivals are as follows:

Samhain – 30 April

Yule – 21 June

Imbolc – 2 August

Ostara – 21 September

Beltane – 1 November

Litha – 21 December

Lammas – 2 February

Mabon – 20 March

(These dates are aligned to the Southern Hemisphere seasons)

Christopher: What are some of the goals for the future?

Marius: There are many goals that we are planning and so too goals that are being realized as we speak. The main goal at this point is the currently being rolled out, international coverage of the group getting eventually as many representations across the globe as is possible.

The main aim of this goal is aimed at harnessing many differing backgrounds and differing understanding of the different paths and collectively to build not only a tradition of standing, but to construct a database of knowledge and training material, refining mythology of the differing paths in order to have the result of a globally structured record of mythology and training material.

This can lead to the reconstruction and regain of the pagan and heathen community all over the world thereby having the result

of a solid and firm groundwork on which future generations can continue to build and strengthen our standing as a recognisable and structured community. Within the realization of this goal, the vastly written material already in existence by many an author will obviously be a part of this database, and by including these writings to so too assist and support those scribes that has given us these already written materials.

This eventual database will not be limited to the group but will be made available to all other interested groups and will result in the further enhancing of the contents. We are looking at the community at large and we are not reserving this as an internal and reserved system, but one that can be utilized on a larger scale. There are many goals that is being planned and in order to become part of this, it would be best to join us in our quest and to be instrumental in making these goals a reality.

Christopher: Is there anything else that you would like our readers to know?

Marius: Indeed there is, the Pagan and Heathen community has been limiting themselves for far too long to backyards of private homes, hiding and practicing in a certain amount of secrecy even though we now enjoy to a large extent the “freedom” to practice our religion. This I, and my group, intend to change, not in the immediate future, but certainly as a goal to be achieved.

The Order of the Circle of Stones is a group dedicated and committed to the uplifting of the Pagan and Heathen “religions” or rather paths. With this in mind, the greatest and most crucial point is in the harnessing and involvement of the community at large. The Pagan and Heathen communities has to reach a point where commitment and dedication to the realization of re-gaining standing in the larger community can be realized. This group does not align with the government and it’s laws, but rather with the main aim being centered around the community and the well being of all Pagans and Heathens alike.

Great work has been done by many other groups and individuals on differing levels and gains and goals has been achieved, but we must bear one thing in mind, those that have done these works has to now get the younger generation in a position to take up the reigns and to ensure the we continue to grow and prosper. These times are the times where this is now taking place and this can only be achieved by an aura of unity.

There is strength in unity and the maturing of the Pagan and Heathen community and the leaders of these communities must have the vision that in order to grow beyond our lifespan, we need to look to the future and put in place not only written material, of which has been extensively already been done, but to now concentrate of the laying of foundations for future generations. It does take a lot of work

to achieve but it is crucial. In the same breath, we must maintain close scrutiny to our current position, for the defining and refining now within our current position of growth is even more crucial in order that foundations laid will weather time, and the tests, that will be experienced.

Pagan Pride, South America Interview with Madelaine Bentiez

By Christopher Blackwell

Pagan Pride now is in South America and the regional coordinator for the whole of South America resides in Chile, Madelaine Bentiez. I was directed to her by Jill Medicine Heart here in the United States. Madelaine was kind enough to give me time for this interview.

Christopher: Could you give our readers a bit of background about you as a person?

Madelaine: I’d love to. I’m 34 years old. I majored in social communications with focus in publicity but I’ve worked mainly in social & human development projects. I was born in La Paz, Bolivia in a very traditional yet loving family. I was lucky enough to spend time with my grandparents during most of my childhood and teen years and I’m also lucky to have parents that I love and admire very much and with whom I have a healthy relationship.

Currently I live in Santiago, Chile with

my husband. I'm a Master Reiki and a pagan priestess. I have a personal devotion to Goddess Hecate, and among other things I host a Spanish radio show every Saturday at 6pm CST, through Pagans Tonight Internet Radio Network. And I also coordinate the PPD events form central and South America Region.

I consider myself a quiet, passionate and fair person. A lot of my friends describe me as diplomatic, serious person yet easy going.

I inherited from my father an acute dyslexia but also my mother's passion for reading. So I always spend time reading and researching about religions, witchcraft and Traditional Wicca.

In my spare time I like do crafts like hand made Book of Shadows, candles and incenses.

Christopher: How did you become Pagan and what Path do your follow?

Madelaine: I'll like to give the context of how I became a Pagan. Despite being mainly Catholics my grandparents had a strong interest in the esoteric world, herbalism, witchcraft, ceremonial magick and Vedic philosophy, mostly because of their parents. They were always respectful of pagan and Andean traditions and they did perform rituals and celebrations in honor of the Pachamama, their ancestors and the earth spirits. However my parents chose not to follow these interests and fo-

cused on being strictly catholic when they had children.

Al though I was very involved with Catholicism, I didn't feel quite at home. My mother, my brother and I always had premonitions, clairvoyant dreams, and encounters with family ghost, etc. But my mom shut off that ability completely. I had to kept my interest in Witchcraft a secret at first, because of my family's history.

My great grandfather who was a ceremonial Magus had an affair with a very beautiful woman who was also a witch, he was open about the affair but he didn't want to leave my great grandmother. My great grandmother started to get sick all the time and started to lose her mind, the doctors never found anything that can cause her illness. And each year she got worst. My great Grandfather left her for his mistress soon after.

The housekeeper with my grandparents found a ritual burial in the garden that had shoes, clothing that belonged to my great grandmother when she was a teen. After they have work with "chamanes" to break the curse, my great grandmother recovered her mental health, but her body was to week to recover completely. She passed away ten months later.

My mother remembers the last year of her grandmother, how scary was to hear her screaming and see her suffering, but also she remembers the months she got better out of the blue, and tried to make up for

the time she have lost.

Long after my grandparents died, my father was repairing the house ceiling; he found a small statue of a chubby man rolled on virgin wool hidden under the roof. It had two nails fixed on the eyes and a third one fixed on the heart, he felt the figurine resembled someone but he wasn't sure.

When he showed it to us my mother recognized it was the depiction of her uncle who have died blind and from a heart stroke when she was to be married to my father.

I stopped going to church when I started the University, and by the time I finished my career, I came out of the brooms closet to my mother. But she already knew I had a different choice of religion. I didn't know the whole story about my family, just very little information my uncles told me. My mother shared with me the whole story after I had an encounter with my great grandmother's ghost.

So, to make a long story short, she explained to me why my parents thought it was better for us to be raised in a catholic house hold without syncretism, without magick, and without paganism. And because she loved me, and saw that as soon as I found wicca I seemed more balanced and happier, even though se didn't understand it, she gave me her blessing.

Been a neo-pagan, instead of a pagan is

quite interesting. In my country the roots of The Andean Cosmology and ancestral beliefs are very much alive. The Bolivian Altiplano is a plateau filled with mysticism and ancient traditions.

Many of these traditions -in order to survive – had suffered a syncretism with Catholicism that has largely changed the external energy of the deities, demi-gods and earth spirits. In many cases they have nipped in the bud the cults in order to remove its energies. Even though it is harder to get in touch with the pure essence of the pre-colonial shamanism it is possible to find families and communities that have kept alive the energies of the earth at its ancient vibration.

Ever since the current president, who has native origins, was elected he has been promoting the revival of the ancient traditions and supporting a secular state that allows freedom of worship. For instance, in 2009 he approved a law that made June 21st a public holiday because of the winter's solstice in which every year we commemorate the death and reborn of the sun, better known as the the Aymaran New Year. (of course that also benefits most of the neo-pagans as well)

Many people have had a hard time trying to understanding why I became interested in a European tradition having such a rich tradition in my own country. For instance a few years ago, when I joined the Pagan Federation International, Morgana Sythove introduced me to a Gardnerian

who- by those chances of life- was living in Bolivia.

But to my surprise when we finally met he told me that he had found shamanism a lot more fulfilling than Wicca and even though he is an initiated Wiccan he doesn't practice it anymore.

While he was telling me his experience I realized that he had found his true path in Bolivia and that his happiness resided in shamanism and Andean cosmology. Then he told me he didn't understand why can I be interested in Wicca and not in shamanism if I was born in Bolivia.

The answer I gave him was that in the same way that he had found his home with the Inca Gods, despite him been European. I had found my home with the children of the stars and the gods of Wicca. And that even though I was born in a very beautiful and rich land, they found a way for me to hear their calling, in a way I just couldn't ignore.

Some people have told me that not appreciate what one has it's a very common psychological phenomenon. But that wasn't my case, I appreciate my ancestor's traditions but when I came across Wicca, I felt something I never felt before. I always believed in the importance of understanding and connecting to the traditions and energies of the place where one lives, not only to learn how to listen the Earth but also to be able ask for permission to work with other energies from

other places.

I had the chance to get a glimpse of some branches of Wicca and paganism, for a while I navigated in Correllianism, but It wasn't for me. I feel drawn to Traditional Wicca instead of eclecticism. I'm a sincere seeker looking for the best initiators for me, with patience and perseverance, while honoring the God and Goddess.

Christopher: Are there any Wiccan groups or schools in your area?

Madelaine: Too few. The year 2004 together with Efemeobe Tari and others who are not yet public, we founded the 1st Bolivian Wiccan community and the Wiccan-Bol School. Both institutions dependent on the WiccaBolivia which started as a self created coven. Although the community continues to operate with public activities in the city of La Paz and Santa Cruz, the school has been working behind closed doors for the last couple of years and with no plans to reopen it.

Despite the fact that, during these 8 years that we have been conducting public events, many people have become interested in us, our growth in terms of size has been very slow and gradual. We started as eclectic, but with the passing of the years we are trying to keep our practices as closer to Gardner's teachings.

For me it has been very difficult being away from the day to day life of my community for so many years, Thanks to the

gods I've met wonderful people in Chile with which it has been an honor to share rituals. Some of them belong to the Paganus Community, which was my second home for the past 4 years. This community was founded by a Chilean Alexandrian Priestess who is currently living in England. At the end of last year I retired from the Paganus community mainly due to time reasons.

In addition to these communities I know of the existence of some smaller groups that have managed to stay afloat, but in general it has been quite difficult for many groups, especially because of the rivalry and fight of egos.

Christopher: How did you learn about **Pagan Pride** and how did it happen that you become the South American Regional Coordinator?

Madelaine: I learned about the PPD through the internet and the news coming from other countries in South America that had begun to do events. When I read about the project objectives I liked them very much and I decided to translate the information on the PPD page to share it with the members of my community. Many of them already knew the project existed, but until then no one was aware that it was possible to be part of the project officially mainly because only three of us were proficient in English.

At the beginning we began to celebrate it unofficially since almost nobody had come

out of the broom closet, and because many people still associated the word Wicca or Paganism with a bomb attack that occurred in La Paz during 2006, when a U.S. citizen and a Uruguayan woman, killed two people and wounded other four. In that incident the U.S. citizen had declared to be pagan, follower of Wicca and Satanism.

Finally, in 2008, we decided to take a step forward and begin to celebrate the pagan pride day in La Paz and Santa Cruz, because we believe it was a very friendly ways to provide a space where people from different traditions could gather to celebrate their right to freedom of worship and to educate about religious tolerance. I was the co Coordinator for the city of Santa Cruz, Bolivia until last year and also I was actively involved with the organization of the PPD event since 2010.

In 2011 the PPD Board of Directors published an ad in which they were looking for a regional coordinator for the Latin America region. I applied and I was selected. I started in the position in August of last year. So far it has been a very pleasant experience and I am very happy to help the project to in any way I can. It has been a big challenge, but the great thing about it is that the majority of the local coordinators in my region are highly motivated people, who are doing the best to ensure the PPD becomes a reality in their own cities. Despite the classic difficulties that arise during the early years, it's a fantastic thing to be able to see them harvest

their own achievements which benefits the whole community.

Christopher: What is it like for Pagans in Bolivia and the rest of South America.

Madelaine: It is a constant challenge. For neo-pagans who follow traditions of European origin is often a difficult and lonely journey. First because the alternatives available in Latin America for people who do not speak English are very slim. While there is much information on the Internet in Spanish, is often unreliable. The books that come in Spanish are usually expensive and many of the translations present some technical errors.

For the pagan indigenous groups it has also been difficult. Many indigenous communities are often quite closed, mostly due to the years of oppression they had to deal with in the past and the racism that still exists in America.

Due to religious syncretism, which paradoxically has allowed these traditions to survive the conquest, many of the concepts and religious myths have been demonized, especially regarding the use of magic, the role of women in religion and the connotation of the word Witch. Today it is still possible to find cases where people is still been murdered and persecuted because they were thought to be witches.

On the other hand, as for the new shamanic movement, there is much debate about the overcharges made by some

groups to the people who want to participate in ceremonies with ancient herbs like ayawasca. Also the religious proselytism made by these groups has made the most of the neo-pagan community uncomfortable.

The funny thing is that as neo-pagans we get patronized by most of the new shamanic movement, and placed in the same bag as Satanists, atelic, gay, lesbian, pagans, etc. by most book religions.

Christopher: What are you trying to accomplish for Pagans in South America?

Madelaine: I just try to do the best I can to be able create bridges between pagans, to promote those plans and initiatives that will help people to focus in the similarities to unite instead of the difference to divide. I had the honor of representing the PFI's Bolivia's Chapter at the Pagan Federation 40th anniversary held in London last year, and for Latin America there is still a long way to go, mainly because there is very little possibilities to access or approach well organized and established traditional groups/traditions or Orders.

Christopher: Have you been able to contact some of the other Pagan religions within South America?

Madelaine: Yes. I've been in contact with other communities since 2005, but thanks to the internet radio show that I host, I have met people from all over the world and from different traditions and paths

within Paganism. I always try to interview people of different traditions and spiritual paths, so the listeners can appreciate the diversity of points of view, protocols and systems of beliefs and to build bridges between people. In Latin America, the neo-pagan community has gradually begun to grow. It is easier to find more groups that are managing to stay afloat despite the typical ego fights.

Christopher: What about interfaith work? Have you had chance to talk about Pagan religions with the Christians?

Madelaine: Very little. Almost every time in a very superficial matter mainly, because sometimes its not easy for people to understand that freedom of religion or tolerance means to “all religions” not just the few that they are more comfortable with.

Christopher: What about the future? Are any other Pagan Pride groups forming elsewhere in South America?

Madelaine: There has been a growing interest in the PPD. Perhaps because of the media impact each LC has made in their own cities. Generally, from August to October, there is a lot of movement because we are in the season of events, so it is very usual to receive messages from people that are interested in doing events in their areas.

So far we have events in Porto Alegre, Brazil, La Paz, Bolivia, Santiago, Chile,

Mexico City, Mexico and Panama City, which have been doing events for more than 2 years. This year also will be the first time for Buenos Aires, Argentina, San Jose, Costa Rica, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic; Brasilia, Brazil and Bogota, Colombia.

Most of the people that are interested in the Project comes with a sincere intention to make a difference in their cities. But sometimes people have come to the project because they want to have a monopoly of the Pagan community in their countries, and they have been very disappointed when they have realized that each LC coordinates just its location/area/city and not an entire country. In the worst cases I have also encounter people that have tried to monitor and decide who can be a pagan and who should not, and that was just not acceptable. Some cities have their pagan communities divided between fights and rumors, so it can be a real challenge for each LC to be able to ensure a “neutral zone” for the whole community.

Christopher: Where could our readers learn more about Pagan Pride and what it is doing in South America? Is there any way that someone could help you and the other Pagans in South America?

Madelaine: To find information about the PPD in Central or South America one can turn to the web pages created each local coordinator for your events. The Facebook lately has become a great tool to disseminate this information and to have more

direct contact with the coordinators of the cities that are active in the project. Below I'm including some links to these pages:

Argentina, Buenos Aires

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/D%C3%ADa-del-Orgullo-Pagano-Ciudad-de-Buenos-Aires-Argentina/366911863362919?ref=ts>

Bolivia, La Paz

<http://www.wiccabolivia.org/orgullo-pagano.aspx>
<http://www.facebook.com/#!/pages/Orgullo-Pagano-La-Paz-Bolivia-P%C3%A1gina-Oficial/342278512505070>

Brasil, Puerto Alegre

<http://www.facebook.com/DOPPortoAlegre?ref=ts>

Brasil, Brasilia

<http://www.facebook.com/PaganPrideDayBrasilia?ref=ts>

Chile. Santiago

<http://orgullopaganochile.wordpress.com/>
<http://www.facebook.com/OrgulloPagano-Santiago>

Colombia, Bogota

<http://www.facebook.com/groups/orgullo.pagano.bogota/>

Costa Rica, San José

<http://www.facebook.com/PaganpridedaySanJoseCostaRica?ref=ts>

Dominican Republic, Santo Domingo

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Dia-del-Orgullo-Pagano-en-Santo-Domingo/294952493934618?ref=ts>

Mexico, Ciudad de México

<http://www.facebook.com/#!/orgullopagano.mexico>

Panama, Ciudad de Panamá

<http://www.facebook.com/DOPPanama?ref=ts>

Christopher: Is there anything else that you would like our readers to know?

Madelaine: I just wanted to thank you for the interview, and for your patience. If anyone will like to contact me you can find me on Twitter or Facebook @lamadduk. Blessed Be.

ACTION

The official newsletter for Alternate Religions Educational Network
Founded Samhain 2004

Christopher Blackwell: Editor

Bill Kilborn: Web Guy