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SUSAN MURRAY & BETH ROBINSON

With offices in Middlebury and Burlington

Middlebury (802) 388-6356

Burlington (802) 864-0217

smurray@langrock.com brobinson@langrock.com

Langrock Sperry & Wool, LLP

ATTORNEYS AT LAW

Spiritual Essence: Bio-Diversity, Queerness & the Sun God Lugh



pippin, the radical faerie

Hoof and Horn, Hoof and Horn – All that dies shall be reborn. Corn and Grain, Corn and Grain – All that falls shall rise again.

Neo-pagan Lammas Chant

August – the days are hot and sticky, the corn is growing higher, and zucchini are in such abundance that the ritual of nighttime squash disposal (on your neighbor's porch) seems to be part of a wild bacchanalian frenzy. It's not exactly a time that we associate with death. Yet for the ancient Celts, the late summer festival of Lughnassa or Lammas is the beginning of the end. In the ritual cycle, August is the time when the Sun God Lugh, variously known as the Green Man, Cernunos, the Corn King or the King Stag, lays down his life so his people may eat of his abundant harvest.

Here in Vermont, we too can begin to sense the end – it's time to start thinking about getting our wood stacked for the winter and stor-

lights are a reminder of the ancient solstice festivals of light on the darkest day of the year, so Lammas is present in the plethora of church suppers and county fairs that dominate the rural landscape of Vermont in August. Remnants of the Lammas story are seen in the Catholic mass as well, with the breaking of bread echoing the Lammas sacrifice of the Corn King.

Indeed, the Christian story is suffused with the primary myth of a Sun god sacrificing himself that his people may live. One of the best modern examples of the Lammas connection to Christianity is "The Wasteland," T.S. Eliot's long poem about the King whose life and prosperity is connected to the life and prosperity of the Land and his People.

Vermonters are constantly seeing both conscious and unconscious representations of the sacrifice of the Corn King. The Bread and Puppet Theater based in the North East Kingdom town of Glover has

ed to natural cycles and bio-diversity. Lammas is our warning shot across the bows of summer. "Remember!" it seems to cry out – "The Harvest is abundant but you must prepare for the lean times to come!" In modern America, lean times are now limited to those who can't play the economic game, who don't fit into corporate America's goal of unlimited consumption.

We used to get strawberries only June, tomatoes in July and August and corn in August and September. They tasted better and we appreciated them more for their special limited appearances. After our short northern growing season, we canned our harvest at home in our kitchens or went without – eating winter squash, potatoes and onions along with our dried, salted meats. We, as a people, needed the primary myth of Lammas to remind us of our summer bounty and the need to plan for winter dearth.

Today, corporate food production is about limiting diversity, ensuring a steady supply of edible, processed products that ship well, don't blemish and taste horrible. Small, local farms are going under at a rate that should terrify us and move us to action to ensure that a celebration of bio-diversity, local harvests and vigorous assertions of bountiful community rituals continue to inform and enrich our lives and bodies.

The Lammas Festival is a ritual celebration of the work of the

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ing enough food to take us through the dark times to come. And, in some places in the Northeast Kingdom, some of us nervously listen to Steve and Mark's Eye on the Sky to see if we might need to cover up the tomatoes in anticipation of an early frost.

Lammas is part of cycle of "primary myths" that have been subsumed or assimilated into the modern Christian and secular worlds. The God is born of the Goddess at Yule on the Winter Solstice, he grows strong with the increasing light until he sates his lust at the fertility festival of Beltane on May 1st. By August he is at his peak and is cut down, like the grain in the fields, to support his children. He begins the long journey to the underworld that culminates at Samhain (or Halloween) as the Winter darkness returns. Then he is reborn again at Yule, on the darkest day and the beginning of the return of the light. The whole cycle is a celebration of unbridled sexual energy, birth, growth, fertility and death.

As queers, we too are constant reminders to the community of the joy and power of sexual energy. This is both frightening and empowering to the larger community and reminds us all of our primal history as creators and survivors.

Just as the Christmas tree

used the Lammas story for decades in their annual pageant which begins with the rise and fall of the Goddess and ends with the nature people sacrificing the patriarchal figure in an orgy of flames. Bread and Puppets' sourdough rye bread, made by founder Peter Schumann from a starter used by generations of his German immigrant family, is a clear continuation of a Lammas tradition going back thousands of years. Hundreds of Vermonters eat Peter's delicious transformation of grain into food every year. It is a ritual that some of us have been participating in for a generation. More generally, all summer bonfires are remnants of the Lammas fires, which were lighted on hill tops throughout the harvest season in the Celtic countries.

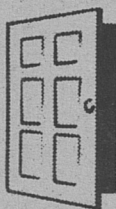
For queers, who have often been denied our natural life by the dominant culture, rituals of connection to the earth and to the cycles of the land often hold a special significance. In a puritan country that looks to nature as the enemy (and 'civilization' as the ideal) suppression of our queer bodies and souls has been reclaimed by queer people. We represent a return to primary myth and connection to a story unsullied by two thousand years of political, spiritual and social oppression.

In a world that is connect-

community to create a harvest that will sustain them through abundance and the lean winter months. Bio-diversity, gender diversity, sexual diversity and community diversity are integral to the cycle of life we celebrate at Lammas. So when you buy your fresh Vermont-grown sweet corn at the farmers market, sacrifice a few kernels to the Corn King, acknowledge Lugh as he rides high in the sky at the peak of his majesty and dig deep into the abundance of the Vermont harvest. Dance around the Lammas fires, go to your County Fair and then start stacking your winter wood pile and canning your tomatoes, for Lugh is dying and cold is returning to these northern fields, woods and mountains.

For more information on harvest festivals or buying locally grown food contact the Northeast Organic Farmers Association at (802) 434-4122 or www.nofavt.org. Tell them the Faeries sent you. Happy Lammas! ▼

Pippin is also known as Christopher Kaufman. He is an anarcho-pagan radical who will be attending the Faerie Camp Destiny Lammas Festival. He can be reached at Pippin@sover.net.



Nancy Ellen Brownsword, MA
Licensed Clinical Mental Health Counselor
COUNSELING AND PSYCHOTHERAPY

802.862.0836

168 BATTERY STREET, BURLINGTON VT 05401

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George Brewer
REALTOR,
CRS, GRI, CRB, ABR
langmidd@sover.net



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www.langteam.net
(802) 388-1000



Jennifer Ponder
REALTOR,
MPM & OITM volunteer
jennponder@hotmail.com