

Whooping it up with Walt:

Scenes from a Radically Fey Birthday Party

BY WYCKED FAYE

"Do I contradict myself? Very well, I contradict myself. I am large. I contain multitudes."
Walt Whitman,
Song of Myself

"If you can't dance, it's not my revolution."
Emma Goldman

OITM wanted a first person account of a recent Radical Faerie Gathering at Faerie Camp Destiny, the sanctuary land in Southern Vermont. Here it is. But first, two disclaimers:

1. At a gathering, everything is optional. No one ever has to do anything they don't want to do or wear what they don't want to wear, and nobody should make them feel lousy about their choice.

2. At any given time, people choose to do different things. Whenever I am describing an event I witnessed, others were doing very different things and having different first-person impressions. Ask them.

This particular gathering ran over Memorial Day weekend. About 60 queer folk were there. Let's start with a scene from Sunday night: Radical Faerie Dinner Theater.

Picture this: about 60 men and women sitting around on picnic tables and pillows, eating pasta puttanesca by torch light in the

woods. An ancient play, the prologue begins, "All Hail Inanna, Great Lady of the Heavens. All Hail Inanna, First Daughter of the Moon." Many voices join in, some laughing, some serious. Mirth and Reverence. The woods echo with these ancient words, written thousands of years ago, miraculously preserved from ancient Sumerian rituals to the goddess before the rise of the patriarchy.

Inanna descends in fabulous drag: campy, yet totally the sacred in-between. Her bereaved sister, the Queen of the Underworld, replete with a fright wig, and breathing fire, lashes out and kills Inanna with her grief and anger at the loss of her love. Then Inanna's father, Enki, creates from beneath his fingernail two creatures 'neither male nor female,' who, because of their place outside of clear gender identities, are able to pass through the gates of the underworld to bring Inanna back to life.

These ancient words came alive for a circle who knows well the power of slipping through the cracks and the gates that modern culture has erected to keep us out.

Memorial Day weekend is also Walt Whitman's birthday weekend (180 this year — Salut!), so we spent a weekend reading poetry, communing with the nature Whitman so powerfully — and sometimes disturbingly — sang, and most of all, remember-



Radical Faeries in the 1998 Pride parade in Burlington

ing, as a tribe, why we do this thing we do and how we can deepen our trust of each other and of our vision.

Some background about trust: the northeast faerie circle has been spending a lot of time and energy this past year learning more about consensus and how to use it to actually make decisions about our land efficiently and with a sense of fun. At one circle, former Disco Hierophant Bambi said, "we need to make this process dance." Since that keen oracular upchuck, we have been exploring how we can do this consensus thing and make it faerie, fun, with a good beat you can dance to.

One of the keys to making consensus work smoothly and quickly is trust: trust that each person in the circle is coming from a good place, is willing to trust the group's collective wisdom, and expresses concerns out of love and trust, not out of a desire to manipulate or passively-aggressively push an agenda. Any of you who have worked in consensus-based

organizations know what I mean.

This gathering focused on the question of personal and communal trust; it was appropriately called "In Walt We Trussed."

Some faeries like to approach our theme through ritual, sacred space where we can explore risk in a safe spiritual context. For this, about 20 of us put together a ritual of Truth or Dare, with small groups playing this wicked little trust game in little candle-lit circles all through the woods. Occasionally, someone on a dare would moon an intense group. Mirth is reverence. In circle the next morning, one person who was there admitted that for them telling the truth was easy, but that taking a dare with a group, that was real work.

After playing Truth or Dare, we walked up to the main ritual circle and began waltzing to the full moon around a raging fire accompanied by tribal drumming. I have to tell you that watching all those people waltzing around a fire, some sweaty and naked, some dressed in fabu-

lous garb, some in jeans and a t-shirt, all waltzing together around a fire in the wood with the big moon overhead and the drums keeping time — that's a vision that I will hold forever. I trust it. I always did love Fellini.

Much more happened. Faeries swimming in the river were pestered by the police warning about nudity. One faerie was harassed by a truck full of teenage boys as it passed by the edge of the property. Someone fell and twisted a wrist pretty badly. The porta-potty got full. The newcomers' orientation never quite happened. There were bugs.

But we had big fun. Watermelon on the grass at the top of the mountain. Spontaneous poetry circles. Excellent accessorizing. We made a decision about a structure by consensus in under an hour! It doesn't get much better than that. ▼

To get on the mailing list, or to check out upcoming gatherings, check out our Web site at www.faeriecampdestiny.org. See ya there.

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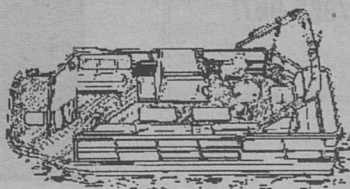
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