

Seasonal Guides

May

A woman's profile is shown in silhouette, facing right. She wears a crown of various flowers and greenery. The background is a vibrant sunset or sunrise over a body of water, with a bright sun on the right side creating a large, glowing orange and yellow area. The overall mood is serene and natural.

BELTANE

Newsletter Subscriber Exclusive Monthly Guide

jenncampusauthor.com

Seasonal Guide : May 2018

Beltane

By Jenn Campus

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Bealtaine - May Day

Bealtaine or Beltane is the Celtic name for May Day an ancient spring and summer festival that has been celebrated for thousands of years, especially in the northern hemisphere. Some people associate May Day with International Workers' Day a secular holiday started by socialists and communists to commemorate the Haymarket affair in Chicago and although International Workers' Day may also be referred to as "May Day", it is an entirely different celebration from traditional May Day.

Beltane is one of the four Gaelic seasonal festivals—along with Samhain, Imbolc and Lughnasadh. The Celts divided the year into two main seasons:

- **W**inter (Samhain) starting on November 1,
- **S**ummer (Bealtaine starting) on May 1.

These two points of the year were believed to be a time when the boundaries between the human world and the Otherworld were temporarily thin. It was thought that fairies and other supernatural beings roamed freely in the human world at those times and it was just as easy for a human to end up in the land of the fairies. Therefore, certain protections had to be administered against their enchantments to protect those of this world.

The festival of Beltane, in some part or other, persisted until the 1950s in the British Isles and also parts of mainland Europe, like Germany, Austria and some of the Slavic countries. In many areas where these traditions held on the longest, they are still celebrated today as cultural events, mostly in parts of Ireland, Germany, the Scottish Borders, Scandinavia and North America (where the celebration was brought over by immigrants from the locations named).

Origins

As you read in the March guide Hope Springs Eternal which was all about the Spring Equinox, cultures all over the world have been celebrating the change of seasons since the dawn of human time. This is one of the reasons I write these guides, because although we live in more modern times our own ancestors celebrated the changing of the seasonal tides for millennia before and it is still imprinted on our DNA.

We long for something as the seasons change, we long to connect in a deeper way and to understand why. These guides try to shed light on that very natural and human feeling.

For us modern folk, seasonal changes may bring better or worse weather, or longer or shorter days depending on the time of year. It may certainly mess with our schedules, but in earlier times, these seasonal changes were much more important and there was a lot more riding on them. In some instances it meant life and death, in colder seasons and climates, if you weren't prepared you might not see the spring or summer. Illness abounded in tight closed spaces and family members were often lost in the colder seasons.

So as the weather got warmer and things began to grow again, or the seeds that were sowed in the spring were beginning to blossom, it was a time to celebrate being alive, and being able to enjoy the next several months without too much worry, except for witches and fairies, that is.

Roman Origins

The Romans celebrated a series of festivals at this time of year which are similar in spirit to what Beltane is best known for these days: fertility, fire and flowers. On May 1, the Romans paid tribute





**Brocken Peak in the Harz
Mountains, central Germany**

to their Lares, or household gods. The Lares were said to hold domain over their location or function, and statues of the individual gods would always be placed on the table at meal times. Romans also celebrated the Floralia, a festival to honor a fertility goddess, Flora by wearing flowers in their hair, and seeking as much pleasure as possible for 6 days . There were plays, songs, and dances. At the end of the festivities, animals connected with fertility, like rabbits and goats were set loose inside the Circus Maximus, and beans and legumes, like lupins were scattered around to promote fertility.

Celtic Origins

The actual festival called Beltane has a first mention in Sanas Cormaic an early Irish text, attributed to Cormac, bishop of Cashel and King of Munster, in the 8th century. For the Irish the festival marked the beginning of summer, and the time when the cattle were turned out to feast on fresh grass and other wild greens and so in order to prepare them for the journey away from the watchful eyes of humans, there were many rituals performed to protect them. There were similar festivals held at the same time in the other Celtic countries of Wales, Brittany, and Cornwall.

German Origins

In Germany the festival is not called Beltane, but Walpurgis Night. History states that in the 17th-century, influenced by the descriptions of Witches' Sabbaths in 15th and 16th century literature, it was believed that witches gathered on this night on the Brocken, the highest peak in the Harz Mountains, in central Germany.

However, the origins of the holiday date back to pagan celebrations and fertility rites that honored the coming of spring. It harkens back to the Celtic belief that the veil between this world and the Otherworld were thin, and that it was necessary to appease fairies and other creatures not of this world.

To counteract witchcraft on this night, and legitimize a festival day so entwined with the local culture, the church established the Feast of Saint Walpurga on the same night because it was believed that Saint Walpurga was efficacious against evil magic and Christians would pray to her to intervene and protect them against the witches.

Walpurgis Night celebrations include bonfires and maypole dancing. It was also customary to leave pieces of bread spread with butter and honey as offerings for phantom hounds that roam. Walpurgis Night celebrations were then extended to Scandinavia, The Netherlands and other areas that saw a large German immigrant population.



Beltane at Stonehenge

Traditions and Rituals

The May Dew

At dawn on Beltane, young girls were encouraged to wash their faces with the morning dew. This ritual was thought to increase attractiveness, maintain youthfulness, and help with various skin ailments. Beltaine was also a traditional time to visit holy wells and collect water there as well. The first water drawn from a well on Beltane was seen as being especially potent.

Sacred Fire

The word “beltane” means “bright fire” in Gaelic. So it is no coincidence that Beltane was celebrated at the beginning of summer, when the sun begins growing in power and the days are longer. Beltaine is a fire festival, meaning that ritual fires were prepared. Livestock were walked around or in between (sometimes leaping over!) bonfires to receive the fire’s protective energy before heading out to the grazing lands.

Crops, homes and people were also protected at this time with ritual fires being stoked in homes from the greater community bonfires. Early Gaelic sources from around the 10th century show that the druids of the community would create the fires, but in later times other specific members of society would perform this sacred act.

Sacred fires were lit using the most primitive means, either through the friction created by rubbing together two pieces of wood together or using a rope and stake to create the friction. Depending on local culture, the demographic of the people creating the fire would also come into play. In the Scottish Highlands it was 81 married men, who took turns, nine at a time, rubbing the pieces of wood together.





In Bulgaria, it was two naked men who rubbed together branches in the forests. In Germany, it was two chaste boys who pulled the rope wound on the stake. There were also prohibitions, like not wearing any metal, or not being allowed to smoke. All of this was done in order to create pure and sacred ritual flame.

Once the ritual bonfire(s) were kindled, the livestock would be driven through for protection; the fire burning and destroying any harmful influences. Then customarily families could come and take flame from the bonfire to create a fire at their home hearth, protecting the home and the family. All home hearth fires would have been extinguished previous to the rituals.

In this way the community was also connected by the same sacred flame. People would also daub their bodies with the ashes. Sometimes such ritual fires were created at other times of the year to rid livestock of disease, or keep a family protected against bewitching. These fires were known as “need-fires” or “force-fires” and were performed in Scotland until the mid-1800’s .

Traditional Offerings

Beltane bannocks, a kind of griddle cake would then be cooked over the bonfire and some offered to the fairies or nature spirits to appease them and keep them from harming the livestock in the fields. Some bannocks would also be offered to each wild animal that could potentially harm the livestock, so a piece for the fox, and one for the hawk, etc. Milk was also poured into the ground in offering to the “little people” or fairies.

Sometimes people would bring their livestock to a place in the forest, known to be sacred to the fair folk and draw a little blood from the animals to leave in offering, or the blood was collected from the animals and then burned in the ritual fires.

Flowers

Yellow flowers such as primrose, rowan, hawthorn, gorse, hazel, and marigold all featured prominently in Beltane festivals. They were placed in doorways and windows or used to decorate the livestock and dairy making equipment. Yellow symbolizes the sun and also fire.

A May Bush was also decorated with flowers and ribbons. The bush was traditionally a small rowan or hawthorn tree, and it would be decorated with ribbons, shells and other offerings to the Aos Sí or fairies as thorn trees were believed to be special to them. There were May Bushes for individual homes and also communal ones erected in towns or villages that were decorated by everyone. Sometimes the bushes were then ritually burned in the sacred bonfires or sometimes they were left out for one month to bring prosperity to the people and the land. May Bushes harken back to a more ancient time when trees were worshipped, and erecting and adorning them was a way to give thanks to the spirits of the trees.

The Maypole

It is believed that the tradition of the Maypole originates from old Germanic paganism and the geographical areas where these tribes had influence. It has survived the Christianization of those places, but has likely lost the significance it once had. However, it is one of the most easily recognizable elements of Beltane and Walpurgis Night celebrations, and therefore deserves a mention.

The true symbolism of the Maypole is not known has been disputed by folklorists for centuries. Most people today seem to associate it with phallic symbolism linking it to the focus on fertility in Beltane celebrations, but there are other equally probable answers.

Some classify maypoles as symbols of the world axis, or the

world tree, Yggdrasil as there is evidence that Iron Age Germanic tribes worshipped trees. There are various sacred trees and wooden pillars that were venerated by the pagans across much of Germanic Europe that still stand today.

In Germany and Austria the maypole tradition can be traced back to the 16th century and is still used today in parts of Scandinavia, The British Isles and North America.



Sacred Unions

The proposed phallic symbol of the Maypole and the focus on fertility brings us to the final key element of Beltane, sacred unions. The ancient Celtic beginning of summer also marked this season as a time to pray for growth, fertility and prosperity, as the sun's power is waxing at this time of year. Handfastings and marriages or ritual coupling were traditional acts at this time. As a time of fertility and harvest, it is the time for reaping the wealth from the seeds that we have sown. It is also a good time to sow some new seeds by planting some flowers or maybe an herb garden. This is a good approach to take when teaching children about the fertility aspect associated with the celebrations.



Beltane Activities

These are some ways that we can be inspired by the fire festivals of the past, and connect with the seasonal energy this time of year, which is certainly celebratory!

Collect Wildflowers and Make A Flower Crown

Beltane celebrations are always associated with flowers, so why not decorate yourself with flowers, too?

Go out early in the morning on May Day and pick wildflowers that are in bloom, then use them to make a crown. If you aren't able to collect wildflowers, you can use spring flowers and even silk flowers to make the crown.

Supplies:

Pipe cleaners (green is best, and easiest to blend in with the flowers)

Yellow flowers with stems on (or any other color you like)

Green florists wire (optional)

Assorted ribbon

Take the pipe cleaners and create a circle that will fit your head. Usually two pipe cleaners make a crown to fit an adult, and usually one and a half for kids. Twist the ends together to form a ring that fits your head.

Then take two more pipe cleaners and twist them around the ring, creating a framework for you to add your flowers.

Weave the stems of the flowers through the pipe cleaner frame. Tuck the flowers in snugly and use enough flowers and foliage so that the frame is completely covered. If you have trouble getting the flowers to stay in place, or if they seem loose, wrap a bit of green florist's wire around them for additional stability.

Finally, cut several ribbons in a variety of lengths and tie them to the back of the flower wreath. You can also decorate your home with the wildflowers by placing them over windows and doorways, or just in a nice vase on the table.

Make A Fairy Garden

This is a time when the veil between the worlds is thin, and so it is a good time to make offerings to the fairies. One nice way to do this, especially with kids is to create a fairy house or garden, and then leave an offering there.

If you wish to make a fairy garden plant these herbs and flowers that fairies love: foxglove, chamomile, elderberry, primrose, pansies, petunias, roses, lavender and borage are good ones. It is best to stick to edible plants if you are doing this with children. You can either plant seeds, or already grown plants. If you use seeds, each person participating can make a wish on a seed before planting to add an extra dimension to the activity.

Once you have created your garden, you can build a house for the fairies using fallen twigs, leaves, branches, stones and any other natural materials you can find.

Fairies enjoy an offering of milk and honey, or coins, or you can leave the traditional Beltane offering of Beltane Bannocks (recipe below).

Place A Wish in a Tree

If you already have a favorite tree, then that is the best one to use for this ritual. If you don't already have a tree in mind, one that is flowering at this time, like a cherry tree for example is a good one to use. Hold a piece of beautiful ribbon and make a wish, then tie

it to the tree and ask Mother Nature and the tree to help fulfill your wish in the best way possible.

Do A Pleasure Ritual

Sex is on everyone's mind at Beltane, but if you don't have a willing partner, or you are celebrating with family, there are many other wonderful ways to enjoy yourself. For example, take a relaxing bubble bath and play music you enjoy. Or enjoy a piece of gourmet chocolate, savoring each bite. Or for a ritual very specific to Beltane collect a few drops of morning dew on May Day morn and add it to a bottle of clean water, then use it to spritz your face as a beauty ritual. The goal is just to enjoy yourself and appreciate being alive.

Make A Bonfire...Or Light a Lot of Candles

Since Beltane is a fire festival including the element of fire in your celebrations is a good idea. You can create a bonfire, and play some fun and uplifting music as you dance around it. Or if that is not available to you, just light a bunch of candles and enjoy some time connecting with this element.

Have A Fairy Tea Party

Make some of the recipes below and enjoy a tea party. Wear your flower crown, and be sure to leave some of the food and drink as an offering to the fair folk!

Recipes

Fried Honey Cakes

These cakes can be left in the garden to please the fairies. If you plan to leave an offering double the recipe so you can enjoy some too.

Ingredients:

- 1/2 cup sweet white wine
- 1 egg
- 2/3 cup all purpose flour
- 1/8 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon cinnamon
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 1 cup honey
- 1/8 teaspoon nutmeg
- Oil for frying

Method

1. Beat the wine with the egg in a medium bowl. Combine the flour, salt, cinnamon, and sugar in a separate bowl, then stir into the egg mixture. Let stand 30 minutes. Combine the honey and nutmeg in a small bowl.
2. Heat about 1-inch of oil in a large skillet until hot, but not smoking. Drop the batter into the oil about 1 tablespoon at a time and fry until golden brown on both sides. Drain on paper towels. Dip into the honey.

Yield: 1 1/2 Dozen.



Chamomile Cooler

This alcoholic drink is refreshing and hydrating, due to the coconut water. It also promotes relaxation from the chamomile itself.

INGREDIENTS

To Make the Tea:

- 1 tablespoon dried chamomile flower (or you can use 2 chamomile tea bags)
- 1 tablespoon honey
- 1 cup of hot water

For the Cocktail:

- 2 oz. mead or honey wine
- 1 oz. Cointreau
- 1/2 cup of the strong chamomile tea
- 1/2 cup coconut water
- 1 teaspoon fresh lemon juice
- Chamomile flowers as a garnish

METHOD:

1. Make the tea: Place chamomile flowers in a tea ball, and place tea ball in a large tea cup, then add the honey. When the water has almost come to a boil, add to the cup and let steep overnight, or at least 1 hour. The longer it steeps the better chamomile flavor and relaxing properties it will impart to the drink.
2. Make the cocktail: Place all ingredients with 2 ice cubes in a cocktail shaker and shake vigorously. Strain into 2 glasses and garnish with fresh chamomile flowers. Serves 2.

Elderflower Water

Elder is a plant that is loved by fairies, make a delicious and refreshing infusion to enjoy.

METHOD:

1. Place a few elderflower heads into a jug of fresh spring water and leave to infuse in the sun for a couple of hours.

Note: Do not wash the flowers because it is the pollen that creates the refreshing and delicious flavor. When gathering elderflowers shake off any little black bugs and remove the stems and stalks, you only want the flowers.

Beltane Bannocks

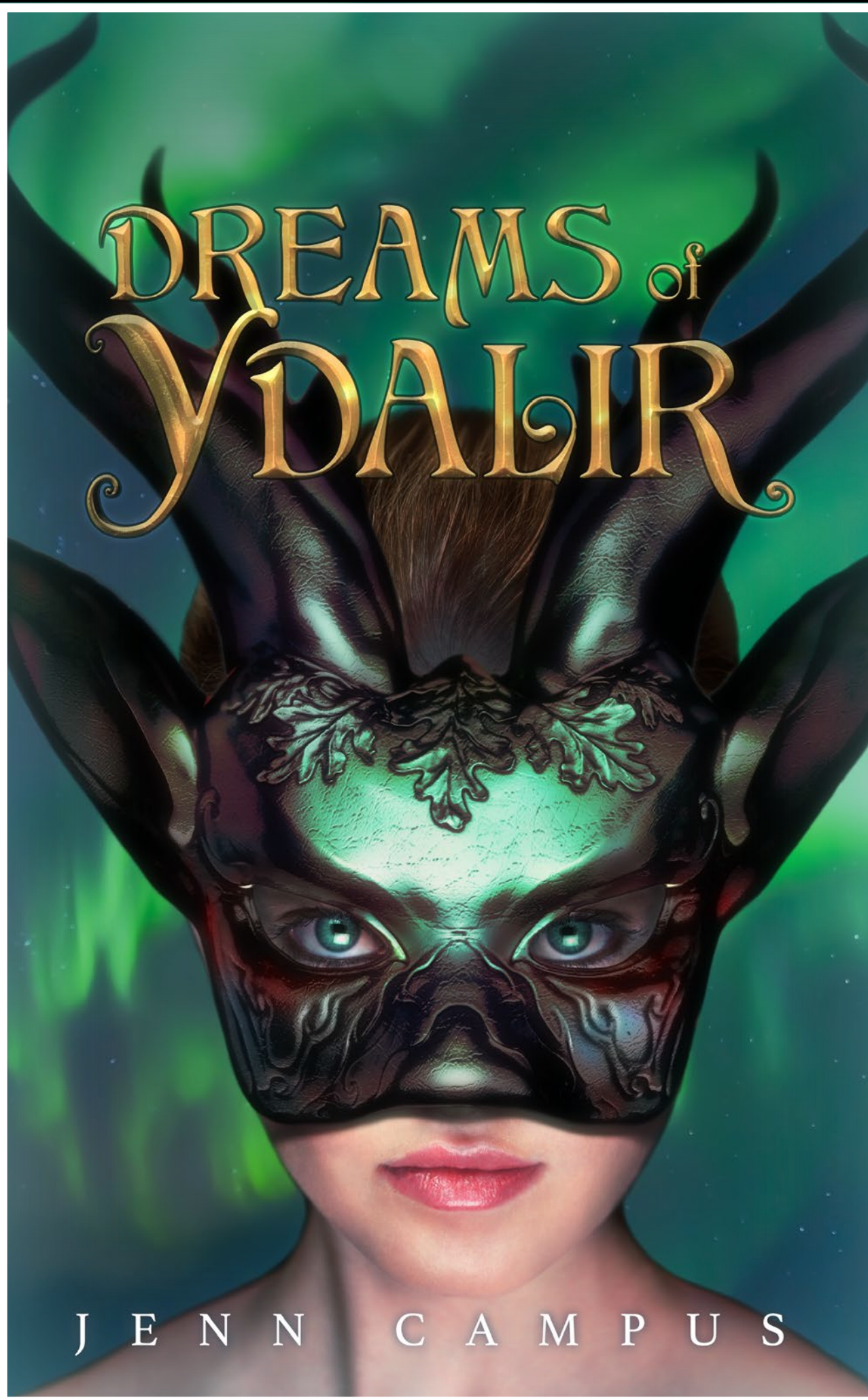
The traditional May Day or Beltane food and offering.

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 1/2 cups oatmeal
- 1/8 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 Tablespoon of lard or butter
- 1/2 cup hot water

METHOD:

1. Combine oatmeal, salt and baking soda in a bowl. Melt the butter, and drizzle it over the oats. Add the water in a steady stream and stir the mixture constantly with a wooden spoon until it forms a bread dough. Turn the dough out on a floured surface and knead thoroughly.
2. Separate the dough into two equal portions, and roll each one into a ball. Use a rolling pin to make a flat pancake that is about 1/4" thick. Cook your oatcakes on a griddle over medium heat until they are golden brown. Cut each round into quarters to serve.



Dreams of Ydalir

I am in the process of writing (and my husband, world renowned fantasy artist and illustrator is creating art for) [Dreams of Ydalir](#), an illustrated historical fantasy fairy tale based on european folklore.

Although some may look at the genre of fantasy as fluff, this story is far from it.

It is folklore. If you enjoy these guides (and I really hope you do!), you enjoy folklore.



I have been writing this story for the past 4 years and working with the material for the past 8.

It has become a part of me, or maybe better said, comes from a deep place inside of me that I cannot be separated from and it is very steeped in a love and respect for the natural world and the wild places.

MESSAGES FROM THE GODS

There are several sections in the story from the perspective of particular gods from the northern european pantheon of whom not much is known today.

One of them is **Wuldor**, also known as Ullr, God of the Hunt, and the other is **Elen of the Ways**, an ancient pan-european Deer Goddess.

They are both stewards of the green places of midgard (earth) and beyond, and they have many valuable lessons for us, as humans that are in a similar vein to what you've read in this guide.

The parts of the story told from their perspective is a result of years worth of personal meditation sessions and devotional work with these figures and knowledge that is near and dear to me.

ELEN OF THE WAYS

I have seen a strong resurgence of interest in Elen of the Ways over the past year, and it validates my own experiences that she really wants her story to be told, and she is ever tied to the wild places.

If these types of subjects interest you, you will love my story. Please check it out and [subscribe here](#) to receive monthly issues of the story.



Thank you!

If you know someone else who might enjoy this type of guide, please tell them about my website and invite them to sign up for the newsletter so they can receive their own copy.

Thanks,
Jenn

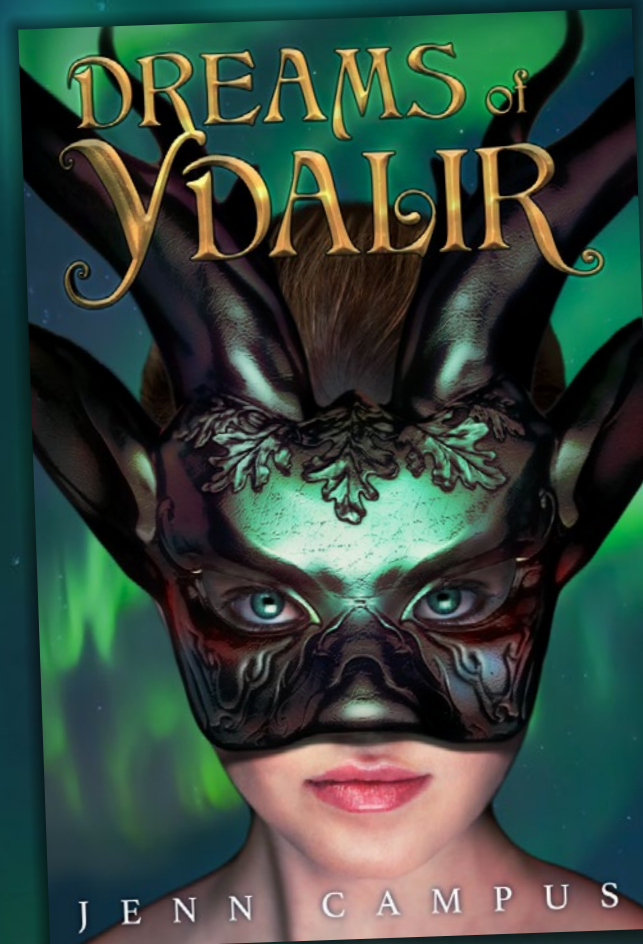
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And if you need more help around celebrating this season, feel free to get in touch with me, or start a discussion on my [Facebook Page](#).

Thank you!

NORSE MYTHOLOGY MEETS MISTS OF AVALON



A COMING OF
AGE TALE AND
THE UNTOLD
LOVE STORY OF
THE GODS, ULLR
(WULDOR) AND
ELEN OF THE
WAYS, AS WRITTEN
BY THE FEY-
TOUCHED HUMAN
FAWN.

Available on
 patreon

About the Author

FOLKLORIST, MODERN PEASANT, CULINARY ANTHROPOLOGIST, MATRIARCH, KITCHEN WITCH, MYSTIC, HEARTH KEEPER

I am a two time Amazon bestselling author. As an expat living on the ancient and enchanted Italian island of Sardinia, I am inspired by the days of yore. I long for simpler times and quiet joys. As a Sagittarius I am hardwired to seek out truths. I enjoy food, art and cultural traditions. I am deeply drawn to creating personal traditions and ritual and through the art of writing, I am able to share with others long held traditions, different perspectives and practical modern tips for navigating this often chaotic and unsettling world. In this global world, traditions can help everyone to feel that they have a place to come “home” to, even if that place is not a physical location.

In my writing I look for ingenious ways to bring together my favorite fiction and nonfiction genres which are fantasy/mythology, culinary arts, ritual, the magical arts, history and the many uses of herbs. I am passionate about the wild places, where my food comes from and sustainability, as well as the stories, foods, culture and mythology of Europe.

If you love deep, introspective cultural experiences, connecting with nature and preparing delicious food, then make yourself a warm drink and pull a chair up to my proverbial hearth. I will tell you fantastical stories or talk about practical skills for everyday life, that allow us to tap into the ways of our ancestors who often made much with little. There are riches to be had through simple joys and experiences, like a delicious meal or a day of foraging with the family. I want to share this with others. Life can be full, even if your wallet is not.

I have a degree in Anthropology from Hampshire College in Amherst, MA. I studied culinary arts at Sterling College in Craftsbury, VT. I have taught cooking classes to children and adults, alike. I have traveled extensively to and lived in Italy, Norway and the Navajo Reservation in Arizona. I also have a decade worth of experiences creating rituals and traditions for my family and myself. I have written two books on the subject of bringing more ritual into your life to help you connect with family, nature and where you are in the present moment.

