

Damh the Bard ([00:00](#)):

Hello my friends, and welcome to DruidCast Episode 172. I am your host, Damh the Bard, and DruidCast is brought to you on or around the 20th of every month, by the Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids. If you want to find out more about the Order and our courses, you can do that on our website, which is [www.druidry.org](http://www.druidry.org).

Damh the Bard ([00:21](#)):

What an amazing song to open the show. Since DruidCast has been placed on Spotify, we've had to be much more careful about copyright, and only play songs that we have permission to play on the show. So I've been really happy to see an increase in music being sent in by independent musicians and labels. So thank you for that.

Damh the Bard ([00:44](#)):

Opening the show you heard the Irish heavy folk band, Bog Bodies, with the song, The Regime, a song that eloquently captures the struggle indigenous populations all over the world face, as they battle corporate interests for access to clean water. The song is out now and I'll be playing another song from Bog Bodies later on in the show. I love it. What a great track.

Damh the Bard ([01:10](#)):

You are going to head off to the Sussex countryside now, with me and a guest. We are going to go for another Walking the Talk section, during which a DruidCast guest is invited to take me on a walk to their favorite sacred space, and share their thoughts on their spiritual journey and what draws them to that place.

Damh the Bard ([01:31](#)):

This month, I went for a walk with an old friend and member of our grove, Heidi McNie. She took me to a sacred spring deep in the heart of Sussex, hidden in a woodlands, and on the way we discussed forest schools, children's creativity, her thoughts on the faerie, and her journey to Druidry. Now once more, I have to say, there is a little interference from the wind, but a lot of you have written in to say that those occasional moments just bring you back to the fact that this is a casual walking interview, without the safety net of a studio microphone, and that you feel you are walking with us. And that is exactly what I want you to feel. So, come on. Pop on your wellies, because it was a little bit muddy, I have to confess, and come along with us through the fields and the woodlands of the Weald.

Damh the Bard ([02:31](#)):

Walking the Talk. An interview series for DruidCast.

Damh the Bard ([02:37](#)):

Well, here we are. I have been brought to Balcombe, and I am here with Heidi, who I've known for 20 ... years, and we have walked through a very beautiful Sussex village, and we have currently stopped at a tree, an oak tree. So tell us about this tree. Why are we here?

Heidi McNie ([03:05](#)):

Okay. We're here because this tree is a very, very old friend. It lives in the garden that I grew up in, so the middle house there, I don't know if you can see it?

Damh the Bard ([03:22](#)):

Yep.

Heidi McNie ([03:22](#)):

Okay, so that house there didn't have another house attached to it at the time, and it had this huge garden, and this chap here was there. It was there when my mother was a child, and she used to climb it, and it was there when myself and my brother were children, constant playmates, and we could climb it even though we were told not to, but we did. Yep, very, very fond of it.

Damh the Bard ([03:50](#)):

So you've climbed this tree?

Heidi McNie ([03:52](#)):

I've climbed this tree, yes.

Damh the Bard ([03:53](#)):

I'm looking at it right now, and I can't see any low boughs, so it's either grown, a lot, or you've shinned up that.

Heidi McNie ([04:02](#)):

Well, it's an interesting story from my mom, actually, because she and her sisters used to climb it, and her stepfather didn't like that, so he cut the lower boughs off to stop the girls climbing it. And I don't know why he didn't want that to happen. But, yeah, I remember her telling me that. But there were a few lower branches, not many, but, yeah, I shinned it, because you can. I also had a little wooden ladder that I used to-

Damh the Bard ([04:28](#)):

How far up did you used to go?

Heidi McNie ([04:30](#)):

Okay, so, can you see that upper fork?

Damh the Bard ([04:35](#)):

Yes.

Heidi McNie ([04:35](#)):

Up there, that's about as high as I could get.

Damh the Bard ([04:38](#)):

All right, that's probably why he sawed off those lower branches, to stop you getting up there, because I would say, looking at that, that's at least 25 feet off the ground.

Heidi McNie ([04:50](#)):

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Yeah, it's lush there.

Damh the Bard ([04:51](#)):

Oh, yeah, yeah.

Heidi McNie ([04:51](#)):

Because you just look down and drop acorns on people coming.

Damh the Bard ([04:57](#)):

Nice. And it's an oak tree?

Heidi McNie ([05:00](#)):

It's an oak tree. A beautiful oak tree.

Damh the Bard ([05:00](#)):

So is there any particular connection you have as a Druid to oak? Or is it any tree?

Heidi McNie ([05:06](#)):

I've never thought about it, to be honest. Isn't that a strange thing?

Damh the Bard ([05:12](#)):

No, but here we are. You've brought me ... the first stop is an oak.

Heidi McNie ([05:13](#)):

But no, he's a friend. Yeah, a friend.

Damh the Bard ([05:15](#)):

And you're a Druid.

Heidi McNie ([05:17](#)):

I'm a Druid. And I have an acorn on my robe, as a button, and I've never given it any thought, other ... Oh look, check it out, a little blue tit on there.

Damh the Bard ([05:29](#)):

Hey.

Heidi McNie ([05:29](#)):

There he goes. He's come to say, "What are you doing?" "We're doing a thing."

Damh the Bard ([05:31](#)):

We're doing a thing. We're not going to disturb you.

Heidi McNie ([05:33](#)):

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It's all good. Yeah. But I think, because it was always here, since me being teeny-tiny, it's maybe that, just sitting under it, and touching it, and having that connection, maybe it is just that. Maybe it was just that, because, I mean, I've known other trees, but this was the first tree in my life.

Damh the Bard ([05:56](#)):

Well, there you go.

Heidi McNie ([05:57](#)):

But there are other trees I have known and sat in. There was a sycamore. It's not there now. I think it's been cut down a long time ago. It used to hang over that main road, and I used to spend a lot of time up there reading, laying in there reading. So why not this one? Because this one's a tricky one to get up, but that was the challenge. That one was comfortable, the sycamore. You could just lay back and read. So that one and the sycamore down there, that has sadly gone, because nobody cares about sycamores Damh. I don't know ...

Damh the Bard ([06:33](#)):

Okay, so where are we going next?

Heidi McNie ([06:34](#)):

Right. Okay, we're going to head up round the corner here. There'll be a few twittens and things, and then we're going to be out on the top road. So I'm admiring all the actual building that has been done. That's [Elspace 00:06:47] House, where we used to play in the cellar. And we actually tunneled in that garden. It was incredible. I don't know how we did it, how it never fell down on top of us, but we made this underground chamber.

Damh the Bard ([07:01](#)):

I used to do that as a kid, too.

Heidi McNie ([07:03](#)):

Good.

Damh the Bard ([07:03](#)):

Dig into it, and find some old bit of corrugated iron.

Heidi McNie ([07:06](#)):

That's the one.

Damh the Bard ([07:08](#)):

And then pop loads of earth on top of it.

Heidi McNie ([07:10](#)):

On the top, yeah.

Damh the Bard ([07:10](#)):

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And then you used to dive in there. I mean, how did we ... and we're still here.

Heidi McNie ([07:17](#)):

Yeah.

Damh the Bard ([07:17](#)):

Nothing happened.

Heidi McNie ([07:18](#)):

No.

Damh the Bard ([07:18](#)):

It was all right.

Heidi McNie ([07:22](#)):

It was. It was all right. And, in fact, what I encourage kids to do that are living now. So whether that's the right thing to be doing, or not, who knows? But they call it Forest School.

Damh the Bard ([07:29](#)):

So as we walk through these houses-

Heidi McNie ([07:33](#)):

Yeah, there used to be a field somewhere along this bit.

Damh the Bard ([07:35](#)):

... tell me about Forest School. What is it?

Heidi McNie ([07:37](#)):

Ah, Forest School. Originally, it comes from Scandinavia, and it was used as a kindergarten type thing. So it's where children do most of their learning actually outside. Not maths necessarily, English or anything like that, but they connect to the earth. They connect to their surroundings. They learn to show respect for the things around them. Basically, you know what we were talking about earlier? With digging holes and tunnels?

Damh the Bard ([08:14](#)):

Yeah.

Heidi McNie ([08:14](#)):

It's all those things, Damh, we did as a kid. But people don't do that now, because everybody's really health and safety conscious. So in Scandinavia, they take it up to seven years old, and children just learn by playing. So they get all their fine motor skills, their gross motor skills, through climbing, through playing with mud, bits of sticks and things like that. Green woodworking skills. So it was brought here by some nuns from Denmark, bizarrely.

Damh the Bard ([08:50](#)):

Oh, right. Okay.

Heidi McNie ([08:52](#)):

And it's kind of taken off, but it's sort of a 50/50 thing. There's 50% people really don't get it, because, why is it school? And it's school because you're learning how to be. Your body is developing, and if you look at the natural world, if you look at the Sámi, all children learn through playing, but their play is exploring. So they're exploring everything they're doing. And that sorts them out in the head, sort of thing. They understand that if they put their hands in water, they're going to get wet. They understand that if they touch fire, they're going to burn. Now we don't encourage them to burn themselves, or anything. It is risk assessed, to the eyeballs, frankly. But we allow them to take those managed risks. And it's for everybody. It's not just for small children. It basically goes through from three years old, all the way through to adults. You can adapt it to anything you want. And it is playing in the woods, and playing in the woods helps you learn.

Damh the Bard ([10:01](#)):

It does. It does.

Heidi McNie ([10:02](#)):

It does. Look at us.

Damh the Bard ([10:03](#)):

Yeah, yeah.

Heidi McNie ([10:04](#)):

Where would we be?

Damh the Bard ([10:06](#)):

Yeah, encouraging the new generation of Druid, I'm sure.

Heidi McNie ([10:08](#)):

Yeah, basically, yeah, yeah. They don't know that though, do they.

Damh the Bard ([10:17](#)):

We are now walking along a rather pleasant, if somewhat muddy, country path. You say you've been doing the Forest School for eight years, yeah?

Heidi McNie ([10:29](#)):

Yeah, just over eight years now. Never dreamed it would be me that was doing it. Thought I would be assisting a teacher, because I'm a teaching assistant, not an actual teacher. And I absolutely love it. I've a huge passion for it. I really believe in all that it does, how it calms people when they come into the small strip of woodland that I have here. It's basically a bit at the end of the field with a few trees on, and I planted it up with rowan trees, which you'll like, because I know you have a particular affinity for rowan

trees. And some silver birches, cherry, loads of hazel, and it was just left. The idea was that it was a nature reserve. Then Siobhan, you know Siobhan? Our lovely Siobhan?

Damh the Bard ([11:15](#)):

Yeah, yeah.

Heidi McNie ([11:16](#)):

... told me about Forest School. Said I should look into it. So I just tried to encourage our school to go along to the one that she had in her wood, which was being run by Susie at that point. And they went, "Okay, that's nice, but put it on the back burner." I thought, "I've done my bit. I've told her it's there. I say, I think our children would benefit from it. " And then a year later, they came up to me and said, would I like to do the training? And would I like to do it?

Heidi McNie ([11:51](#)):

And schools being as schools are, they quite often send you on ... and any teachers like this will agree with me, they send you on lots of training things, and they never use it again. Never use it again. And I've been on a couple of these, and I said to them, "Well, I'd love to do it, yes. But I will only do it if you follow it through, and we actually get to do it."

Damh the Bard ([12:17](#)):

And they did.

Heidi McNie ([12:18](#)):

And they did, and eight years later ... I've had to fight for it a couple of occasions, because some adults don't understand it. I think any adult in Druidry would. Any pagan adult will understand it completely, because that's where they've been drawn back into. But some adults who haven't been brought up in a countrified way maybe, or whose onus is purely academic, would not necessarily see the benefits. So those are the people that we have to prove ourselves to.

Damh the Bard ([12:53](#)):

Yeah, right. Okay.

Heidi McNie ([12:55](#)):

But it basically creates creative, diligent, respectful, resilient little bodies.

Damh the Bard ([13:04](#)):

We're being watched.

Heidi McNie ([13:08](#)):

We are. Isn't he gorgeous?

Damh the Bard ([13:08](#)):

We're being watched by a dog in a field. Hello.

Heidi McNie ([13:15](#)):

We can barely see him. He's had a haircut.

Speaker 3 ([13:16](#)):

He has.

Damh the Bard ([13:16](#)):

Looks beautiful.

Heidi McNie ([13:18](#)):

Yeah, lovely tongue.

Damh the Bard ([13:19](#)):

What's the dog's name?

Speaker 3 ([13:22](#)):

Roo.

Damh the Bard ([13:22](#)):

Roo? Oh. Oh, hello. And there's the dog.

Heidi McNie ([13:30](#)):

You said his name. He wanted to meet you. He's called Roo, because he does ...

Damh the Bard ([13:39](#)):

Exactly, yeah. So obviously, we've moved away from the village now. We're walking across a beautiful field, surrounded by woodland, in full summer solstice green.

Heidi McNie ([13:55](#)):

Oh, it really is.

Damh the Bard ([13:56](#)):

And it's so pretty and lovely. So which bits, do you reckon, of the Forest School ... I mean, I remember playing with mud pies, and all that kind of stuff, when I was a kid.

Heidi McNie ([14:11](#)):

Oh they love that.

Damh the Bard ([14:11](#)):

So what is it, do you think, that the kids enjoy about that kind of activity?

Heidi McNie ([14:19](#)):



They enjoy the freedom, because we do try to be as hands off as we can. So the freedom to just be themselves. They don't get it to start with. They come in, and they're kind of like all hunched down, all hunched over little people, sitting in the woods in the half-center there, looking around, a bit like ... Have you seen Madagascar? The giraffe?

Damh the Bard ([14:41](#)):

It's learning to be free again, isn't it?

Heidi McNie ([14:43](#)):

It is. It's learning that, actually, no, it's okay. We're not going to tell you what to do. We're going to guide you. It's a different thing. So to be a Forest School leader, it's not really how I see it. It's more, you facilitate it. And I've disagreed with that name, Forest School Leader, makes it sound like I'm leading everybody astray, which I'd quite happily do anyway. But facilitator would perhaps be a more apt term for it.

Heidi McNie ([15:12](#)):

They come in Reception, usually. I mean, last two years, obviously, it's all gone pants, so we haven't done much of it, but usually they'll come in at Reception about this time of year. And they'll have one taster session. I'm aiming to change that, by the way. I'm always aiming to change and get more. What we do with them there, is we take the story of the Three Little Pigs as a theme. And they come in, and we explore it. We show them where they can and can't go. And they can't believe their eyes and their ears. "We can do this?" "You can do this." And we make mud pigs. So what I discovered was, as I was learning how to teach Reception ... Look at this little chap here. There he goes.

Damh the Bard ([16:04](#)):

Lovely butterfly.

Heidi McNie ([16:05](#)):

Yeah, meadow brown. What a lovely name. It's a character name, isn't it. Meadow Brown.

Damh the Bard ([16:11](#)):

Meadow Brown. Yeah, D&D character. Meadow Brown.

Heidi McNie ([16:11](#)):

Yeah, it is. It's going to be. Definitely. Oh I've thought of another one, Lottie Bramble.

Damh the Bard ([16:15](#)):

Lottie Bramble. Very nice.

Heidi McNie ([16:17](#)):

Lottie Bramble, because that's what I've named my latest blackberry wine. Lottie Bramble. So, yes, they come in and they're like this ... So you have to grab their attention. So if you want them to hear a story, you have to be doing something at the same time. And I knew I wanted them to play with mud, so I brought mud from a safe source, stuck my hand in, and I started to model this pig. And they were

fascinated by what I was doing. And as I was doing it, I was telling the story of the Three Pigs, in a really outrageous way. Because everything you do with Reception has to be extreme, otherwise they're just not going to stay long enough. So right down to, "I'll huff and I'll puff and I'll blow your house down." And it's the longest raspberry you've ever heard in your life. They think that's hysterical. That, and the word bottom. They just can't get enough of it, frankly.

Heidi McNie ([17:13](#)):

So you blow the longest raspberry in the world, and eventually they start joining in with you. So the attention is now no longer on the mud pig, but they've seen you make it. You pass it round, and they can't believe it. And that's the first thing. Once the story's done, they want to go off and do that themselves. They can make hedgehogs, do anything they want, and it's just fab. So that's Reception.

Heidi McNie ([17:37](#)):

At the end of Reception, we mud them.

Damh the Bard ([17:41](#)):

What, you mud the kids?

Heidi McNie ([17:42](#)):

We mud the kids. Yeah.

Damh the Bard ([17:43](#)):

This is getting better and better.

Heidi McNie ([17:44](#)):

So they don't always want it. Some of them are a bit, "Ooh, I'll get dirty." "Yes, you're going to get dirty." Down and dirty, in a good childish way. Yeah, these steps are really quite interesting.

Damh the Bard ([17:55](#)):

Yeah, the audio might be going in and out a little bit, right now, because we are negotiating steps that are-

Heidi McNie ([18:02](#)):

I told you it wouldn't be easy.

Damh the Bard ([18:03](#)):

... yes, interesting.

Heidi McNie ([18:05](#)):

Aren't they fab. Yeah, working farm.

Damh the Bard ([18:09](#)):

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Beyond this point is private land and working farm. All right, we won't go that way, we don't stray from the path. If we do, we'll come across the Slaughtered Lamb Inn. Well, we're going right into deep Sussex now. This is actually beautiful, isn't it?

Heidi McNie ([18:26](#)):

So when I was a kid, these steps, huge for me. I mean, we would either come back home via them or you'd leave to go on the walk. So these are great, these steps. And they lead down to the mill.

Damh the Bard ([18:42](#)):

So you would have walked down these steps in your past?

Heidi McNie ([18:44](#)):

Yes.

Damh the Bard ([18:45](#)):

How old were you?

Heidi McNie ([18:47](#)):

My earliest memory has got to be about three. Three years old.

Damh the Bard ([18:51](#)):

You were about as tall as one of those steps at three.

Heidi McNie ([18:53](#)):

I was about as tall as one of those steps. So I had my nan, I had aunties, my mom would hold my hand and lift me down when I was teeny-tiny. And this is how I remember it, with the dappled sun coming through.

Damh the Bard ([19:08](#)):

Yeah, so let's just describe, being podcasting.

Heidi McNie ([19:10](#)):

Oh yeah, they can't ...

Damh the Bard ([19:12](#)):

Full leaf, lots of-

Heidi McNie ([19:15](#)):

Hazel.

Damh the Bard ([19:16](#)):

... beech, I can see. Lots of beech in here. There's hazel. There is a few pine trees.

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Heidi McNie ([19:24](#)):

You've got some pines. Yep, lots of pines.

Damh the Bard ([19:27](#)):

And it's very much ... on the floor, there are ferns, all over the floor-

Heidi McNie ([19:32](#)):

Yeah, it looks like we've got ferns and bramble.

Damh the Bard ([19:33](#)):

And it looks like bramble, yeah, blackberry. Blackberry.

Heidi McNie ([19:35](#)):

And the buttercups.

Damh the Bard ([19:37](#)):

There's a holly there. Typical deciduous Sussex woodland.

Heidi McNie ([19:43](#)):

It's very, very old, most of it.

Damh the Bard ([19:45](#)):

But what I've noticed, is this is the path. And it might be because it's quite a steep hill we're on at the moment, but away from the path, it's really overgrown with bramble. You're not going to get into there very easily, are you, into the actual woods itself, from this bit?.

Heidi McNie ([20:03](#)):

Nope. Can you hear that?

Damh the Bard ([20:07](#)):

I can hear something down the valley. All right, well. Okay. I'm going to hang this up for a minute, and we'll continue in a second.

Damh the Bard ([20:17](#)):

So, in true podcast fashion-

Heidi McNie ([20:20](#)):

Car.

Damh the Bard ([20:21](#)):

Car. We are now walking up a road. That's the first traffic we've seen since we've been walking along here, and it happened just as I turned on the recording. In the distance, you might hear some mowing going on, with some strimmer, but we are currently standing beside Ardingly Reservoir.

Heidi McNie ([20:47](#)):

Yes, so this is the millpond here. So the water comes from the lake, which runs in a stream down to here, and this would have been the original race, so that would have then ... ooh, be careful of traffic as we cross over this beautiful bridge, over to ... that was where the water mill was housed. In that person's house. Sorry, person's house. But it was an empty shell when I was a child, and I remember them starting to dig out the Reservoir. It was just a stream, and you could see the stream coming through under the road here. If we lean over-

Damh the Bard ([21:24](#)):

Lean over the bridge.

Heidi McNie ([21:25](#)):

Yeah, and it used to be-

Damh the Bard ([21:26](#)):

Don't drop the recorder. Ooh, there's fish.

Heidi McNie ([21:29](#)):

Don't drop the recorder. Yeah, there's fish in there. There's all sorts of stuff kicking off in here. Oh hello. Is it that time of day? Brilliant. Ardingly sixth form. That's where he's off to. Posh. Can't say that. Hi, Jan. She works there.

Heidi McNie ([21:45](#)):

So this used to be very much enclosed. This was all wooded. And then when they came to do the Reservoir, they dug it out. And as you know, it's a horseshoe shape. So this is the beginning of the Balcombe end. Balcombe folk call it the Balcombe Reservoir.

Damh the Bard ([22:03](#)):

Ah.

Heidi McNie ([22:04](#)):

Ardingly folk call it the Ardingly Reservoir. And there's always been much competition between Balcombe and Ardingly at the best of times. So you can imagine, whatever it was, they started to do this. It is a beautiful, beautiful area. Because I know that you said you've played along, as a child, along the Reservoir.

Damh the Bard ([22:23](#)):

Oh yes, yes, yes. I've played along here, when I was a kid myself. Absolutely. Yes.

Heidi McNie ([22:27](#)):

I don't know how far down this end you ever got, whether you just stayed in Ardingly.

Damh the Bard ([22:33](#)):

Not at all. I actually believe I was playing beside the Ardingly Reservoir, not the Balcombe Reservoir.

Heidi McNie ([22:38](#)):

Were you really?

Damh the Bard ([22:39](#)):

Yes, at the time.

Heidi McNie ([22:39](#)):

Well, ours is better. As you can see, this one's much prettier.

Damh the Bard ([22:43](#)):

I've got to say, it is pretty. And it is absolutely heaving with fish. Look at the shoal of spry. There's absolutely hundreds of fish. And it is beautifully surrounded by-

Heidi McNie ([22:57](#)):

It's kingfisher country as well, so usually, if you're really lucky, we may see a kingfisher going from that willow there, that's dripping into the water. And that's a white willow, not a weeping willow. It's where they've been seen before. So, yeah.

Damh the Bard ([23:14](#)):

Yeah, and it's so still and lovely. The woodland absolutely borders the water here, doesn't it? There's no bank. There's a little bank there, with a step going down, tiny little, probably 10 foot area, but the rest of it is trees into the water. It's very magical. I bet, if there's a mist on here, you'd just want to throw a sword into it.

Heidi McNie ([23:40](#)):

You do. Six o'clock in the morning, if you happen to get up. It's a drive for me now, because, obviously, I don't live here. I haven't lived here for 25 years, but I still come back. I bring my friends now, and when my children were little, I brought my children to wade in streams, as well.

Heidi McNie ([23:57](#)):

They remember one particular magical one, where we waded through a stream at another place I'm going to take you to, and a frog ... It was humid like this, actually, and this frog, huge frog, flopped out in front of us all. And their faces were like, "Ah, hello. Sailor.". And they had the big sticks, and I usually used to put a backpack on them. "We're going on an adventure," like I just did with you. It never grows old. It never grows old. Even now, Ryan says, "Are we going on an adventure?" He's only 26, bless him. 26, he was, but yeah.

Damh the Bard ([24:35](#)):

We've stopped on a very quiet road, he says, on a corner, and looking into the woodlands, you can see a cliff of sandstone. In the center of the cliff, is what looks like a cave. Go on, then. Tell us all about this.

Heidi McNie ([24:52](#)):

Yeah, this is an overhang. And it's the closest we get to a cave. Again, my mother used to play around here, and I used to play here, too, with my brother and my friends. And that area, there, has got tons ...

or it did have. It's probably worn away, but when we were little, lots of graffiti, going back to the early 1900s. Which, as kids, you go, "Oh, I want to do that." But it doesn't click till you're older, the significance of the dates. So that has been a place where people have trysted, for years and years and years. And underfoot at that time, and obviously people don't go there now, which is a damned shame-

Damh the Bard ([25:40](#)):

Yes, it's very overgrown.

Heidi McNie ([25:41](#)):

Very overgrown now, but it never used to be. You used to be able to just get through, and at the bottom of it, is all pure silky sand. That obviously was worn off from the whole of this. And can you see the trees above?

Damh the Bard ([25:54](#)):

Yes.

Heidi McNie ([25:54](#)):

So along the steps, there's a pathway, which I showed you, that you can follow up, and you follow that ridge way. Another way down is to climb down.

Damh the Bard ([26:06](#)):

Good luck with that.

Heidi McNie ([26:07](#)):

I did it. That's what I'm telling you.

Damh the Bard ([26:09](#)):

Oh, blooming heck. It's a sheer drop.

Heidi McNie ([26:10](#)):

Yeah, but can you see the trees?

Damh the Bard ([26:12](#)):

Yes, yes.

Heidi McNie ([26:13](#)):

So the tree roots?

Damh the Bard ([26:13](#)):

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Heidi McNie ([26:15](#)):

So, you swing down and it wasn't that one, but there was one-

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Damh the Bard ([26:19](#)):

By the way, this is not an instruction manual, if you're listening to it.

Heidi McNie ([26:21](#)):

Yeah, lovely people at home, don't try this at home. Certainly not without ropes and pulleys and things.

Damh the Bard ([26:30](#)):

Yeah, and all that.

Heidi McNie ([26:30](#)):

And all that stuff. But, yeah, there's a tree ... this tree here, this silver birch, it dips down like this. So you can climb down to it, and once you've climbed down to that, because it's curved like a seat, and then you lower yourself down from that.

Damh the Bard ([26:44](#)):

Oh, wow. I'm looking at it right now, thinking, "If there was a path going in there, and if that was leveled out, like you say, that is a beautiful place for a ceremony in there, isn't it?"

Heidi McNie ([26:56](#)):

Isn't it. Isn't it.

Damh the Bard ([26:56](#)):

I mean, seriously, you can imagine that at night, just lit up with a fire maybe-

Heidi McNie ([27:01](#)):

And candles.

Damh the Bard ([27:02](#)):

And candles, and just-

Heidi McNie ([27:03](#)):

Yeah, candles in the sandstone.

Damh the Bard ([27:04](#)):

There's some stuff going on in there already. You can sense it, can't you? And I'm sure you did, when you were a kid, as well.

Heidi McNie ([27:09](#)):

Oh, yeah, yeah.

Damh the Bard ([27:10](#)):



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So what do you think of ... let's talk about the spirits of woods. What's your thought ... actually, it's probably a bit busy. Let's just hold it a second. With this view, have you got a relationship with the spirits of the woodland, and what do you call them? Do you think of them as the faerie?

Heidi McNie ([27:31](#)):

I've definitely got a connection with them.

Damh the Bard ([27:32](#)):

Or what's your otherworldly experience?

Heidi McNie ([27:39](#)):

Ah, there are many. They're not perhaps as exciting as you might think. I've never seen ... I don't think I've ever seen ... I don't recall, I may have done, the little people and all that, the little fey wings and things. So yes, I think of them, definitely, as the fae, but they're not a Disney fae. They are most certainly not. And I also feel that they will choose whether or not to contact you. If they choose to do so, they can do so in one of two ways. They are amoral, not moral. That means they've got their own-

Damh the Bard ([28:26](#)):

Set of rules.

Heidi McNie ([28:26](#)):

... set of rules. Their own thing that they do. And I don't always feel that they are trustworthy, because of that. There are lots and lots of stories, which I have bordered the line of, particularly where food and drink is concerned. So blackberries, mushrooms, those sorts of things, to me, because they're of the wild, because they're of the woods, they are faerie food. And yes, I partake in a faerie food, thank you very much. And there are certain places, but I don't think it's all blackberries and all hazelnuts. I think it's only in certain areas, and you'll know. If you've traversed woodlands long enough, and played in them from right down low, you will know when that's safe and when that's not, and whether, if you want to challenge them, they'll take you up on it.

Damh the Bard ([29:24](#)):

You see those mushrooms that are growing in there? Right through there, there's loads of mushrooms on the ground.

Heidi McNie ([29:29](#)):

Yeah, yeah, there we are.

Damh the Bard ([29:30](#)):

Yeah, there we are.

Heidi McNie ([29:31](#)):

As if by magic.

Damh the Bard ([29:32](#)):

As if by magic, yeah.

Heidi McNie ([29:34](#)):

I feel like these woods brought me up. They protected me, and they brought me up. So, yeah, a good connection.

Damh the Bard ([29:41](#)):

I love Fiona Davidson, Bard, Fionn Tulach, who refounded the Céile Dé in Scotland, she has a way of looking at the food of the fae, if you eat or drink the food or drink of the fae, that you will stay there for ever. Her interpretation of that, which I love, is what that simply means is, your life will never be the same again, is that part of you will always remember and always know there are other mysteries.

Heidi McNie ([30:15](#)):

I completely concur.

Damh the Bard ([30:16](#)):

And so it doesn't necessarily mean that you stay in the realm of faerie for ever, but you'll never again be able to return entirely to your current life, and I think that's brilliant.

Heidi McNie ([30:26](#)):

I think that's spot on. I would also go a bit further, and say that, if you feel that you have, somehow, somewhere along the line, be it dreaming or those twilight times of subconsciousness, actually been in contact and things, you respect that. And I think that if you do eat and drink and party with the fae, then a part of you will always be with them, and a part of them will always be part of you. So it's that mutual exchange. So yes, you can't ... I'd say, you can never go back, I'd like to think that, actually, some day I will. I have a death fantasy. That might sound odd.

Damh the Bard ([31:15](#)):

Oh okay.

Heidi McNie ([31:16](#)):

But I have a death ... yeah, I'm just going to bring it down a bit.

Damh the Bard ([31:18](#)):

A tangent I didn't see coming, but there we are.

Heidi McNie ([31:18](#)):

No, neither did I, to be frank, but we're here, and yeah, so land of my birth and of my death, why not? A death fantasy that I have is that, now that my children are grown and perhaps don't need me as much as they did when they were younger, and obviously it's not going to be for many years yet, I hope, but at some point, I'll be spending more and more time within nature. And more and more time in settings like this. And maybe one day, because I've eaten and drunk from the fae, that I'll return to them. And I won't even know it's happened. The older I get now, the closer I feel to nature, and very, very similarly, as I did as a child. That feeling's growing and growing, so one day, I think, I'm just not going to come back.

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Damh the Bard ([32:12](#)):

Yeah, yeah, just slip into the other world, and that's it. Yeah.

Heidi McNie ([32:16](#)):

Yeah, I'll just walk out there. And say, "Have you seen your mom?" "No, not for a while."

Damh the Bard ([32:18](#)):

Last time we saw her, it was with a tree.

Heidi McNie ([32:21](#)):

Yes, she was with a tree.

Damh the Bard ([32:22](#)):

Yes, she was abseiling down a sand cliff.

Heidi McNie ([32:24](#)):

And there's another beautiful one there.

Damh the Bard ([32:28](#)):

There is. There is.

Heidi McNie ([32:29](#)):

And that holly tree has got ... do you know the film, the Lord of the Rings film, with the "Get off the road"? And those beautiful roots?

Damh the Bard ([32:37](#)):

Yes, yeah.

Heidi McNie ([32:37](#)):

Up there, there's a holly that has roots like that.

Damh the Bard ([32:41](#)):

Roots like that, ah. Okay.

Heidi McNie ([32:42](#)):

So just under that curtain there.

Damh the Bard ([32:43](#)):

Well, let's continue.

Heidi McNie ([32:43](#)):

Okay.

Damh the Bard ([32:52](#)):

So from the road, we've walked up a hill, and a classic style at the top, which ... we did have a gate. We always should have a gate opening and closing on a DruidCast Walking the Talk, and we have had one of those. So that's good. And another field.

Heidi McNie ([33:12](#)):

Yes, there is a stream coming down the side there. There'll be a place where you can see it soon. And this is coming from the lake. So the waters are all connected in this line. Well, I don't think it's a line.

Damh the Bard ([33:29](#)):

More magnificent oak trees.

Heidi McNie ([33:32](#)):

Oh yes. Oh yes.

Damh the Bard ([33:33](#)):

Like an avenue of them along the side of this field.

Heidi McNie ([33:36](#)):

Yeah. You like trees? You just wait.

Damh the Bard ([33:39](#)):

Okay. So, what drew you to your Druid path? Tell people about your story. How did you come upon this particular path?

Heidi McNie ([33:50](#)):

Crikey. So, obviously, my upbringing, all countrified and lovely, and all that sort of thing, from the outside. I was never christened as a child. And that's not a bad thing, but when I was little, I thought it was, because it meant that I wasn't like the others. So in our school, the school I pointed out to you on the way here ... Oh look, ladybird. The local rector came in with a book of-

Damh the Bard ([34:24](#)):

Let's just have a little wait here.

Heidi McNie ([34:24](#)):

... book of births, deaths and marriages, and I, having been born, brought up here, was expecting to hear my name in that. And all the other kids in the class, "Oh yes. Your name's here." "Oh, you're not? Okay, well perhaps you weren't born here." And I thought, "Well, I know I was born here. So where's my name?" And my name wasn't there.

Heidi McNie ([34:51](#)):

And I got home, and I think I must have been about eight? I think I was about eight years old, and I said to my mom, "They had the book, and I'm not in it. Why am I not in it?" And she said, "Because you were never christened." And I said, "Well, why was I never christened?" Because I felt, at that point, when

you're a child, you want to be like everybody else, don't you, and be like your friends. And she said, "Because I wanted you to have the choice." And what a marvelous gift. What a marvelous gift. But at the time, I thought, "What? I want to be like my mates." And then she explained further that, if you're christened, you're given a Christian blessing, so you're being told to believe in a God before you've even gained consciousness, as it were.

Heidi McNie ([35:41](#)):

And it had never done her any favors, so she wasn't going to have myself or my brother christened, because she wanted us to find our own way. Which we did, and she, herself, is a Druid, as you know. So, yes, but I didn't follow that. She wasn't at that time. She wasn't a Druid until much later in life, and when I had my son, we discovered this book. We always had these leanings for the natural world, and all of that, and she brought me up, my nan brought me up, to appreciate this countryside, particularly.

Heidi McNie ([36:20](#)):

When things got too hot at home, this is where I'd come. And they were never worried, because my mom was ... so she knew exactly where I was, and why. That was never a problem. So we always had these leanings. And I went on to study religious education as GSE O-level, as it was in those days, actually. That and drama were my highest two grades, so I am actually qualified to proselytize, and become one of those fire and brimstones.

Damh the Bard ([37:00](#)):

I think that went out the window years ago.

Heidi McNie ([37:02](#)):

Ah, thank goodness. It may seem lovely now. So I was then, really ... my feet were then, okay, well I've got to find my way, because you've said I've got to. And so we looked at various different things. And when my son was born, I was in the bookshop, and I found, I think, Patricia, is it Crowley? Or Crowther? One of them. Can't remember.

Damh the Bard ([37:23](#)):

It would be Vivianne Crowley.

Heidi McNie ([37:26](#)):

Vivianne Crowley. Vivianne Crowley's Principles of Paganism.

Damh the Bard ([37:29](#)):

Yeah, right.

Heidi McNie ([37:29](#)):

That was her first ever pagan book, and in the back of that ... because there was no internet then, it wasn't out there, no mobile phones apart from the talking bricks, if you recall those?

Damh the Bard ([37:40](#)):

Yes, I do remember those.

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Heidi McNie ([37:42](#)):

From Dom Joly, "Oh, oh." Yeah, those. So the only way you could contact was via post or telephone.

Damh the Bard ([37:51](#)):

Imagine that.

Heidi McNie ([37:53](#)):

I know. Crazy, isn't it? Yeah, yeah, yeah. Ah, what is it you want? Oh, I want to find a coven. Ping. Oh there are three in your area.

Damh the Bard ([38:03](#)):

Three weeks later, you get a reply.

Heidi McNie ([38:05](#)):

There we are. Three in your area. So yeah, you can do that now, but then you couldn't. So we wrote to the Pagan Federation, and they sent us a list of people that could be contacted in our area. I live in Lansing, and down the road were Fran and Rob.

Damh the Bard ([38:21](#)):

Absolutely.

Heidi McNie ([38:22](#)):

And they were my first out-there pagan contacts. Mom and I then started to ... I think I did a bit more than she did at that point. There was a juxtaposition there, where she did a bit more for a long time, because I had very small children, and then she would come babysit, and I'd do some stuff. Yes, so that was the first introduction to actual official paganism, don't you know. So I studied witchcraft as a hedge witch, I think. People who do things by themselves. Because it sounds nice, hedge witch, rather than solo witch. So I did that for a long, long while. Then I joined a coven. I was initiated into my first grade of witchcraft there. I've got two small kids now, and I took a bit of a break. We've known each other from those first early meetings, and you'd started Anderida, and things like that, when Michaela was born. That was when Anderida began, wasn't it?

Damh the Bard ([39:33](#)):

Yeah.

Heidi McNie ([39:34](#)):

So for a little while there, I worked with various different groupings and settings of witches. And I actually had my second degree in Sussex witchcraft, happened here. So, yes, we were initiated as second degree together. Then Sue took me under her wing, and we decided that we really rather liked this Anderida crew. So we were going to make our home with you, if that's all right with you. So the main reasons for switching from craft to Druidry is, it's more open. There's no secrecy. Well, there's huge amounts, but there is a certain ... Because it's secretive, it makes it ooh, spooky, spooky thing, which wasn't what I felt-

Damh the Bard ([40:22](#)):

It wasn't what you needed.

Heidi McNie ([40:22](#)):

... about my paganism.

Damh the Bard ([40:25](#)):

Yeah, right. It's good for some people, but not for ...

Heidi McNie ([40:27](#)):

Yeah, I think it's okay for some. But that wasn't where I wanted to go. I loved the magic, really love the magic. Love all the stories. Love being with the spirits of the land, and so Druidry is a far better fit for me. In fact, many witches would refer to me as the Druid, in their group.

Damh the Bard ([40:51](#)):

Right. Even when you were doing ...

Heidi McNie ([40:53](#)):

Even when I was practicing witchcraft, I was referred to as the Druid in the group. And that's what brought me.

Damh the Bard ([41:03](#)):

So, crossing another field, let's just hold on one minute, because another love of yours is storytelling. What's the attraction of storytelling for you?

Heidi McNie ([41:14](#)):

The attraction of storytelling. Gosh. I just love stories. I used to write a lot-

Damh the Bard ([41:23](#)):

Any particular type of story?

Heidi McNie ([41:24](#)):

Yes. For me, it's got to be attached to the land. So it'll either be part of ... folklore, normally, is what inspires them. So a lot of the stories that I write to tell, because story writing and reading, reciting, totally different thing from storytelling. Storytelling is always there in your head, and you can take it with you anywhere. So, if somebody says to you, "Oh, do you know any stories about this?" You go, "Do I?" And you'll go blank, or I do, anyway. I go blank. I go ... and then something goes, "Oh, remember me? Remember me?" And so I can then tell that story. So a lot of my stories are partially written by me, or partially told in here, by me, but they're all inspired from folklore. They're all inspired from places I've been, from beings I have met, and, yeah.

Heidi McNie ([42:23](#)):

So stories are nice. I'm no good at music, particularly. I like to sing. I can't particularly sing. I'm in total awe of anybody who can write music and songs, absolutely. It's never something that I've been able to

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do, but stories, I've always been able to do. And there's a performance element to storytelling, which always really appeals to me as well, because I'm an old drama student. So I always remained reading stories, and then later on, when I had my children, then I would retell stories to them. They used to really enjoy it.

Damh the Bard ([43:05](#)):

Is that how you refound your love of it, from them?

Heidi McNie ([43:08](#)):

It is, yeah. It's through the children, and I'm going further into it now.

Damh the Bard ([43:19](#)):

Okay, so I had to stop and press record again, because we're walking through a holly wood, right now. And it is really is a woodland of holly. We've come up to an old moss-covered stump of a tree, and Heidi, what did you just say to me?

Heidi McNie ([43:40](#)):

Yeah, because you asked me earlier for encounters, and it's only when I do this, I remember them. But there was one day, when I was on my own, taking comfort from the land. And as I walked up through the holly wood, in the back of my mind was the only tune I've ever actually heard, that I've never heard anywhere else before. And I can play it on a penny whistle now. But I heard that tune, and I came through here, and in my mind's eye ... because I don't see things the way ... I wish I did, actual person things. I'd love that. But I don't. So in my mind's eye, as I came here, this is where the tune became its loudest. And this is where, in my mind's eye, I saw Pan or Puck for the first time.

Damh the Bard ([44:28](#)):

Puck, yeah.

Heidi McNie ([44:29](#)):

Puck is a very good friend of mine. So, yes, this is where I actually ... and I stood here, as we are now, and the music became very loud in my head. The image of this guy here, and then just faded away, and as he faded, so did the music. And I just walked on feeling completely and utterly blessed. But yes, that's one of those encounters.

Damh the Bard ([45:05](#)):

Lovely. Well, this little copse, you can sense there's eyes watching here.

Heidi McNie ([45:12](#)):

It's the beginning of the magic.

Damh the Bard ([45:13](#)):

Without doubt, we're being observed.

Damh the Bard ([45:21](#)):



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So yes, walking along this woodland path, past this lovely cherry there, there are two very old yew trees, standing either side of the path as it heads down. Oh yeah, there was more. There was more.

Heidi McNie ([45:41](#)):

They're the parent trees.

Damh the Bard ([45:42](#)):

And heading down, so yes, definitely a gateway here. And beyond the gateway is the spring.

Heidi McNie ([45:48](#)):

Is the spring. It's the Chalybeate Spring, yes.

Damh the Bard ([45:51](#)):

Okay, all right.

Heidi McNie ([45:52](#)):

But whether we'll be able to see it, because I spoke to you before about how they've been allowing it to flood. That was another froglet, by the way.

Damh the Bard ([45:59](#)):

Yeah, careful where you tread. There's lots of frogs. Tiny little frogs, all over the the place.

Heidi McNie ([46:05](#)):

Lots of life. And this is where I had the second degree that I was talking about.

Damh the Bard ([46:12](#)):

This is where you had your second degree initiation into ...

Heidi McNie ([46:16](#)):

Yes, into Sussex crafting. But this has always been in my life.

Damh the Bard ([46:22](#)):

Yeah, yeah. Powerful. Right, well let's step across the threshold.

Heidi McNie ([46:42](#)):

Powerful.

Damh the Bard ([46:42](#)):

We're in.

Damh the Bard ([46:42](#)):

And you can see that the water is very red. Iron, like the Chalice Well. And we're walking along like razed plank platforms. It reminds me a little bit of the woodland of St Nectans Glen. It has these wooden

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platforms, sort of snaking across the wood. And we're actually walking across this stream. This is so magical, Heidi. It is so amazing.

Heidi McNie ([47:17](#)):

Meadowsweet. Meadowsweet.

Damh the Bard ([47:18](#)):

Ah, we're surrounded with meadowsweet.

Heidi McNie ([47:22](#)):

Meadowsweet. Now where this fencing is, right inside there is the actual original source of the spring. As children, and I've actually brought your missus here, and we were actually able to sit around it, so they haven't sluiced it. So that means it hasn't gone down. But when there's a will, there's a way, when it comes to water, and particularly magical water. So it has moved itself. So wherever you see, there's a particular sort of bubbling on the surface, that is where it's come up in other places.

Damh the Bard ([48:00](#)):

It's bubbling up right there, isn't it, as well, yeah.

Heidi McNie ([48:01](#)):

So if you were to take your water from there, that's drinkable from there. I have a jam jar in my backpack, so I wouldn't trust it up there, because this has come from a different source. But that water and this runnel, if I can get there, I do trust.

Damh the Bard ([48:20](#)):

All right. Step back a little bit.

Heidi McNie ([48:21](#)):

And, as you know, you should never drink water that isn't free running, but this is a trusted source that I've drunk since a kid. My babies were named with this water, for this water, for the spirit that lives with this water. So I'm just going to ... I mean, there is more. We'll just do this bit, and then there's another spring to take you to. But yes, that is all fine.

Damh the Bard ([48:59](#)):

It tastes like Chalice Well water. You can taste that iron.

Heidi McNie ([49:02](#)):

Very much, exactly. Exactly.

Damh the Bard ([49:03](#)):

Yeah, you can taste that iron. Definitely. Wow.

Heidi McNie ([49:07](#)):

So, parallels with Chalice Well, how many have you spotted so far?

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Damh the Bard ([49:10](#)):

A number.

Heidi McNie ([49:12](#)):

Only this is the wild version.

Damh the Bard ([49:15](#)):

Oh, it's beautiful.

Heidi McNie ([49:16](#)):

Yeah, it's not been hedged in. It's not being managed. It's just being its own thing, and doing its own thing.

Damh the Bard ([49:26](#)):

Yeah, and within the woodland. You can hear all the birds around, and lots and lots and lots of willow.

Heidi McNie ([49:33](#)):

Lots of willow, which is of course a psychic one, isn't it?

Damh the Bard ([49:37](#)):

Yes, yes.

Heidi McNie ([49:38](#)):

So, if you look around, usually, as well, you'll hear woodpeckers. This is a good place for woodpeckers.

Damh the Bard ([49:44](#)):

There's loads of willow.

Heidi McNie ([49:46](#)):

Yeah.

Damh the Bard ([49:47](#)):

Tons of willow. Tons of meadowsweet.

Heidi McNie ([49:49](#)):

And you see it breaking down there. Breaks down, it revives. Breaks down, it revives. When I come here, I feel the full energy and the full force of the natural world. And it makes me giddy.

Damh the Bard ([50:03](#)):

I can understand why.

Heidi McNie ([50:03](#)):

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I can sit here and I can feel that I've only been here for five minutes, and yet hours can have passed. This is true faerie land, to me.

Damh the Bard ([50:15](#)):

Yes. So while we negotiate-

Heidi McNie ([50:23](#)):

More mud.

Damh the Bard ([50:24](#)):

... more mud. Thank you, Heidi for this Walking the Talk. It's been lovely to talk to you. And thank you for taking me to your woods and your springs.

Heidi McNie ([50:35](#)):

You're very welcome. It's a pleasure to show you after all these years.

Damh the Bard ([50:38](#)):

I know.

Heidi McNie ([50:39](#)):

Because you've heard me talk about it.

Damh the Bard ([50:40](#)):

It's taken a while to get me here, but here I am.

Heidi McNie ([50:42](#)):

And you've even had the water from it before, but this is the first time you've actually seen where it comes from.

Damh the Bard ([52:42](#)):

Brilliant. Thank you.

Heidi McNie ([52:42](#)):

But no, you're more than welcome.

Damh the Bard ([52:42](#)):

Thank you.

Damh the Bard ([52:42](#)):

(singing)