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Damh the Bard:

Beautiful Woodland for this month's Walking the Talk. Walking the Talk, an interview series for Druidcast.

Damh the Bard:

Tell the people a bit about you, and what brought you to this path?

Gary Colcombe:

Well, I was 16, I think, when it first hit me.

Damh the Bard:

Right.

Gary Colcombe:

And I discovered that ... I grew up in a spiritualist family.

Damh the Bard:

A spiritualist family?

Gary Colcombe:

Yeah.

Damh the Bard:

Oh, right.

Gary Colcombe:

My grandmother was a trans medium. And very soon, I came to feel these things myself. And we found a deck of tarot cards, and I learned how to read tarot. And from grandmother and friends saying, "Oh, you're doing very well, Gary. Well done," that was all the encouragement I needed to research more.

Damh the Bard:

So your family, there was no, "Oh, that's the occult. Stay away from that kind of thing,"? It was-

Gary Colcombe:

Not at the beginning level, no.

Damh the Bard:

No! Not at that point?

Gary Colcombe:

By the time I was reading Crowley, it was.

Damh the Bard:

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That's a little bit different? Okay.

Gary Colcombe:

Yeah.

Damh the Bard:

So what was it like growing up in a spiritualist family, then? Were there seances and things, happening?

Gary Colcombe:

Yeah, they held development circles.

Damh the Bard:

Right. Okay.

Gary Colcombe:

And I was never allowed, being too young, to join in. But, years later, I heard some of the tapes of the messages they received, and so on.

Damh the Bard:

Right. Okay.

Gary Colcombe:

So, yeah, it was quite interesting. And it's good to ... I mean, things happened as well. These are the things that convince you, the things that happened.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah.

Gary Colcombe:

Like overpowering smells-

Damh the Bard:

... just appearing? Yeah?

Gary Colcombe:

Yeah.

Damh the Bard:

Right.

Gary Colcombe:

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Lily of The Valley was the scent in question, which was my great-great grandmother's personal scent. So, it was when she was around. But doors would unlatch and the television would go on and off. We had a solid push button, but it would still go on and off.

Damh the Bard:

Right.

Gary Colcombe:

Enough for you to know that ... "What the hell is going on here? This doesn't look right."

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. Right. I mean, that must instill in you, from a very early age, a belief in things otherworldly. You know?

Gary Colcombe:

Not just the belief, but an acceptance.

Damh the Bard:

Right. Okay.

Gary Colcombe:

I kind of just regarded it as normal.

Damh the Bard:

Just, how it is?

Gary Colcombe:

Just, how it is.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. Like people who grew up in musical families, not understanding why not everyone plays an instrument, and that kind of stuff.

Gary Colcombe:

Was that you?

Damh the Bard:

No, it wasn't, weirdly.

Gary Colcombe:

Oh!

Damh the Bard:

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I wish it was. Yeah. Okay. Okay.

Damh the Bard:

And then, so, from there, your spirituality. And you had an acceptance, and an experience of, the other.

Gary Colcombe:

I did.

Damh the Bard:

And then, at age 16, you know, you were within that. And then, where did you go from there?

Gary Colcombe:

Well, I started to read, and read ferociously. There used to be a metaphysical research group, the MRG, up on The Ridge in Hastings, which is the high land behind the town. And I used to be a regular visitor there, pouring my way through the shelves and the books. And I found out about witchcraft, and I found out about magic. And I found out about Aleister Crowley, or Crowley ... Is his name. I've never known exactly his name is pronounced.

Damh the Bard:

No. I always used to say Crowley.

Gary Colcombe:

Yeah.

Damh the Bard:

But then Vivian Crowley came along, and it was Crowley. And I've never quite worked out which one it should be.

Gary Colcombe:

Well, there's a poem in Konx Om Pax called "Bury Me in a Nameless Grave". It's only a very small one, but in it, he rhymes his own name with "unholy".

Damh the Bard:

Oh, well, there you go.

Gary Colcombe:

So I'm guessing it's Crowley.

Damh the Bard:

Right. Okay. So it's just us lot, and Ozzy, he got it wrong as well.

Gary Colcombe:

I remember.

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Damh the Bard:

Yeah. And I mean, at this time, there wasn't ... I mean, there was no internet.

Gary Colcombe:

We're talking about the late seventies.

Damh the Bard:

The late seventies?

Gary Colcombe:

Yeah.

Damh the Bard:

Right. Okay.

Gary Colcombe:

Yeah.

Damh the Bard:

So that was, you know ... I mean, well, the PF, I guess, were in existence by then?

Gary Colcombe:

Yeah. Yeah. I was a member.

Damh the Bard:

You were a member?

Gary Colcombe:

I was.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. And your path led you down the Crowley path? Or ...

Gary Colcombe:

No, that was still-

Damh the Bard:

... the witchcraft path?

Gary Colcombe:

That was still ... Yeah, the witchcraft path. The Crowley stuff was something that bubbled along in the background for many years.

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Damh the Bard:

Yeah. Yeah.

Gary Colcombe:

But the witchcraft path being an liturgical tradition, and being very conscious, at the time, entry was only available through the apostolic succession; line after line of initiates, each keeping it within boundaries; it made entry very difficult.

Damh the Bard:

And finding out who they were, and where they were, I guess?

Gary Colcombe:

Exactly.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah.

Gary Colcombe:

Exactly. Yeah.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. So we found something called Seax-Wica, or Saxon Witchcraft, which was created by Raymond Buckland.

Gary Colcombe:

That's right. Raymond Buckland. Yes. Yeah.

Gary Colcombe:

Yes. And that is one of the few sources off self-initiation.

Damh the Bard:

Right. Okay.

Gary Colcombe:

So we practiced that for a couple of years.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Gary Colcombe:

There was me and some friends.

Damh the Bard:

And I bet those were good times?

Gary Colcombe:

They were good times. Yes. Hunting for a ritual sword in all the antique shops in Hastings. Yeah. Yeah, we eventually found a theatrical one that did the job perfectly.

Damh the Bard:

Brilliant!

Gary Colcombe:

Yeah.

Damh the Bard:

You've got to have your Solomonic sword, haven't you?

Gary Colcombe:

You have. Yeah.

Damh the Bard:

Okay. Well, we we're just entered into these woods. So let's take a little step further, and then, let me know why you've brought me to this particular place?

Gary Colcombe:

Okay.

Damh the Bard:

So you've brought me to this woodland in Hastings. And looking around, because it's podcasting, let's just see what we've got? We've got a lot of sycamore, by the looks of things, up here. And the ground is covered with the bramble that's going over. There's holly I can see, as well. But a lot of it is maple and sycamore, in this little bit, anyway. You can see the ash has gone over, at the top there. But it's mostly a deciduous, Southern England woodland, in the middle of the city.

Damh the Bard:

So anyway, why are we here? What's your connection with this place?

Gary Colcombe:

Well, when I was about 19, myself, and several other members from the coven that was a part of, used to come here to meditate-

Damh the Bard:

Right-

Gary Colcombe:

... to be with nature. Neither of us, or any of us, drove, at the time; we were too young. So this was easily within walking distance. And as you'll see, hopefully you'll encounter some of the magic of the place.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. Yeah.

Gary Colcombe:

There is a spot I would want to take you to ... See if we can find it?

Damh the Bard:

Okay.

Gary Colcombe:

Although I do hear it's changed a lot, over the years. So I'm a bit trepidacious, myself.

Damh the Bard:

If we'll find the spot?

Gary Colcombe:

Yeah. The spot will be there. But what they've done to it, I dread to think.

Damh the Bard:

Oh, well, we'll have to see.

Gary Colcombe:

Yeah.

Damh the Bard:

So, I don't think many 19 year olds meditated in those days, did they?

Gary Colcombe:

No. No. Me, and my best friend at the time, were probably fairly obscure, and different from others. At one stage, one summer, we walked around with staffs, staves.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah.

Gary Colcombe:

And yeah, that got quite a few strange looks.

Damh the Bard:

That got noticed? So you were, what is deemed, and commonly known as, potentially, a weird kid? Yes?



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Damh the Bard:

I was a weird kid.

Gary Colcombe:

Yeah?

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. Okay, and how was school, and that, and growing up, for you, because of that?

Gary Colcombe:

Well, at one stage, they tied me to a column, at school, and filled my coat full of paper, and we're going to burn me as a witch.

Damh the Bard:

Oh, okay. That's ... Okay.

Gary Colcombe:

That's a memory that's never left.

Damh the Bard:

Wow!

Gary Colcombe:

I can't imagine why. But ... Yeah.

Damh the Bard:

Wow! All right. So you know, it had its ups and downs, then?

Gary Colcombe:

It did. It did. It did. But the relationships, as always, was a reward for all the ...

Damh the Bard:

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Gary Colcombe:

That's the growth of knowledge. And then after a few years, we actually came in contact with a genuine coven, and were invited to join.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. I can imagine why. Because you probably had a good foundation by then, anyway, by the sounds of things?

Gary Colcombe:

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I had a good foot in many doorsteps, yeah.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah, yeah, yeah. And so, okay, you could have meditated in a park, couldn't you?

Gary Colcombe:

Yeah.

Damh the Bard:

You could have meditated in your bedrooms?

Gary Colcombe:

Yes.

Damh the Bard:

But you chose to come to a wood. What-

Gary Colcombe:

At dawn.

Damh the Bard:

At dawn? What was that all about, for you?

Damh the Bard:

Well that's because, this is the nearest and purest essence of nature that we could find.

Gary Colcombe:

Yeah.

Damh the Bard:

And Wicca is, or witchcraft is, is not just about the magic, it's about the gods.

Damh the Bard:

And then, the connection?

Gary Colcombe:

And the connection you have to them.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah.

Gary Colcombe:

And you try to learn it.

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Damh the Bard:

Yeah. It's a gut thing, isn't it?

Gary Colcombe:

It is very much a gut thing. And by avoiding places like this, you're doing yourself no favors.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. Cool. Okay. Well, let's see if we can-

Gary Colcombe:

Go on a bit, shall we?

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. Let's go on a bit, and see where we go. Yeah. Thank you.

Damh the Bard:

There always has to be a dog on the Walking The Talk session.

Gary Colcombe:

And there are none madder than Spaniels.

Damh the Bard:

No, there aren't. Well, I think I might be a spaniel, actually.

Gary Colcombe:

Are you? Right.

Damh the Bard:

In my heart. Yeah. I mean, I know I say I'm ... You know, that stag is my animal. But I've always felt like, inside, that I'm actually a spaniel.

Gary Colcombe:

A raving spaniel, mad, trying to get out?

Damh the Bard:

Yeah!

Gary Colcombe:

So, we're hunting the water.

Damh the Bard:

We're hunting the water. There's water here, is there?

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Gary Colcombe:

There is water here.

Damh the Bard:

Oh, right on! Okay. Oh, I love this sound of, just ... Of the fallen autumn leaves.

Gary Colcombe:

Yeah.

Damh the Bard:

It's just beautiful, isn't it?

Gary Colcombe:

It is. It is. Autumn is one of my favorite times of year. The other is spring.

Damh the Bard:

Yes.

Gary Colcombe:

Kind of like, the intermediary time, or the liminal space, between summer and winter.

Damh the Bard:

Yes.

Gary Colcombe:

What about yourself? What do you like best? What season appreciates?

Damh the Bard:

Well, funnily enough, I've always been a summer person in my heart. And I've always had an inner distrust of autumn, because I know that it's the doorway to winter.

Gary Colcombe:

That's true.

Damh the Bard:

But I've worked on that relationship, to be honest, over the past kind of five, or so, years. And now I can see that it's not all about the warmth. I was born in June, June the 16th. I'm a Summer Solstice child, you know? And summer, to me, means those things. But actually, do you know what?

Gary Colcombe:

What?

Damh the Bard:

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Those liminal times, although they are times of perceived balance, that's the time when things are really happening.

Gary Colcombe:

Yes.

Damh the Bard:

Do you know what I mean?

Gary Colcombe:

Very much so.

Damh the Bard:

Autumn and spring are the time when things are really happening.

Gary Colcombe:

The space on the strand between the sea and the land is a magical space, as well. And there you'll find things happen.

Damh the Bard:

That's it. The liminal space, the times of balance, if we're not sure-

Gary Colcombe:

Can I show you something?

Damh the Bard:

Yes, you can. Yes.

Gary Colcombe:

Do you see over there, there's a mound, raised in the middle?

Damh the Bard:

Yes. Yeah. Yeah.

Gary Colcombe:

It must have been about four o'clock in the morning, one morning, and I was seated on top of there, watching the stars go by. And I saw a green ball, like, of energy, or something. I don't know what it was. But a green ball, shoot down from the sky and bounce into a tree. And then I saw a female form step out from that tree. It lasted five or 10 seconds, and I was absolutely stunned.

Damh the Bard:

And that was over on this ...?

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Gary Colcombe:

On that mound, over there.

Damh the Bard:

It's not a barrow, or anything. Is it just a mound?

Gary Colcombe:

I think it's just a mound. Yeah.

Damh the Bard:

You know what? Mounds, did you say "just a mound,"?

Gary Colcombe:

But is there such a thing? Yeah, absolutely.

Damh the Bard:

Is there such a thing, in the woods, if you come across a mound in the woods? You know, these Hollow Hills, and all that?

Gary Colcombe:

That was, yeah, my first encounter with the Fey.

Damh the Bard:

That's amazing.

Gary Colcombe:

And I think I remained calm enough not to disrupt it.

Damh the Bard:

Wow!

Gary Colcombe:

And then it just faded away.

Damh the Bard:

What do you think it was? She was? What do you think she was?

Gary Colcombe:

Well, my immediate answer is a dryad, you know, the spirit of a tree. But, I don't know. Ultimately, I don't know.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. Wow. Can we go and have a sit on that mound?

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Gary Colcombe:

Yeah. Why not? Why not?

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. Yeah. So I was just saying, as well, I've just finished a song about the Autumn Equinox.

Gary Colcombe:

Ah!

Damh the Bard:

And one of the lines are, "The oak the holly stand equal again." You know, they do not battle at those times. They stand as equals.

Gary Colcombe:

That's cool.

Damh the Bard:

They're night and day.

Gary Colcombe:

That's cool.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. Yes. I'm looking forward to recording that, and getting it out.

Gary Colcombe:

After you then, sir?

Damh the Bard:

What a fabulous mound. There we are. So what we can see, here, is there are paths going all around it. But, just, in the woods is a mound-

Gary Colcombe:

... illuminated by sunshine-

Damh the Bard:

... illuminated by beautiful sunshine, coming through the dappled, autumn, falling leaves ... That's out of poetry-

Gary Colcombe:

That's really good.

Damh the Bard:

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I'm a bard you know?

Gary Colcombe:

Yeah, I expect this sort stuff.

Damh the Bard:

Let's go and have a look.

Gary Colcombe:

You'll be raising my expectations, soon, you know?

Gary Colcombe:

Over there, we've got a Victorian walled garden. Because this place, originally, was part of the estate of Bohemia house.

Damh the Bard:

That's a name.

Gary Colcombe:

It is a name, isn't it?

Damh the Bard:

Bohemia House? Right. Okay.

Gary Colcombe:

And that garden is original, so it's Victorian.

Damh the Bard:

This is weird, isn't it?

Damh the Bard:

It is strange.

Gary Colcombe:

I mean, it's not weird for you, you've been here loads. You say that you spent about 20 years, coming to this wood?

Damh the Bard:

I have, over the years, yeah.

Gary Colcombe:

Yeah.



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Damh the Bard:

And it literally is a walled garden, in the middle of the woods. And the walls are not insignificant, either.

Gary Colcombe:

No. They must be eight feet tall, something like that.

Damh the Bard:

Wow!

Gary Colcombe:

You can see right into the garden.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. Let's have a look.

Damh the Bard:

So, where were you sitting when this happened?

Gary Colcombe:

Up there. You see that tree, the large tree in the center?

Damh the Bard:

Yeah.

Gary Colcombe:

Up there, with my back against the tree.

Damh the Bard:

Right. So, up here? Maybe, let's go up here. So, where were you looking, do you think?

Gary Colcombe:

Down there.

Damh the Bard:

Down there?

Gary Colcombe:

It was over there, somewhere, that she came out. The trees have changed. There used to be one there, I think. We can just about see the remains of it.

Damh the Bard:

Oh, yeah. Yeah.

Gary Colcombe:

My perception might have had a lot to do with it being four in the morning, tired, and just chilling out. I used to spend a lot of time, at night time, in these woods.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. Yeah.

Gary Colcombe:

Yeah. Beautiful.

Damh the Bard:

That's when it all happens.

Damh the Bard:

I think that's a Holm oak, isn't it, over there? By the looks of things? One of the kind of evergreen oaks, I think. let's go and have a look.

Gary Colcombe:

Oh, right. Perfect.

Damh the Bard:

So we're still on the mound and by the tree, and we're under this Holm oak. And I was just thinking that people can live lifetimes and not see things like that. But, those things that have fallen into your presence, you know-

Gary Colcombe:

Yeah-

Damh the Bard:

... do you think that that may have happened because of your involvement with the spiritual stuff, when you were growing up? Because did it, maybe, open up certain parts of you that other people find harder to learn how to open, I guess?

Gary Colcombe:

Dave, I don't know. I can't answer it for other people, really. I don't know. But, for myself, I think I can say that I grew up with a large degree of acceptance of many things that, normally, you might have shot by, and said, "Oh, it's a reflection in the sunlight," or whatever. But I accepted these things as existing, and accepted these things as happening. So, yeah. Acceptance.

Damh the Bard:

And you do have a very, I think, deep and personal relationship with the other world, with the realm of the fairy, or of the she?

Gary Colcombe:

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Yeah, I do.

Damh the Bard:

Was that the first time you'd seen a manifestation of that kind? Of nature?

Gary Colcombe:

Yes, it was.

Damh the Bard:

And do you think that is why that thread has continued, to this day, with your connection with those things?

Gary Colcombe:

Quite possibly.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah.

Gary Colcombe:

Yeah. Hopefully, I'll be able to show you the second encounter space I had.

Damh the Bard:

Oh, okay.

Gary Colcombe:

If it's still here?

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. And so, after so many years of feeling that connection with what, I would see as the other world ... And I never mean that as another world.

Gary Colcombe:

Sure.

Damh the Bard:

I always think that, all you need to do who is just step slightly to one side, and you'll be there. You just need to know how to step slightly to one side to see it.

Gary Colcombe:

Yeah.

Damh the Bard:

It's all here, it's just our eyes can't always perceive it.

Gary Colcombe:

Absolutely.

Damh the Bard:

Is that your kind of understanding of that ...?

Gary Colcombe:

Definitely-

Damh the Bard:

... of their worlds?

Gary Colcombe:

Definitely. Yeah.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah?

Gary Colcombe:

I think there are places you can go that may make it easier. I think there are things you can do that make it easier. Ritual, for example, in the right place, and at the right time, helps that. They used to say, "the veil becomes thin," which is an expression I very much go for.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah.

Gary Colcombe:

I believe in that one.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. Yeah. Right. Some people will see that as a realm of the gods, and other people say, "No, the gods are different." You know, "The gods are in a different place." Do you have a feeling about that?

Gary Colcombe:

Dealing with the gods is something that's always left me in awe. It's not something that I have a great practical understanding of, encounters I've had with deity that have left me breathless, are different from those I've had with the Fey.

Damh the Bard:

Right.

Gary Colcombe:

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And I think that's probably about as far as I can go, in actually saying what I think, because it's only based on experience.

Damh the Bard:

I totally get that.

Damh the Bard:

Well, let's leave this space to its peace and quiet, and continue.

Gary Colcombe:

It's lovely, isn't it?

Damh the Bard:

It is really, really lovely. I can totally get why you would come here at night. How far away did you live, from this space?

Gary Colcombe:

Probably about half a mile in that direction.

Damh the Bard:

Okay. So, it's pretty local?

Gary Colcombe:

Yeah.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. Fantastic.

Damh the Bard:

All right. Onward.

Gary Colcombe:

Onward it is.

Gary Colcombe:

So I used to walk through the woods a lot, during the night, so that I could get to the place where I would sit and wait for the dawn. And one particular night, the moonlight filtering through the trees quite brightly, I was lucky because I heard ... I was actually quite scared, at first, to be honest, because I heard a movement in the shrubbery to the sides.

Damh the Bard:

Right.

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Gary Colcombe:

Well, I know there's not much, but it used to be denser than this. And I could see in the moonlight, all of a sudden, a small group of badgers burst out onto the path.

Damh the Bard:

Wow!

Gary Colcombe:

There was an adult and several cubs.

Damh the Bard:

Oh!

Gary Colcombe:

Three Cubs. And they gamboled, they played with each other, just ahead of me. I was stunned. I was trying to very carefully place my feet, so that would make no noise. They must have walked on in front of me, for 50 yards or so, before disappearing into the trees again.

Damh the Bard:

Wow!

Gary Colcombe:

Absolutely astounding.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah.

Gary Colcombe:

It was then that we discovered there were a lot of badger setts in the area. And several groups of the coven, and I, took part in raising signatures on a petition to try and protect them, because there was rumors of them being gassed and horrible things like that.

Damh the Bard:

Oh, wow. Yeah.

Gary Colcombe:

And it was from there that the coven ... Or later, becoming known as the Grove of the Badger, came from.

Damh the Bard:

Right. With that connection with this particular area? And there, it's very, very active, local spirits?

Gary Colcombe:

Yeah. It definitely is, isn't it?

Damh the Bard:

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah. Oh, right. And the Grove of the Badger, that ... How old were you when you were in the Grove of the Badger?

Gary Colcombe:

Probably, my thirties, I would think.

Damh the Bard:

Oh, okay.

Gary Colcombe:

Yeah.

Damh the Bard:

Okay. So you'd been involved for a long time?

Gary Colcombe:

Quite a long time.

Damh the Bard:

Was the Grove of the Badger, was its root in Wicca, or ...?

Gary Colcombe:

Its roots were in Alexandrian Wicca.

Damh the Bard:

Was in Alexandrian Wicca?

Gary Colcombe:

Well, had been initiated in the late seventies, by then.

Damh the Bard:

Right. Okay.

Gary Colcombe:

So, this was eighties.

Damh the Bard:

Because, of course, Alex Sanders was local, here?

Gary Colcombe:

Yeah.

Gary Colcombe:

So I worked with him a couple of times.

Damh the Bard:

Did you?

Gary Colcombe:

Yeah.

Damh the Bard:

Oh, right. Okay.

Gary Colcombe:

That was quite an experience.

Damh the Bard:

How did you find that?

Gary Colcombe:

He was a prankster, a trickster.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah.

Gary Colcombe:

Yeah. He had a wonderful voice that you had to quieten down and strain to hear what he was saying.

Damh the Bard:

Really? Oh.

Gary Colcombe:

Which I don't know whether it's deliberately done to attract attention, or whether it's just the way he was? I don't know. I didn't know him well enough.

Damh the Bard:

There's a lot of Alexandrian ... When I first came to paganism from ceremonial magic, in the early nineties, there were a lot of Alexandrian covens around Hastings. But, must of all, a lot of them have stemmed from him-

Gary Colcombe:

... from his work in [Bexhill]. Yeah.



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Damh the Bard:

And Maxine, and what they were doing in at the time.

Gary Colcombe:

Yeah.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. Yeah. Amazing. Wow. Okay. And that then became The Grove of the Badger?

Gary Colcombe:

Yeah.

Damh the Bard:

Right. Well, tell me a little bit more about that, in a minute.

Damh the Bard:

So we've come down these steps. I mean, we call them steps, they are steps.

Gary Colcombe:

Just about.

Damh the Bard:

Just about steps, in the wood, down into the valley here. And there is a ...

Gary Colcombe:

It's a pool.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. And quite a large one, really.

Gary Colcombe:

With moss and lichen and things.

Damh the Bard:

It's got everything you need for ritual here, hasn't it?

Gary Colcombe:

It has.

Damh the Bard:

Do you have any kind of memories of ritual by the pool here?

Gary Colcombe:

No.

Damh the Bard:

No?

Gary Colcombe:

No. All of our ritual was done inside a temple, rather than in the woods.

Damh the Bard:

Oh, really?

Gary Colcombe:

Something I now regret.

Damh the Bard:

Okay.

Gary Colcombe:

Yeah. One of the things, in my later life, I thought, well, in some ways it would be nice to work closer to nature.

Damh the Bard:

Oh, let me just let everybody hear this. I don't know if you can hear that? Oh, and there's another one down there. Oh yeah, so this is the upper pool, and then this is-

Gary Colcombe:

And that's the lower one-

Damh the Bard:

This is emptying slowly, I guess, because of rain and the like, and heading down into a lower pool, down there.

Gary Colcombe:

There's a stream that feeds this pool.

Damh the Bard:

There is a stream? Right. Okay. Okay.

Damh the Bard:

And we have another dog. We always have to have dogs on Druidcast. Where are we heading now?

Gary Colcombe:

Back up there, past the dog.

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Damh the Bard:

Past the dog. Brilliant. Okay. All right.

Gary Colcombe:

Hello, little fellow.

Damh the Bard:

And this looks like bitz-a dog!

Gary Colcombe:

Yeah, it does.

Damh the Bard:

A wee, brown dog.

Gary Colcombe:

It is a wee, brown dog.

Damh the Bard:

As Billy Connelly would have said.

Gary Colcombe:

I love Billy Connelly.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah.

Gary Colcombe:

Hi. All right?

Dog walker:

Hi.

Damh the Bard:

And this is the bank where the badges were?

Gary Colcombe:

No, a bit further on. We're on this side of the stream.

Damh the Bard:

Right, okay.

Gary Colcombe:

That's where the badger setts were.

Damh the Bard:

Okay. So, let's head there. That's great.

Damh the Bard:

So, heading up by the stream that feeds the upper-

Gary Colcombe:

... and lower pools.

Damh the Bard:

... and upper, lower pools.

Gary Colcombe:

Yeah.

Damh the Bard:

And we're heading up, now, towards ...

Gary Colcombe:

A little spot, which is where we used to do our meditation, in the morning, of course.

Damh the Bard:

Right. And you haven't been here, for quite some time?

Gary Colcombe:

I haven't. No. It was somewhere between five and 10 years ago ... I don't remember ... when we were here last. And I've heard some rumors that the local council has stepped in and done things.

Damh the Bard:

Oh.

Gary Colcombe:

So this is kind of a voyage of discovery for me, as well.

Damh the Bard:

Okay. Well, is it just up here? Is it this space?

Gary Colcombe:

It should be, yes. Yeah, a hollow carved out of the hill.

Damh the Bard:

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I can see it, yes. Well, this is perfect ritual space, this. Oh, yes. Well, look at that?

Gary Colcombe:

Yeah, they have done it.

Damh the Bard:

Okay.

Gary Colcombe:

This is an 1830s, 1850s. I think, the house was originally 1831 built. It was a folly.

Damh the Bard:

Right. Okay.

Gary Colcombe:

What the Victorian thought a Roman bath looked like.

Damh the Bard:

Okay.

Gary Colcombe:

So what they've done is they've dug into the hill where a natural stream exists.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah.

Gary Colcombe:

So, this is continually fed. I wonder how much closer we can get?

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. But there's a big gate there. Was the gate there ...? Not there?

Gary Colcombe:

No. The local council fitted this lot. Citing, "Danger!" and, "Severe danger!"

Damh the Bard:

Oh, careful now, as they say.

Gary Colcombe:

And I used to sit over there, on that side.

Damh the Bard:

Right.

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Gary Colcombe:

My friend used to sit on that side. If you look hard enough amongst the graffiti, I'm ashamed to say, you'll find an "S" and a "G" rune.

Damh the Bard:

Oh, okay! What a shame, that they've done this. What could possibly be a problem here?

Gary Colcombe:

Where's the severe danger?

Damh the Bard:

Where's the severe danger? There's a tiny little pool that's about six inches deep. And something that ... It doesn't go anywhere else, does it?

Gary Colcombe:

No. No.

Damh the Bard:

It's just into the limestone, or whatever, here.

Gary Colcombe:

But they did this without planning permission.

Damh the Bard:

Right.

Gary Colcombe:

And these are Friends of Summerfield Woods. And one, Historic England Society, or something like that, I forget the name, were fighting them about it, so they retroactively applied for planning permission for work they'd already done.

Damh the Bard:

Oh! And of course, got it, because it's themselves that they're applying to, right?

Gary Colcombe:

Yeah. Yeah.

Damh the Bard:

Oh. Well, I can see why you would sit here. You'd probably just bring in some ... Just a couple of little candles in here, or something.

Gary Colcombe:

Exactly so.

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Damh the Bard:

And light it up.

Gary Colcombe:

Something to sit on, because the rocks are always wet.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. And then just sit here, and just listen, and be part ... Be in the earth.

Gary Colcombe:

And the longer you listen to that water, the more you can hear the voice of the Fae in it.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah.

Gary Colcombe:

There's something better.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. I wonder if this-

Gary Colcombe:

It's almost as if, if you stretched a little bit harder, you can understand what they were saying. But I never made it!

Damh the Bard:

Will this even pick it up, if I just put this in here, and just be quiet for just a second? Yeah. I hope that came out because it is very, very peaceful.

Gary Colcombe:

So this is what I bought you to see.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. And is this a natural spring, under there, as well?

Gary Colcombe:

Yes.

Damh the Bard:

I mean, this, you know, it's like a holy well, isn't it?

Gary Colcombe:

It is, isn't it? Yeah.

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Damh the Bard:

It is. And you know, anywhere else-

Gary Colcombe:

We were very lucky.

Damh the Bard:

If this was in Cornwall, it would have a saint attached to it.

Gary Colcombe:

Yeah.

Damh the Bard:

Wouldn't it?

Gary Colcombe:

Yeah.

Damh the Bard:

And I wonder why ... What a grim thing to do. But there we are. There we are.

Gary Colcombe:

We mixed with the strangest of people's, while we were working here. One chap came around claiming that Christopher Lee actually was Dracula.

Damh the Bard:

What? He wasn't?

Gary Colcombe:

Absolutely. And that another, somebody else, claimed frequently that he always met Crowley in the woods.

Damh the Bard:

Right.

Gary Colcombe:

Now, as he lived a couple of miles away.

Damh the Bard:

Yes.

Gary Colcombe:



And died a couple of miles away ... Well, it's possible, I suppose, is the Bohemian set were a part of Bohemia house.

Damh the Bard:

Oh.

Gary Colcombe:

So, the Victorians would party, and they had swimming pools and all sorts in this house. It was a mansion-sized thing.

Damh the Bard:

So, Crowley may well have walked around that walled garden?

Gary Colcombe:

He may well have done. Yeah. Well we'll never know.

Damh the Bard:

Wow! He's a complicated character, isn't he? You can't deny that a lot of the magic that is still used to this day, was developed-

Gary Colcombe:

... from his work?

Damh the Bard:

... from his work. Yeah, exactly. He's a very, very complicated character. And you know, I still have a soft spot, because those early books were the only things I could find-

Gary Colcombe:

Yeah. Same here-

Damh the Bard:

... on magic, you know?

Gary Colcombe:

Same here.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah.

Gary Colcombe:

And I did the old, Liber Resh, Adorations of the Sun, four times a day. I did that for several years.

Damh the Bard:

Really?

Gary Colcombe:

Yeah.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah, yeah.

Gary Colcombe:

Yeah.

Damh the Bard:

And his, The Work of the Golden Dawn, and all those things that became-

Gary Colcombe:

And that's something else I tried to do, is to get into the Golden Dawn, but I couldn't find any orders, locally, or within my reach. So I started to build models of the temple, and my aim was to reconstruct the Neophyte Ceremony, and learn it to the point where I knew where everything was, and learn it to the point where I could do it, astrally, in my mind.

Damh the Bard:

Right. Right. And did you get to that point?

Gary Colcombe:

No.

Damh the Bard:

No! It's quite complicated.

Gary Colcombe:

I got close. I got close.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. Yeah.

Gary Colcombe:

Made models of the officers, and started to learn it. But, no, I didn't finish.

Damh the Bard:

You obviously still have a connection to ceremonial magic, and that kind of thing.

Gary Colcombe:

I do, Dave. Yeah.

Damh the Bard:

What is it about it that's still, after all these years, is the thing that fires you up?

Gary Colcombe:

The beauty of symbol. Symbol is something that ... With words, you can try and describe something, and even then there's some latitude in the meaning of words. But if you use symbols to describe something, then you are dealing with an almost infinite possibility of meanings.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah.

Gary Colcombe:

And for each symbol. The sheer beauty of that infinity leaves me breathless, it really does. This is why the the Lord and Lady, the God and Goddess, are themselves symbols of polarity of all kinds.

Damh the Bard:

And that still speaks to your heart, obviously?

Gary Colcombe:

It does.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah, yeah.

Gary Colcombe:

It does. I don't find it easy in today's world to separate them out as being non-inclusive, because I see them as far greater than gender-based entities.

Damh the Bard:

Sure. But inclusive means people who believe in polarity, right? That's what inclusive means. It doesn't mean ... You know, you've got to include it all, haven't you?

Gary Colcombe:

Yeah, I would like to think so.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah, exactly. You know, so that's actually-

Gary Colcombe:

I would like to think so.

Damh the Bard:

... that's all good.

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Gary Colcombe:

There used to be a tower there, that has long since gone.

Damh the Bard:

Oh, really? What, as part of the folly?

Gary Colcombe:

Yeah.

Damh the Bard:

Right next to this ...

Gary Colcombe:

Yeah. You can see the foundation.

Damh the Bard:

And was this here? Was this all here?

Gary Colcombe:

Yes.

Damh the Bard:

All of the brick work?

Gary Colcombe:

Yeah.

Damh the Bard:

Right. Okay. So it was, literally, just all of the metal work?

Gary Colcombe:

And there's a path, there, that is probably not ... Yeah, you used to be able to walk round this path, climbing up, and to get onto to the very top.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah.

Gary Colcombe:

Where there was a lion head there, looking out over the water.

Damh the Bard:

Wow! What a shame.

Gary Colcombe:

It is a shame.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. And there's a great big barrier at the top of these steps, now, saying, "Oh, don't go up there! Be careful!" You know? Okay. All right. Mm.

Damh the Bard:

And I know there are some who have said to me that ceremonial magic is very staid, it's very serious. It's very ... You know, "Great, Neophyte. Light the candle of the west." "Yes, Zelator. I will do that." And all those things, you know what I mean? But it doesn't have to be like that, does it? It can be joyous. And actually, my feeling has always been that the root of ceremonial magic, of what it was about to me, when I was studying it, was to find that part of myself that was holy.

Gary Colcombe:

Yeah.

Damh the Bard:

It was sacred, you know. And to connect with it. And some people call that your holy guardian angel, and that kind of thing. And that is still, to me, a really valuable and powerful life quest.

Gary Colcombe:

Likewise.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah.

Gary Colcombe:

Likewise.

Damh the Bard:

Mm.

Gary Colcombe:

Yeah. I brought that into our Wicca. The Cabala was always an essential part of Alexandrian Wicca.

Damh the Bard:

Right.

Gary Colcombe:

Right from the beginning.

Damh the Bard:

Interesting, isn't it?

Gary Colcombe:

Yeah.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Okay. Thank you.

Damh the Bard:

Just up the hill, you were talking about how the group you were in became The Grove of the Badger?

Gary Colcombe:

That's right.

Damh the Bard:

What happened to the Grove of the Badger? And where did your life lead, after that, for a while?

Gary Colcombe:

Well, I moved on from The Grove of the Badger at a time that Philip took it over, and it changed direction, I believe.

Damh the Bard:

Okay. And so, that's Philip Shallcrass?

Gary Colcombe:

That's Philip Shallcrass of the British Druid Order.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. And so, The Grove of the Badger, in a way, became ...

Gary Colcombe:

The fledgling British Druid Order, I would guess?

Damh the Bard:

The fledgling druid order.

Gary Colcombe:

Yeah.

Damh the Bard:

Right, okay. Well, there you go. Yeah.

Gary Colcombe:

He's said as much. But that's his story to tell.

Damh the Bard:

Exactly. Exactly. And your direction went off in different ways, I guess?

Gary Colcombe:

It did.

Damh the Bard:

Was that because you could feel it was getting more druidic, and it wasn't your way, particularly? Or ...

Gary Colcombe:

My circumstances changed.

Damh the Bard:

Right.

Gary Colcombe:

I moved to a different part of town, and got involved in a different group of people.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. Yeah.

Gary Colcombe:

And it was some years before I picked up an Athame again.

Damh the Bard:

Right. Okay. So, what, you had a break?

Gary Colcombe:

I had a break.

Damh the Bard:

You had a break from everything spiritual, or ...?

Gary Colcombe:

No. There are some things you can't take a break from.

Damh the Bard:

They're part of who you are.

Gary Colcombe:

Dreams and visions and things like that, are always there.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. And then after a few years, you came back in, and found your way back into another group?

Gary Colcombe:

Yep. Yep. I made another group.

Damh the Bard:

Uh-huh. Still in Hastings?

Gary Colcombe:

Still in Hastings, on the other side. Worked with those people for several years. And then I moved again, moved down to Bournemouth, and was involved in a very strange, and a very hard group. It was training, but it involved four people; myself and three ladies; one of whom was young, one of whom was a mother, and one of whom was elderly.

Damh the Bard:

Right. We can see the symbolism there, then, right away. Yeah.

Gary Colcombe:

So that was very, very powerful, but very hard to train in the ways that I had been trained.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. Yeah.

Gary Colcombe:

Because the polarities were forever shifting.

Damh the Bard:

And was that still based around the Wicca?

Gary Colcombe:

That was based around Alexandrian Wicca, yes.

Damh the Bard:

Right. Okay. Okay.

Gary Colcombe:

Yeah.

Damh the Bard:

And you still felt that you had a connection with your ceremonial magic? I've never been involved with Gardenarian Wicca, or Alexandrian Wicca. I've never been initiated. But I've always had the impression that Alexandrian Wicca was slightly more ceremonial?



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Gary Colcombe:

In my experience, you're correct.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah?

Gary Colcombe:

Yes.

Damh the Bard:

Right. Okay.

Gary Colcombe:

Yes, definitely.

Damh the Bard:

Right. And the Gardenarian was more the folklore kind of stuff, as well?

Gary Colcombe:

In fact, we were told, during our training, that the three degrees of Wicca, which I'm sure you heard about?

Damh the Bard:

Yeah.

Gary Colcombe:

Yeah? Good. Were the initial three degrees of entry into a ceremonial order.

Damh the Bard:

Right. Okay.

Gary Colcombe:

And that the Wicca was created as a front door to it.

Damh the Bard:

Right.

Gary Colcombe:

Now, I think that's probably a load of poo, to be honest.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. Probably. Probably, yeah. One of those stories, probably.

Gary Colcombe:

Absolutely.

Damh the Bard:

Nearly everyone's had one of those stories.

Gary Colcombe:

But it felt like that.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. Yeah. In my ceremonial magic training I was, I think, a Neophyte, as my entry level. A Zelotor for the next level.

Gary Colcombe:

Yeah.

Damh the Bard:

And then I was a practicus or a philosophus. And I can't remember which one came first?

Gary Colcombe:

A practicus, I think.

Damh the Bard:

A practicus, and then philosophus.

Gary Colcombe:

Yeah.

Damh the Bard:

I've known a number of ceremonial people, over the years, and that's seems to be as far as a lot of people got. And I wonder whether or not the rest of the grades actually exist?

Gary Colcombe:

Some of the higher ones, I think, in people's minds more than in reality.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah, yeah, yeah. But good times, good times.

Gary Colcombe:

Because you should be able to stop there, because, for them, you've got the face, the link, and the journey across the portal.

Damh the Bard:

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What, for me, it was, if I'm honest, is that, at that time in my life, I wanted something ... Ceremonial magic felt, to me, like that, the aim was the connection with that part of the self, the guardian angel, and that aspect of the self, and what I needed was something earthy.

Gary Colcombe:

Yes.

Damh the Bard:

What I needed was something with mud and herbs and the moon and stars, but really getting into the earth. And that's why I think I turned my face away from ceremonial magic and towards paganism, because, at the time, I wasn't looking for Druidry, or Wicca, or whatever, I just knew that there was something that I felt was missing in ceremonial magic, and that was that. It was very much about the stellar, and about that kind of connection, rather than with the earth itself.

Gary Colcombe:

Yeah. I've been trying to unite those two things, myself, for years.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah. And how have you got on?

Gary Colcombe:

Not successfully.

Damh the Bard:

Not entirely successful!

Gary Colcombe:

Luckily, I forged a relationship to the Egyptian gods, as well as native gods.

Damh the Bard:

Oh, right.

Gary Colcombe:

So, working with Egyptian mythology does help to link ceremonial magic through to paganism.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah? Right. Oh, go on, you can't just tell me that, you got to tell me a bit more about the Egyptian gods and your connection with those?

Gary Colcombe:

We did start to create a set of Egyptian rituals.

Damh the Bard:

Right. Okay.

Gary Colcombe:

Made up a pure set of white robes, and all the rest of it.

Damh the Bard:

Wow!

Gary Colcombe:

Tried to paint things gold, and goodness knows what else. But the rituals were hard because we were trying to use the Egyptian language a lot. It was hard work, and wasn't everybody's cup of tea, to be honest. I think the results were fewer than the effort put in. So, that failed.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. I think there was a lot of experimentation in magic, in the kind of nineties. When would this have been? The eighties?

Gary Colcombe:

Yes, late eighties.

Damh the Bard:

Late eighties, early nineties? Yeah. Yeah. There was a lot of experimentation with this kind of thing going on, at the time.

Gary Colcombe:

Yes, very true. And freedom to do so.

Damh the Bard:

Yes, yes, absolutely.

Damh the Bard:

All right. Well, let us continue our walk.

Gary Colcombe:

Okay.

Damh the Bard:

So, we've just walked past the actual walls of the walled garden, and they are definitely, definitely higher than eight foot.

Gary Colcombe:

They are. They are, absolutely.

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Damh the Bard:

And we met through your podcast that you were doing, for a number of years.

Gary Colcombe:

That's right. The Celtic Myth Podshow.

Damh the Bard:

The Celtic Myth Podshow. So let me, maybe, ask you a little bit about what-

Gary Colcombe:

Yeah, of course.

Damh the Bard:

About the show, and what inspired you to start that, and that kind of thing?

Gary Colcombe:

Yeah, surely. As a, what I think has since become known as a British Traditional Wican, a BTW ...

Damh the Bard:

A BTW! You've got to love it, haven't you?

Gary Colcombe:

It's amazing, isn't it?

Damh the Bard:

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yes.

Gary Colcombe:

The gods of land were always strong and dear to heart.

Damh the Bard:

Right.

Gary Colcombe:

So, got to a certain age, and instead of just practicing with the forces behind the form, I wanted to learn more about the form itself.

Damh the Bard:

Right. Yeah. Yeah.

Gary Colcombe:

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And ... Hello? And so, by looking at Celtic mythology and trying to understand it, that we realized that it wasn't an easy task. Many of the books that were written, at the time, were either academic or written by Victorians. So, in order to understand it, we started to dramatize it.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah, yeah. Yes, because you didn't just tell the stories, you literally had ... You acted the roles and everything else.

Gary Colcombe:

Yeah. We'd drag friends in, whenever they were passing by.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. Me and Cerri included. We did a couple of them!

Gary Colcombe:

You have, right. Yeah. And much appreciated.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah.

Gary Colcombe:

But yeah, it's been a lot of fun. But I think it's done its job, and we are now debating where to go, and what to do with it.

Damh the Bard:

And what to do, from here?

Damh the Bard:

Are all the shows still online? Are they still available?

Gary Colcombe:

No, they're still available.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah, yeah.

Gary Colcombe:

I'll give you the address for your show notes.

Damh the Bard:

Yes, I'll put them in the show notes. But if you look up Celtic Myth Podshow, you will find-

Gary Colcombe:

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You will.

Damh the Bard:

Is the website still there, and everything?

Gary Colcombe:

Yep.

Damh the Bard:

So, look at the website and all of the shows there. I think, your last one was The Second Branch of the Mabinogi, was the last one you did?

Gary Colcombe:

That's right.

Damh the Bard:

Which I thought, actually, was the best one you'd ever done.

Gary Colcombe:

Oh, thank you.

Damh the Bard:

You know, for me, listening to it, you put in a lot of information that you'd obviously gleaned from other sources, into the story. And it took a couple of episodes before it even got to the point where a lot of people-

Gary Colcombe:

... recognized the story starting.

Damh the Bard:

... recognized the story starting. Exactly. Yeah.

Gary Colcombe:

Yeah, that's true.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. We are in the woods, but as you can hear, we're also in a town.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. So that must have taken a lot of research and that kind of thing, to do that?

Gary Colcombe:

It did. Will Parker's Mabinogian was probably our primary source.

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Damh the Bard:

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Gary Colcombe:

A wonderful book. The Four Branches, I think he called it, didn't he?

Damh the Bard:

That's right. Yes. 50 quid, too, but worth every penny, I've got to say.

Gary Colcombe:

Yeah.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah, okay.

Damh the Bard:

Well thank you for bringing me to your space. Thank you for taking time out of your day-

Gary Colcombe:

You're most welcome-

Damh the Bard:

... to talk to me. And for being on Druidcast.

Damh the Bard:

I still think, Gary, that there's a book in you that I want to read, and that everyone else wants to read, because you are so interesting, and you know so much so. So, thank you.

Gary Colcombe:

We'll see what the future brings.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. Yeah.

Gary Colcombe:

You're most welcome, Dave. And thank you very much for being so kind.

Damh the Bard:

Blessed be, my friend.

Gary Colcombe:

Blessed be.



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