

Damh the Bard:

So I am here on Zoom with the Chosen Chief of the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids, Eimear Burke. Hello, Eimear.

Eimear Burke:

Hi, Damh, just lovely to be here.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah, here we are. Now you haven't been on DruidCast much, and that occurred to me the other day. I thought, "Well, we need to rectify this by sitting down and having a chat-"

Eimear Burke:

Absolutely.

Damh the Bard:

"And getting to know the Chosen Chief of Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids a little better." So, let's go. Can you go right back? Can we just ... I know with Phillip's interview from some years ago now ... Oh, my God.

Eimear Burke:

It was years ago.

Damh the Bard:

Some years ago, you told some of your story. But let's just say that people haven't heard that. How did you find druidry? If you look backwards, how did you find the path?

Eimear Burke:

Oh, well I suppose my first introduction to druids was listening to the myths and legends that I learned in primary school. I come from a Roman Catholic background and I was taught by Roman Catholic nuns. But we had a rich introduction to all the myths and legends of Ireland, and of course I heard about druids. But there was something about the words that to me was magical. It would make me tingle. I didn't know why, and I didn't think I'd ever be a druid because I didn't know there were any druids in these days ... Excuse me. But the interesting thing is the Irish word for druidry and for magic is the same.

Damh the Bard:

Right, right.

Eimear Burke:

So it was almost something that held me. If I saw the word druid written anywhere, I would be drawn straightaway to it. I went to Africa to save the world when I was a nurse, and I became interested in indigenous healing and in an indigenous world view. Dipped into it, and then came back and then did a degree in psychology, then went to Africa again and met healers. I had joined the Traditional Healers Association of South Africa, and I was doing some training and then I came back and did a master's in counseling psychology. So I would dip into nature-based world views and back into the more scientific

one, back out into the nature-based world view, and back into psychology. Of course, they're so interlinked anyway when you actually go to explore it.

Eimear Burke:

I had started working with ... I'd done a series of sweat lodges with a Native American medicine woman, which intrigued me. It was nature-based. I loved the ritual. I loved the engagement with all of the elements. I also have a very close friend, Shabani Kalula, who I've mentioned a few times, a Tanzanian healer. I had worked with him. I'd had initiations with him and this was all wonderful, but none of it was from my landscape. I found that so frustrating, that here I was engaging in spiritual modalities or healing modalities from cultures that weren't mine, and yet I was welcomed. I was offered these teachings, but they weren't from my landscape.

Eimear Burke:

I remember being in a book shop with Shabani actually, in Dublin, and this book ... It was Cassandra Eason's book, *The Modern-Day Druidess* ... Hopped out as these books do from shelves, synchronistically. I looked at it and I thought, "I'll buy this." She talked about druidry, and the way she talked about it was anyone could be a druid. You can create your sacred grove in your apartment in a city with four potted plants. She made it accessible, and she mentioned OBOD at the back of the book. She said she had trained with them but wasn't a member of a seed group or a grove, because she was a solitary druid. I thought, "That suits me." So I read the book, I went online and onto the OBOD website, and I was really looking through it and came across the introductory pack.

Eimear Burke:

I was meant to ... Because I'm a psychologist, I was meant to do a course in psychotherapy supervision in Trinity. I knew I couldn't do both. One was the sense of a right thing to do, and the other was this other thing that was really calling me. I thought, "I can't do both. Oh, to hell with it. I'm clicking on the introductory pack." As soon as I did whatever it is, click, buy, this rush of energy just came right up through me and I knew that was the right thing. I had already done psychotherapy supervision training. I never went and did it. It all started from there, and I was blown away. And so I joined in August and my first course ... Or maybe I joined in July ... Was the autumn equinox ritual book. Shabani, my healer friend, and Howard, we were running a workshop. It happened to be the equinox weekend, and I was given the ritual book.

Eimear Burke:

I thought, "You know what? We're going to do this," and we did. Shabani said to me, "You've been given a key. If you do not use it, the lock will get rusty." And in a sense, he gave me permission. I mean, I was five minutes in the Order and he said, "You need to hold these rituals and invite people," and I've done it ever since. So actually next week will be our 20th Wheel of the Year.

Damh the Bard:

Wow, that's amazing.

Eimear Burke:

So I wouldn't have done it without his permission. In some sense he just said, "You can do it. Just ..." And I didn't know my west from my east when I started off. When some people say, "I'm in the Bardic grade

and I shouldn't be holding ... I can't do this and I can't do that." And I said, "Well, I've always thrown myself in the deep end." I've broken that pattern because I had three years preparing for Chosen Chief role, which was a break in that pattern. But, and I've never looked back.

Damh the Bard:

Right.

Eimear Burke:

And for seven years I didn't go to anything OBODy. I did two of Kate and Barry Rielly's Ritual in Meditation workshops in Glastonbury, but I never went to a gathering. I was too shy.

Damh the Bard:

For seven years.

Eimear Burke:

Yeah.

Damh the Bard:

Wow.

Eimear Burke:

So I went to those workshops, because that was maybe 25 people in a room.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah.

Eimear Burke:

But the idea of going to a big gathering ... I never went to the camps. They terrified me, but they always clashed with my own ceremonies here, which was my excuse. And then one friend Rhiannon, she said, "I'm going to the OBOD gathering." I said, "Can I go with you?" I had already been to the Goddess Conference that year. Oh no, that was afterwards. I thought, "Okay, I'll go." Now still, I found it really intimidating. Because I'm Irish, I didn't know how I was going to be accepted. Because I'd had a few not pleasant experiences about being Irish in England or with English people, so I didn't know how it was.

Eimear Burke:

I remember going up the steps of the town hall, and Shaun Hayes was there with somebody else, with his hat and the two staves, and he welcomed me. I thought, "Oh." He heard my accent, and then later we discovered that his father was living in Tipperary at the time. He has since passed. We had a great chat, and I found people were incredibly friendly. I've never looked back, and I found my family within the Order. It healed that wound between the two countries, because you know we haven't had an easy history.

Damh the Bard:

Mm-hmm.

Eimear Burke:

And for me, it's been really useful joining the Order for that.

Damh the Bard:

Wow. So by the time you were seven years into your journey and got to that gathering, where were you in the three courses?

Eimear Burke:

Oh, very slow. I had just gotten onto the Ovate Grade.

Damh the Bard:

Right, okay.

Eimear Burke:

It took me seven years to do the Bardic. It was interesting, because I was paranoid about having a mentor. Because I'm a psychologist so ... Psychotherapist ... So I'm used to face-to-face supervision. That relationship, the idea of writing, really, really ... It still does threaten me. I'm not comfortable with it. I'm not at ease with it. I thought, "I'll never write anything good enough," or, "It'll come across that I'm boasting, or that I'm not really engaging deeply enough." So I kept putting it off until year six, and then I got a mentor. Bless her, every six weeks she'd say, "Blessings of," whatever it was. "Thank you very much." I still couldn't engage. And then I wrote my review in one go. I mean obviously, I'm keeping notes all the time because I didn't think I was a Bard. I'm not a poet. I sing, but that's nothing. I was in an art group. That didn't count. I only started telling stories after I'd handed in my review.

Damh the Bard:

Mm-hmm, really.

Eimear Burke:

I could tell jokes. I could tell jokes, and good jokes. But I thought, "They're not important. I'm no Bard." Howard, my husband, he would spit out poetry sitting down while he's waiting for the bread to rise in the kitchen, and he would write stuff. I couldn't. I couldn't. "I'm not a Bard. I'm not a Bard. I'm an Ovate." So during my seven years, I did reiki. I did Shamanic therapy. I did a herbalism course, everything to avoid the Bardic piece.

Damh the Bard:

Isn't that interesting?

Eimear Burke:

And then I just did it, and lo and behold I started telling stories.

Damh the Bard:

And you could do.

Eimear Burke:

Well, and then I took up the harp during the Ovate grade. Just one of these things, because you know this path, although we have Bard, Ovate and Druid, it's not a straightforward path. For me it was like the triskele, in and out, back and forth all the time. There's nothing I've ever done in a straight line.

Damh the Bard:

Mm-hmm.

Eimear Burke:

It's just not my way, so it was a really interesting journey.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah, yeah. I didn't engage the Bard until I was an Ovate either, to be honest.

Eimear Burke:

Wow really?

Damh the Bard:

There was something about the Ovate that just called to me. It felt like that's where I belonged, which is ironic considering I'm Damh the Bard. But I just ... There was something about the magic of the forest, of trees, of herb lore, of the moon, of mystery, that called to me far more than the kind of grounding, earthy stuff of the Bard. But what I've realized is I kind of ... I think I exist in ... There's the two circles and they overlap, don't they? They overlap, and I think I exist in that overlap there. I think if you look at the Taliesins of this world, and the Merlins and the Amergins, I think they exist there, too. They've got one foot in this, and the other foot in the Otherworld.

Damh the Bard:

I think that that is what I found inspiring. Yeah, and so I kind of ... Yes, very much so. I felt like I came to life as a Bard once I'd entered the Ovate grade. But that's not the same for everybody. A lot of people just dive straight in, and they find that they're immediately ... The Awen starts to flow and all that kind of thing happens. And then other people join OBOD and they, "What? I'm a Bard first? But I've never written a poem. I'm not a storyteller. I'm not a performer," all those kind of things. And sometimes I think that can put people off a little bit, you know what I mean? But of course all it does is open your eyes, doesn't it?

Eimear Burke:

That's right.

Damh the Bard:

It slowly opens your eyes, and slowly you begin to see the world through the eyes of a poet. It doesn't necessarily make you a poet, but you just start to see the cycles of nature and all those things in a very poetic way. So what was it about magic that you found exciting, then? If it was the ... If druid and magic or magician is the same word in the Irish language, and that really got you interested at a young age, what is it? What was it, do you think, about magic that really made you look?

Eimear Burke:

It's not that ... I'm not like a high magician or any of ... Spells have never that ... This is my ignorant image of a magician ... Never really called to me. It was around discovering magic or magical experiences in the environment, synchronicities. I'm thinking of something, and ... I'm thinking of a ladybird and it comes by me, or finding it all around me, and finding insights that come to me when I'm in the ... I love the forest. I love the woods. That's the magic that always called me, and then the stories. Something around the presence of a druid, the druid's voice, that ability to hold space, to contain and create a sense of peace or a sense of safety, and I can see a picture of a druid. Of course initially they were all men, and then I discovered, "No, no, no." Of course, everything was all men; composers, writers, you name it, and then you discover actually, "No. There were plenty of women as well."

Eimear Burke:

But that presence that can hold that in a place in nature, just something ... And then that engaged with the other world, you know? One foot in this world and one foot in the other. Even though I struggled with the Bardic grade, I had struggled for years to be grounded. I don't know why I did, because I'm really earthy. I'm way more down here than I am up there, and yet for somehow I resisted it. It was like I wanted to be flying around, and that's just not where I need to be.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah, yeah.

Eimear Burke:

I'm very grounded here, so there was something about that. I don't know if I'm explaining this. That was the magic of ... The magic in the mundane is something that really, really came to me, because I thought magic was all up there. That was a brilliant discovery, you know?

Damh the Bard:

Mm-hmm, yeah.

Eimear Burke:

Finding the magic, like the alchemy in baking, or putting a seed in the ground and seeing what comes up, and finding things that you haven't planted have turned up, that you needed. I want an herb, because I'm an herbalist. I was looking for mullein. I hadn't had it in my garden for years and I was asking people, "Has anyone got seeds that I can plant?" And I wished to God I had it, and I had started to re-water, but on an automatic watering system in my garden, and guess what?

Damh the Bard:

Yeah.

Eimear Burke:

Mullein. I've had loads of experiences like that. I don't have willow in my garden. It's too dry. I wish I did, and then suddenly there's a willow tree. How did that happen?

Damh the Bard:

Uh-huh.

Eimear Burke:

To me, is magic and-

Damh the Bard:

Yeah, I think that is the description of what I feel is druid magic.

Eimear Burke:

Yeah.

Damh the Bard:

Is I remember the winter gathering in 2019, me and Cerri did a ritual there where we asked people to consider whether or not they were magicians or mystics.

Eimear Burke:

Yes.

Damh the Bard:

And the magicians were the active, pointy energy drivers. The mystics were the holders of energy, and who held the magic as it was being directed. I remember thinking quite, "Oh, there'll be a lot of magicians here." But what actually happened was there was a handful in the center who identified as magicians, and everybody else was around the outside as mystics holding the energy. And part of me thought, "Wow, that's a really interesting visual identification of the kind of difference between witchcraft and druidry." Because it feels to me that witchcraft is all about the magic and the spells and the direction and that kind of thing, but the druidry is about a mystical connection to the land.

Damh the Bard:

It's like you say, when you get that, that's the moment when you're doing an initiation down by the willows at a camp, and you're hosting this initiation. The initiate comes forward and they're welcomed into the circle, and while you're doing the initiation an owl just flies in, lands on a branch, and just within the circle, and just watches you. To me, when you are in the flow of that magic, that's when magic, like you say, happens automatically. You don't have to cast a spell, because it's happening all around you. It's like nature goes, "I know this. I see you." Do you know what I mean? It's ... And yeah.

Eimear Burke:

And it conspires with you.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah, yeah, and inspires with you.

Eimear Burke:

We were doing a full moon ceremony years ago, Rhiannon, another member. It was cloudy, and somebody greeted. You know, we knew where the moon was, and turned to greet the moon. And with that, the clouds opened and the full moon emerges. There were people there for the first time and they were going, "How did you do that?" I said, "We didn't."

Damh the Bard:

No, you didn't do it. It just ... Yeah.

Eimear Burke:

It was nature with us recognizing that we were holding a sacred ceremony, and revealed themselves to us or said, "We're here." And I mean, I've had that so many times. And like you say, you've had it as well. Many people tell me that, and-

Damh the Bard:

I think we have-

Eimear Burke:

I'm tingly even now as I'm thinking of it, you know?

Damh the Bard:

Yeah, but it takes a while to notice I think, do you know what I mean? It takes a while to notice. And for me, it took a long time. Because I always wanted to be the magician. I wanted to be the Merlin, "Oh," you know, casting spells and doing magic and that kind of thing. And I realized, "I'm not that." And even the magic ... When I was a ceremonial magician back before I was in druidry, even the magic there that really switched me on was the magic of connection, to make me feel I was part of the flow and part of everything else, and not necessarily the magic to get a new job or anything like that. It just didn't interest me, and it still doesn't, in fact. I know it's fine for some people. I'm not saying it's wrong. It's just that I've come to the conclusion, like you I think, that my magic is in connection to the land, is in connection to the seasons, into spirit and that kind of thing. I think that to me is the gift of the OBOD Gwers, because-

Eimear Burke:

Oh-

Damh the Bard:

Yeah, yeah?

Eimear Burke:

Oh, I'm so grateful that that book hopped out at me at that particular day.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah, yeah.

Eimear Burke:

You know?

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. So we were talking about our journeys through the Gwersi and you say that druidry is for everybody, and there is a kind of interesting thing that I've noticed. A lot of people ... You, myself ... We



say that we came to druidry because we wanted something from the land beneath our feet, yeah? However, everyone can follow the druid path even if ... So it's not like druidry is owned, or you have to have Celtic blood to be a druid. Maybe that might have been what it was like in the Iron Age, but modern druidry has developed in a very different universal manner which welcomes a lot of people, doesn't it? So-

Eimear Burke:

Like any religion, so when you think of Judaism, where does it come from? Palestine, and that's moved all over the world. Well actually, I suppose Jewish people have moved and so on and so forth, and there's a line. But Christianity spread. It's not because Christians were driven out of what was known as the Holy Land and moved, but individuals went and spread it. Christianity has gone all over, and it isn't ... It's a Middle Eastern originally religion, but it's all over the world. The same with Buddhism or ... Particularly Buddhism. I'd say Hinduism maybe is practiced mostly with people from the Indian continent. I could be wrong, but maybe a few different ... But there are lots of Europeans and Westerners who practice Buddhism. That has moved. You don't have to be from the East to be able to practice it, so I think it's the same with druidry.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah, I wonder if it's ... When I think back, like I remember coming out of a Sunday school. I remember coming out of Sunday school after learning about something from the Bible, that included palm trees and palm leaves if I remember. I walked out, and it was freezing cold and it was snowing. I think that was the point where I just thought, "This doesn't feel connected to me." And maybe it wasn't necessarily the land beneath my feet or something historic that was attracting me, but it was a fact that it wasn't a revealed religion of a book, you know? It was a fact that it's a ... If it's a spirituality or a religion of anything, it is a nature-based thing, isn't it? You know, yeah?

Eimear Burke:

And it reveals itself to you, not to somebody else who says, "Oh, by the way, so-and-so, so-and-so spoke to me from on high and this is what you're to do." I remember people saying to me, "Oh," first, "Oh, that's an English Order, isn't it?" "Why are you doing English druidry?" And it's like, my druidry comes from out there. The landscape speaks to me. That's how it is, and I found the Gwers was an amazing, wonderful framework from which I could ... Or like a scaffold that I could be the druid who I am. Essentially, it's the landscape that speaks to me.

Damh the Bard:

Mm-hmm, yeah.

Eimear Burke:

And that reveals itself, so it's a personal revelation, but only for me. I'm happy to share it, but it's not ... This is not my teaching for you. It's that you receive your own revelations from your landscape, in however you do that.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah, and that's why we always say that it's not necessarily a good idea to study the Gwers in a group or even as a couple, because everyone's journey through the course and through all of the three grades is

very, very personal. It's different for everyone. Considering the material is the same, it astounds me how that happens, but it does, doesn't it? I mean, your journey through the Bardic grade would have been very different to mine, you know?

Eimear Burke:

Mm-hmm.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah, yeah.

Eimear Burke:

So I'm going to ask you a question.

Damh the Bard:

Oh, okay.

Eimear Burke:

You mentioned that interface between being a Bard and an Ovate. For me, it's all three. So I've taught druidry. I hold ceremony, et cetera, and I was doing that from day one, which is one of these interesting ... That's why the model of a triskele suits me, because it's all three. Where are you as a druid? I know obviously you went through the druid grade, and then you identify as being a Bard.

Damh the Bard:

Mm-hmm.

Eimear Burke:

So, where does the druid piece come in for you in your practice as a druid?

Damh the Bard:

To be honest, the druid part I think is where I've spent most of my time up until lockdown. So it's the path of service for me, the path, the part of druidry. So during the spring equinox of 2000, myself and Cerri initiated the Anderida Gorsedd at the Long Man of Wilmington. We have been back there rain, shine, snow, whatever for every festival, every six weeks since, to hold open rituals there for the community. When the lockdown happened, we moved those onto the internet and then we're back again now, and we're doing another one this weekend for the autumn equinox, the moots. I think in a way, organizing the OBOD gatherings in Glastonbury have been part of a druid path for me. The DruidCast podcast, you know? Helping, being with Cerri and facilitating a grove.

Eimear Burke:

Mm-hmm.

Damh the Bard:

That to me feels like the druid path for me. I did stick my toe into celebrancy, and took part as a celebrant for a couple of handfastings, and realized very, very quickly that was not for me.

Eimear Burke:

Ah.

Damh the Bard:

So I stepped right back for that, so I'm not a celebrant. I don't do that kind of work. I don't think you have to do everything.

Eimear Burke:

You do a lot.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah, yeah. Yeah, I mean in a way the Zoom meet-ups and hosting those, all those things to me, that druid path is all about you know yourself. Like the thing above the Temple of Delphi, know thyself, you know?

Eimear Burke:

Know thyself.

Damh the Bard:

The Bardic and Ovate work have helped you to understand and know yourself, and know your limitations and where you excel and all those things, and also the way you interact with the natural world and spirit and all those things. I think once that's happened, then it's a far safer place to start spreading into the realm of service. Because I think sometimes if you don't know yourself, that's when you can get into being a bit of an egomaniac, you know what I mean?

Eimear Burke:

Oh, absolutely.

Damh the Bard:

And you can start these things from a very different reason, because you want to be noticed, because you want to be a big name because of all these things. And I never wanted that. I just wanted to grow a community and nurture it like a gardener. And of course in 2010, when they initiated me as Pendragon, I think that role as well is very much linked with the druid path. But I also realized that when lockdown came along, I'd done too much. All my focus, everything, was service. When I lost all of that and it stopped, I realized there wasn't actually much left for me. I had to spend lockdown re-looking and re-exploring, "What do I think? What do I believe now? What do I feel now?" Because there was no distraction. There was no distraction of having to do stuff for other people. All that was left was my relationship to my path, and I hadn't looked at that for a long time, you know? So yeah, that's why I probably ... That's probably why I don't talk about the druid circle as much, because it feels a lot like work to me.

Eimear Burke:

Oh yes, yes.

Damh the Bard:

You know? And work is service as well, but it feels like the Bard and Ovate is where I exist. When the druid comes in, it brings in 30,000 other OBOD members.

Eimear Burke:

Yes.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah?

Eimear Burke:

That I understand, because when I started I didn't know many ... There were no OBODies in Ireland that I knew, and so it was just myself, Howard and one other person. And then it became four people, and then it gradually grew. So mine is, like yours is, an eclectic, open grove. It's for ... Not everybody identifies as druid, but the ceremonies that we hold have a resonance for them. There have been people, like we have one woman, Joan, she always sings the Peace. When we're calling for peace, she sings it as gaeilge, and she's been doing that for nearly 20 years. She doesn't identify as a druid. She identifies as pagan, and she's one of those pillars or strong trees in our grove.

Eimear Burke:

That's what I also like, and that's ... I know there are many groves and seed groups within the order that it's only for OBOD members and that's their choice. But I like the freedom, like what you have, is that open group of like-minded people, regardless of what banner they operate under. I thought, "Yes, I will do this." I mean I never saw ... I could never have predicted that I would be in this position now.

Damh the Bard:

Do you have visitors who you don't know? Is it that open, that people can just phone up and say, "Can I come?"

Eimear Burke:

People need to contact me, and people have. So sometimes there's wandering, traveling OBOD members.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah, well you've done it now. There's 5,000 people who are going to contact you in a bit.

Eimear Burke:

Well I have ... I mean, people are coming to ... So I have a ceremony on Sunday week on the 25th, so people have already contacted me and said, "I'm an OBOD member. I'm passing through. Is it okay if I ...?" And I go, "Yeah.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah.

Eimear Burke:

They have to bring some food, because we have a potluck feast, and a listening ear or a Bardic offering, because we have a night court, which is what we call the Eisteddfod. And so far, it's worked very well. People come with an open mind and engage, and so it hasn't come to the point yet where it's like too many people, I'm going to have to cap this. This hasn't happened.

Damh the Bard:

Over the years of your ceremonies that you've been holding, have there been any kind of ... I'm sure there have been loads of standout moments, but are there certain ones that come to mind over the years, of moments of beauty or of engagement or connectivity?

Eimear Burke:

I'll tell you a funny one.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah, go on. Go for it.

Eimear Burke:

Okay, so we were doing the Lughnasadh one, and I was doing ... Because there weren't many OBODies, so I would kind of do an amalgam of the group ritual and maybe the individual one. There's the part where you were going up, and you took a sip of wine, and you're focusing on the oats and the apple. You were to come away, eat your apple and meditate on it. So people were taking their turn. They were taking the wine and getting their apple, and sitting down and eating it and meditating on it. So Howard, he went up, took his apple, and then he went to sit on a bench and it split in two. He went back, and he was wearing a kilt, so he went back ... Legs, kilt, everything. It had been a really quiet, meditative moment. The whole thing just exploded. It was so funny. You know, you go from this solemn moment to him falling over, everybody laughs. He picks himself up. He's not hurt, and then we go back in to that place again. I still remember it every Lughnasadh, when I think of him. I still see it happening.

Eimear Burke:

There was another time. There was somebody actually ... They were doing a documentary on ... It's called There's Something About Patrick, and it was about St. Patrick. They were filming, interviewing academics, and they wanted to interview and film a druid. Now, it was interesting. It was at Imbolc that they were filming, so they were filming the ritual and there was somebody calling to the east, and calling on the birds. I can't remember the wording. And with that, birds burst into song and I saw the director looking at me and his jaw dropped. It was like ... And that was magical.

Eimear Burke:

There was another time we were holding a ceremony for a friend whose father had passed, and his funeral was being held someplace in England at two o'clock. We were there at two o'clock, and somebody was singing and they were talking about your soul taking flight. And with that, as she was saying those words, a flame jumped out of the fire, up into the air, just as they were I think burying him. I think there's those wonderful times, and there are so many. Another time was at Samhain. I have a Norman tower. I live in Three Castles, so here is the ... My house. It's a house built in 1790. It was a

Church of Ireland rectory, and it was built around a tower ... A tower house, so the center part is a square tower. There are wings, and then there's a Norman tower.

Eimear Burke:

In the ground floor, which actually was an Anchorite cell I've discovered recently ... Are you familiar with Anchorites, like Julian of Norwich? So an Anchorite was a holy person, man or woman, who sealed themselves up inside a building. Julian of Norwich was ... And with a window. They prayed to release the souls from purgatory, or for healing or intentions for the community. In this tower ... So the priest lived in the upper two floors, and the Anchorite lived down below and people would feed them. It was considered a great status symbol, and then when they passed they were buried underneath in the cell where they had lived.

Damh the Bard:

Wow.

Eimear Burke:

And then somebody else would take over, if there was somebody willing to do this. Julian of Norwich is a well-known Anchorite. She was the first person, I think ... Was she first? Must have been person, to have a book published in English. That was 600 years ago.

Damh the Bard:

Wow, wow.

Eimear Burke:

Just a little bit ... It's a beautiful vaulted ceiling. It's dark. We have a cauldron, and so we were putting what we were letting go in. When the Cailleach had finished, put it into this cauldron, then everything went, "Pow." Just, I can't remember the words, but it was like it happened right on cue. People were going, "This is just amazing." And then you have that sense of ... You know, when she's burning ... Everything's burning that you've put into the fire, that great sense of cleansing and clearing and healing. It's like, "Whew, now we're ready for the next cycle." So there have been, I can't remember, so many.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah, and a lot of these come from what we say, this just being in the flow and just things around us. Some would say synchronicities, some would say coincidences, but it happens too often to be a coincidence, yeah.

Eimear Burke:

I've only once had ... And that was National River Day. Was that 2020? No, did we have a ceremony in '20? No. I remember Lauren Cardier had asked us to do a ceremony on National ... Was it 2019? I can't remember, '20-

Damh the Bard:

Those two years, they go. They're just weird, aren't they?

Eimear Burke:

It was at the autumn equinox. So we had our ceremony, and then I'd asked people to bring water from their own places, either well or river. We went down to the river, and it lashed rain for the whole time and we were soaked. It was the first time ever that it rained during a ceremony. So it might be raining just before the ceremony, and so people will say, "Oh, you're a weather witch, Eimear," and I'm not. It's like I put it out there. I never asked for it, "Please don't rain. Please don't rain." I always say, "I really appreciate you rain. You cleanse the land. You make sure our plants grow. This is wonderful, and I thank you for holding off so we can have our ceremony." And if it happens, it happens, and if it doesn't, it doesn't. I don't get upset.

Eimear Burke:

Anyway, one winter solstice there was a gale outside. It's windy and it's wet, and people are inside before we go out to the temple to have our ceremony in the complete darkness. A friend comes in and he says, "Ha, ha, ha." He said, "I thought you were able to control the weather." He said, "It's lashing out there." And I thought, "I have no answer." It's the right ... If that's the way it is, it's okay. Anyway, a few minutes later I was going out to the temple to put some candles in. The sky was clear. I went back in. I called him out and I said, "What's that?" He said, "How did you do that?" I said, "I didn't." Anyway, we had our ceremony and coming back to the house, Howard, Pete and I were talking about this. Howard said, "Well," he said, "It'll start raining in about 20 minutes," and he was wrong. It started raining in 22 minutes.

Damh the Bard:

Ah, yeah. It was-

Eimear Burke:

Do you know that it stops raining just before we need to? I don't know why. It's just beautiful.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah, and when it isn't, it's often for a reason, you know?

Eimear Burke:

That's right. World River Day lashed, and nobody complained. I got soaked to the skin. Everybody did, and the ceremony was quite long. For some reason people wanted to ... There's always an open space for people to add something. We went down to the river. We placed the river ... Collected water in our bowl. We sang, processed down, so it took a bit of time. Nobody complained about being wet.

Damh the Bard:

No, no.

Eimear Burke:

And that was like, "That is really interesting."

Damh the Bard:

Yeah, it's like sometimes I think when you're doing a ritual like that and you're just getting soaked to the skin I think, "Now, this is why they invented churches." Because you know, this is ... If you look at what we're doing, it's a bit daft. We're standing out here in the open air, getting soaked to pieces. But then

you're celebrating the turning seasons, you know, and the cycles. And when you go out on the winter solstice or at Imbolc, if it was warm it wouldn't be right, would it?

Damh the Bard:

I think part of the beauty about the Wheel of the Year is that it reminds you ... Because it's like we can go from being in a house, to being in a car, to being in somewhere else, and maybe going for the odd walk in the countryside. But having to spend time every six weeks in the open air regardless of the weather, just reminds us of what is actually happening out there. I think that's one of the best gifts. What's the Wheel of the Year to you? How do you see the Wheel of the Year?

Eimear Burke:

Well, it's really ... Because when people ask me, what do I think druidry is? To me, it's like it's a nature-based virtual path where we look to the landscape and the seasons as a metaphor for our lives. So if our inner world is in sync with the outer world, then there's kind of that sense of balance and harmony. And of course, the Wheel of the Year allows us ... It gives us every six weeks a reminder where I am. I'm coming in now to my harvest, so what is it I've harvested in the last year? What do I need to store? Then when we come up to Samhain, what do I need to let go of? I love the solstice. Did I say Samhain or solstice? So Samhain, letting go of, and the darkness of midwinter is really important.

Eimear Burke:

I've always found the transition from Lughnasadh into September difficult. Lughnasadh's the month of August, actually. It's a whole month. That transition, because it's going to get darker and darker and darker, but once I pass the equinox, I now welcome the dark and I love that stillness. So each time there's like ... Which is my favorite time? The time I'm in. It's such a beautiful reminder of, "Am I paying attention to what I need to pay attention?" With no guilt, no imperatives. But it's that gentle reminder that every six weeks, I am invited and reminded to connect with my landscape, and give it time, and then it allows that community as well. So I don't do it alone, I'm doing it with a community.

Eimear Burke:

And like last December, normally I have it inside in the temple, the solstice, so that it's completely dark. But because of COVID, and I was just a little bit anxious about people getting sick, we did it outside. The moon conspired to be with us, going down. And then at the end of the ceremony, then the moon comes up and then we have light. And it was a still, quiet night even though it was midwinter, and it's like the embrace of the landscape and the grove around me ... And I'm talking about not the human grove but the physical grove ... I get that every six weeks.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah, yeah.

Eimear Burke:

I'm fast. You may have noticed I speak quickly, and if you've ever ... I'm a fast walker. That stillness and restriction of winter has been really, really good for me, because it's slowed down. I remember the winter of 2010. This is when we had a ... When it snows in Ireland it's a big, big event, like we have two snowplows in the whole country, I think. We had snow outside for four weeks. I've never experienced ... This is my second white Christmas ever.



Damh the Bard:

Ah.

Eimear Burke:

So, and I remember people had to cancel. They couldn't come down my drive, down by the road because it was skating, so all my clients canceled because I work from here. That all stopped. And then we went out on the fields, and then we saw footprints of snipe. I didn't know there were snipe there. We saw animals. "Oh, I didn't know they were around here," and discovered ... You know the sound of snow?

Damh the Bard:

Mm-hmm.

Eimear Burke:

That beautiful, loud silence; I just love it. And I realized, "You know, this is the Cailleach's way of telling us, 'Stop.'" This is what we should be doing; withdrawing, coming in, being still. Winter is always about winter courses, and it's the start of the academic year and then there's Christmas. And I mean, regardless of whether you're a Christian or not you can't avoid it.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah.

Eimear Burke:

Certainly in this part of the world, and all that mad, frenetic rush. And yet this was, "No, stop. Be still and just notice"

Damh the Bard:

Have permission. Have permission, yeah, yeah.

Eimear Burke:

I thought it was just so, so beautiful.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah.

Eimear Burke:

So I've now ... I've become too ... I'm less ... I'm in September now, and I've been enjoying it. I haven't gone ... I haven't had that usual, "Oh, I don't want to go in," and I'm fine. It's like, "No," because I'm going into that dark and hopefully I can enjoy the stillness and the drawing in, and tell some stories or focus on other things rather than the busy, busy, busyness. And then of course when you're in that dark place, then you know. You know, "Yes, it's not going to take long," and then the sun is reborn.

Damh the Bard:

So there we go. So, we have been talking for quite a while, and I know you're busy and have to get ready for something else in a little while. But I don't think it should be very long before we have ... We sit down and have a chat again about something else.

Eimear Burke:

I've really enjoyed this, and I feel we've ... And it's just lovely, because we've never had this conversation, you and I.

Damh the Bard:

No.

Eimear Burke:

It's like, "Oh, this is like the fireside chats." I get to know people by having a conversation.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah.

Eimear Burke:

Which we wouldn't be having if I was sitting in your sitting room, because we wouldn't have sat down in this formal way. So I've really, really enjoyed it. I feel we've covered only a tiny little bit.

Damh the Bard:

Oh, yeah.

Eimear Burke:

There's lots more to talk about.

Damh the Bard:

Very.

Eimear Burke:

So I look forward to many more conversations.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah, let's do it. Thank you very much.

Eimear Burke:

Not at all.