

Damh the Bard:

Well, I'm sitting here on Zoom and I can see my friend Barry Patterson, but you can't because you will only hear this audio. We have known each other, oh, I dread to think how many decades we've known each other. But we've not actually had a chance to sit down and have a good old chat, and I haven't had the chance to really get to know you and what brought you to the path and your journey. So really, Barry, maybe we can start there. What was your journey? And first off, let me say that to me, you are a poet. You are a writer, an observer, an entertainer, a person who has an amazing connection to the land. And that's what I would like to touch on as we go through this interview. But right at the very beginning, how did you find that connection, and what brought you to Druidry and the OBOD in the first place?

Barry Patterson:

Well, Dave, thanks. I'm honored to be here with you and have this lovely chat. I suppose really I should go right back to the 1950s. My mom and dad met youth hostelers. All these young people from the towns and cities in the north would go youth hostelers at weekends and they'd have a great time. And then when I was about five, my dad decided he was going to take me back to the youth hostel they used to frequent and the wild lands of North Northumberland: rocky shores, hills, secret valleys, loads of prehistoric sites, wildlife. My dad wasn't particularly into all that stuff, but the warden of the youth hostel was an old family friend and he was. I was already keen on natural history as a small child, but I was introduced really to the land by good people.

And we'd go, we'd be on top of some hill in Northumberland with prehistoric cup and ring markings carved into the stones. And the adults that I was with would fall quiet for a little while. And little Barry would be crawling around all over the place, poking his nose into things. And so from a very young age, that was it. As far as I was concerned, that was where my heart was, was in that land, in that lovely wild land, basically.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. It's a beautiful place, beautiful area of the land. I've barely gone to Northumberland. I think I've only ever gone to Lindisfarne, actually, over onto the island and that kind of area, but not really explored it. But it has a wild feel about it, doesn't it?

Barry Patterson:

The coast south from Lindisfarne, for 10 to 20 miles south of Lindisfarne, is just truly remarkable. Very complex, geologically, thick with wildlife, particularly with winter visiting birds. And it's a magical place. So anyway, so I grew up with that natural history and a sense of being spiritual but not religious. And as a young man, I was a science boy, but I knew there was more to the world than the naive materialists can see. And so I started to experiment with things which scientists wouldn't usually experiment with. Scared myself witless with ritual magic, and then took to Buddhist meditation because it was simple and had obvious benefits and wasn't as scary as you know what. And I practiced my whole life. I practiced sitting meditation since I was about 15.

And then in my twenties, as a result of various experiences and adventures around and about the place, I made contact with the then-emergent modern pagan revival. Shan from House of the goddess was my teacher. A good teacher she was. She taught us ritual mechanics. She taught us how you build ritual, how you make ritual work, that kind of stuff. And she was a very good teacher, she taught a lot of really good stuff, and I got a great grounding. And soon decided that I was, if you like, more on the shamanic

side of the spectrum with respect to my Paganism. And then also constantly worked to try and integrate that with my, if you like, Buddhist worldview, which put in Barry's terms is if you are wrong about the nature of the self and you are wrong about the nature of reality, you are wrong about everything. And if you're wrong about everything, you're screwed.

It's not that you need necessarily to find "the truth." But smarter that one should maintain an open and inquiring mind with respect to one's own deepest nature, and respect to the nature of the world. And then as a result of that work, I spent a lot of time outdoors, in South London, in fact, and in North Kent. In the wild woods by the Kent megaliths with a bunch of like-minded people. And from that, grew my little pamphlet, *The Art of Conversation with the Genius Loci*. And then that work, I dined out on that work for years, because I wanted to write in simple terms things that a lot of the pagan folk I knew didn't know or hadn't occurred to them. Like you don't just walk into some potentially powerful place a total stranger, set up and start doing heavy stuff. You've got to get to know the spirit of the place, and there are lots of ways of doing that.

And so I wrote my little pamphlet. And then, at that time, Paganlink. Paganlink invented the pub moot. Paganlink held camps in which we would all gather from all around the country. We would all go and we'd gather somewhere and sit around the campfire arguing about what Paganism was. Paganlink put an awful lot of people in touch with each other, and it also created just a kind of grassroots network of people. And so you could find the people you shared interests with and you could find like-minded people. And I became friends with Penny and Arthur Billington. And years later, Penny and Arthur, it must have been around about the year 2000, 2001, Penny and Arthur invited me to a Gorsedd of OBOD in Leicestershire, which was at autumn equinox.

Damh the Bard:

I remember it.

Barry Patterson:

Anne and I were running Coventry Earth Spirit at the time, but we were getting really bored with running Coventry Earth Spirit. And so we said to them, "We're not your mum and dad. And we've never ever told you we were a high priest and a high priestess. If you are a group, be a group. Bye." And we were a little bit bored and a little bit jaded with the general pagan world. And then we came to this Gorsedd with Penny and Arthur. And what a remarkable weekend, what an incredible group of people. It's just like that thing that you get in OBOD, and in other places too, where you walk in and it's just like you always were there and you always knew these people, like you're all old friends. It really felt like that, the warmth and the welcome.

And then we had a great weekend together and did lots of things. And then the climax of the weekend was an autumn equinox ceremony. And it was in a yew grove on the grounds of the place where we were staying. And it was just one of the most remarkable ceremonies of my entire life. It was just so beautiful and powerful. But we didn't do a lot of that stuff that the more Wiccan-oriented ritualists will do. The kind of, "We have to raise energy, we have to raise energy, we have to raise..." No, there's nothing like that. It came up out of the ground and it came out of our hearts. And by the end of that ceremony, there wasn't a dry eye in the circle. We were crying with joy and beauty. And Anne and I went home and said, "Cor blimey, is that what the Druids do?"

Following year, I was invited to go to what was then OBOD camps. And we walked into OBOD camps, were met by a whole lot of people who we'd met on our previous thing, plus one or two other old friends. And then camp was just like... Wow, camp was great. We walked through the camp when we

first arrived and saw that water world with the water tower in them. Caravan and the yurts and tarps and benders. Benders and yurts. And I said to Anne, "Cor blimey. The Druids are Pagan engineers." And that was so inspiring. After we'd been to a couple of OBOD camps, as they were then, we just said, pfft, whatever these guys are doing, it's pretty good. So we joined the order.

Damh the Bard:

Right. That was that.

Barry Patterson:

But I would say that I'm a perpetual bard. And I think it's a little unfair that maybe some people get the impression that being a bard is like entry level Druidry.

Damh the Bard:

Oh, I agree. It's the foundation of everything. That's why it's first, you know what I mean? To me, that's what it is.

Barry Patterson:

Yeah. So anyway, and then arriving in OBOD, discovered with my interest in Buddhist dharma, and a longtime practitioner, discovered that what's really interesting is that Druidry seems to be a place where pagans with an interest in Buddhism tend to be. So there are quite a lot of people with an interest in the dharma who are members of OBOD.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. Those campfires from the OBOD camps of the 2000s just were so, so magical, with Ivan and with Julie and the labyrinths of fire and the talks and the community. They were very, very special times without a doubt. And I think if you look at the OBOD Eisteddfodau, still at the summer and winter gatherings, the bards who were performing there, they learnt their craft or they honed a lot of their craft around those campfires in OBOD camps, me included. Jim Faupel, everybody, just amazing. Yeah. Well, that was a journey. That was a journey.

Barry Patterson:

Well, that's the journey.

Damh the Bard:

That's the journey, yeah. And so when did you start writing your poetry and learning your instruments and that kind of thing? Was that before you came into the order or-

Barry Patterson:

Oh, yeah.

Damh the Bard:

Afterwards?

Barry Patterson:

Yeah, a long time.

Damh the Bard:

It has? Okay.

Barry Patterson:

So then at school, I was pretty good at creative writing. I won one or two little prizes within and outside the school for creative writing. As a teenager I wrote poetry and never stopped.

Damh the Bard:

Right.

Barry Patterson:

I've always-

Damh the Bard:

That's your expression.

Barry Patterson:

No, I don't think that's fair to say I use poetry for a particular purpose, but I've always written. As an undergraduate in Durham, I used to wander in the wild woods. And then one time, not really in thinking in pagan terms back then, of course, but then one time before I went back to college, I found my old school recorder underneath the bed. And I thought, I'm going to take that to college with me and play it. "You know what I'm going to do?" I said to myself, "When I go out in the wild woods, I'm going to sit under a tree and play this." And I did. And it made me feel instantly happy, really, really happy. And I just thought, wow, this is something very, very good that I'm glad I found. Sitting under a tree in the woods playing the recorder is one of the great joys of life.

And so then from there, the recorder's a slightly out on its own sort of instrument. I moved to penny whistles. And once I had mastered penny whistle fingerings, I was able to pick up quite a lot of different things like bamboo flutes and things like that and play with those. I started making bodhrans in the late eighties as part of the kind of pagan shamanic culture thing that I was part of in South London. And then the most recent instrument are the English bagpipes. I go to the Original Reenactors Market, which is this huge market. It's just outside Coventry. And some of your listeners will no doubt know it, I'm sure they do. But it's this huge market for historical reenactors, and I always go to it.

And then I met Sean Jones, a bagpipe maker there. And he was a very nice fellow and we'd have some good chat and he'd give me a go on some of his instruments. I meet up as a potential, as bagpipe curious. And then one time, he had this particular bagpipe, he said, "Yeah, try this. This is something I've just made. It's kind of interesting." When I played it, I just got a feeling. I can feel a bagpipe calling to me now. That was in 2008 and I'm still a beginner.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah, yeah. And then you say that's the English pipes you play. Is there a particular region of English pipe?

Barry Patterson:

Well, okay, so bagpiping in England, what happened to it? A number of things happened to it. One thing that surely happened to it were Cromwell and the Puritans, who didn't like music generally and certainly didn't like to see uncouth peasants dancing around a bit drunk, having a great time. And the bagpipe was very much, prior to that period, the instrument of dance music rather than the fiddle.

But then when things relaxed out of the Commonwealth and music and musicians and dancing and things like that started to make a comeback, for some reason, the fiddle very much ousted the bagpipe as the dance music instrument of choice. Possibly because it's a more sophisticated instrument and it can be tuned more precisely and it can be played loudly and softly according to your needs. Whereas an awful lot of rustic bagpipes can be quite difficult to tune precisely and are often quite loud.

I currently have four sets of bagpipes. I started on something that Sean calls a shepherd's pipe, which is a very generic bagpipe. There are bagpipes like that all over Europe and once was common in Britain. A little bit like what they call the Cumbrian or border pipe, only are mouth-blown. And then after that, I decided that I wanted something smaller and quieter, and I went back to Sean and he makes a very nice... You've seen me at Eisteddfod's playing the small pipes. That's based on an 18th century German design. So strictly speaking, my small pipes are a German dudy. And then recently, I've acquired this thing I called The Beast, made by Julian Goodacre, which is a real old medieval English great pipe with big trumpety ends. It's loud, and that's a very dramatic instrument, but better for outdoors.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. Okay. Is it very loud, is it, yeah?

Barry Patterson:

Yeah. It's quite loud.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. Okay.

Barry Patterson:

And also it's quite big, so it's very easy to just swing round and just, I don't know, hit the lampshade or whack somebody.

Damh the Bard:

Right. Yeah.

Barry Patterson:

And the bagpipe has been a bit of a journey because I never was someone who really read music and really sat down to learn specific tunes. And I never had much self-discipline, and I always just played for enjoyment and joined in with people when and where and how I could. But with the bagpipe I've had to be more disciplined, so I play most days, make an effort to learn, to keep adding to my tune in order that I can go to... Some shows that I work at as the Wild Man of the Woods, the Green Man, some shows I work at, I do a lot of voice, spoken word stuff, but some shows I go to is more music. And so I've set myself the goal of being able to play for a considerable amount of time without repeating myself. That means knowing tunes.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah.

Barry Patterson:

And so I've been working quite hard. I work quite hard on that.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. So the English pipes that you've got, have they all got... This is my interest. I've always wanted a set of pipes, okay? I am more than bagpipe curious. I've spoken to Andy Letcher a couple of times about it. I've spoken to... Oh, the woman in Dragonsfly, I can't remember her name. Down in Glastonbury, she was another piper. And to be quite fair, Cerri has restricted me to say, "If you learn the pipes, you learn them up on the Downs. And then when you can play them, you can come back home." So I can get tunes out of some of the tin whistle and things like that. But what I've noticed is that some pipes have very different fingering for different notes. The ones you play, are they the same as the tin whistle or are they... See, that's what's confusing me. That's what gets me every time. Yeah, so they're different?

Barry Patterson:

Well, first of all, Andy Letcher, what a great friend. Known him a long time. Not seen him as much since he moved to Devon. But when I first got into piping, Andy very, very graciously gave of me of his time. And I went and he blessed me with a lot of really, really, really wise, useful and practical advice, to which I still refer and about which I still remind myself.

Basically, there are three different kinds of fingerings. If you play penny whistle, you take all your fingers off in sequence, and that's called open fingering. What I do is called semi-closed. And that is when after I've taken all the fingers of my right hand off... Oh, I can't describe it. That's semi-closed, and then fully-closed is when, like the Northumbrian small pipe, which is a bellows-blown pipe, of course. But the Northumbrian small pipe, dear listener, I'm holding something up so Dave can see what I'm talking about.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah, this is good podcasting. So he's got another pipe in front of him. Yeah, yeah.

Barry Patterson:

So the Northumbrian small pipe is fully closed. And so what happens then is you only take one finger off at a time. And Julian, a good egg of a bagpipe maker, once said to me, "Barry, it makes it sound more bagpipey."

Damh the Bard:

That's fair enough.

Barry Patterson:

Which I said, "I don't think my brain could handle another different set of fingerings." Now semi-closed.

Damh the Bard:

Okay. Right. So you take off-

Barry Patterson:

Kind of like, you play the holes off one hand, and then you put that hand back on, then you close those holes and then you play the holes of the next hand.

Damh the Bard:

Right. So not too dissimilar, then.

Barry Patterson:

Not that hard to adapt, Dave. And these days in Britain, there are quite a lot of people, quite a lot of highly-skilled people making simple, rustic English bagpipes, which won't break the bank or drive Cerri mad.

Damh the Bard:

Both of which are very important.

Barry Patterson:

There are quite a few people doing it.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. You mentioned your Green Man performance, which you did at one of our Anderida camps. Can you describe that to the listeners and what got you into that? Because it was absolutely magical to witness.

Barry Patterson:

Well, the Wild Man of the Woods is... Okay, well, I paint myself green and I wear a large crown of ivy. Some of your listeners have probably seen me. And I'm tall and green. And I've been traveling up and down the country doing various kinds of performances as the Wild Man of the Woods since 1991, which makes me, I reckon, the longest running and widest traveled green man possibly in history. And these days I mostly do public events. I used to do schools, museums, libraries, and more formalized situations, but these days I mostly do public events.

And it started because I used to work in the Natural History Museum in London as one of those explainers who does workshops for visiting children and families. And they said, everyone has to have a project for the summer holidays. And so I decided to do storytelling and I did the story of a wood from the ice age to the present, and decided I'd create this wild character for it. And then the bosses said, "Oh, we like that. That's good. You could do that again." And then that winter, they held a huge conference. Do you remember Tree Dressing Day?

Damh the Bard:

Mm.

Barry Patterson:

We don't hear much about Tree Dressing Day these days. But the charity Common Ground inaugurated National Tree Dressing Day. The Natural History Museum decided they were going to get involved in that, and they had a big, big national tree dressing conference. And then they decided they had to do it.

And so then my green man got recruited to help out with that. And then that was quite high profile, so that raised my profile. So then I started getting invitations to go to places. And by then I had already started performing a bit: poetry, music, song, storytelling, in an informal kind of way within the alternative culture of Southeast London.

So then I just start doing it. I've been at it a long time now. And basically, I make a point of not going for the lowest common denominator. The green man is an ancient pagan god of fertility. They carved thousands of these things on hundreds of Christian buildings for centuries because it was a secret. I always tell my audience it's a mystery. They inherited it from classic temples where he was probably a temple guardian. And I very much belong to the Professor Hutton school of folklore studies, that most British folklore has a history, that history can actually be traced and understood. Most of it doesn't have direct pagan antecedents.

Our folklore heritage is a precious, wonderful and marvelous thing. But as Ronald always says, find out the truth of the matter is more interesting than just having a whole load of beliefs about it that were to some degree invented by Edwardian Romantics. There's a 13th century architectural document in which they're describing cathedrals in France. And then when one particular cathedral, it says, in this particular cathedral, there are lots of leafy men's heads. So leafy men's head, the thing is though, modern Paganism is what it is. It's an inspired, transformative, liberating tradition, which we are in the process of founding and creating. And modern Pagans have taken our foliate heads and many other customs, and they have made them sacred. And I honestly think it's a wonderful thing that modern Paganism, we take these materials and we have given them a sacredness they probably didn't have before. And I think that's very important and very special. So now when I'm being the green man, I don't say that I represent anything other than the land.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah.

Barry Patterson:

So then I say, I speak for the woods and the trees and the ponds and the pools and the rivers and the streams and the heaths and the moors and the rocky shores. And the blackbirds and thrushes and robins and wrens and the tits and the finches and woodpeckers and jays.

Damh the Bard:

The voice of nature.

Barry Patterson:

A voice of nature to contemporary British society. I'm not the only voice of nature to contemporary British society, there are many people doing inspiring things. But then to say, I speak for that and that's my aim, that's my ministry. My ministry isn't to actually try to persuade people to change their beliefs or to change their values, necessarily, because I think most people actually understand the state of the environment is a terrible thing. It's just that they're feeling disempowered and scared and uninspired about it. And that's a sad thing. And so I always say that if they just see me sitting underneath my tree, the magic is working.

Damh the Bard:



Yeah. It feels to me like that is the healing that needs to be done because of the separation over the centuries that humans have built up in human constructs to separate ourselves from nature. It's like when you watch a David Attenborough program, you say you're watching a nature program. Not once does it show humans as part of nature, it's always something else. And it's almost like that spirit is calling out to people now to say, this is what we are. And the zeitgeist, if you like, or the thrust of modern Paganism is something that is deeply needed; that connection to the seasons, to the animals, the birds, a reintroduction of some form of animism, of seeing other life forms as sacred and valid. To me, that's what the green man message is as well, definitely.

Barry Patterson:

Absolutely. Very much so. And also in the figure of the green man, you have a really interesting thing, because he can speak for nature, but it's history too. So then you have human history and, if you like, natural history can't be separated, can't be unwoven from one another. And that's the great illusion. That's the great illusion. And then if some young person in bright pink trainers says, "You're weird," I say, "Oh, no, no, no, young person. I'm not weird. I'm quite normal. You're weird." Out of the house and into the car and out of the car and into the shops and out of the shops, where you can get anything you want anytime you want. And into the car and out of the car and into the school and out of the school and into the car and out of the car and into the house.

Central heating and double glazing and turn the tap, clean water. The roof doesn't even leak. The windows aren't even draughty. You think that that is normal. But actually throughout history and throughout our world today, that is not normal. It isn't normal. There's a great story, I think it's King John is sitting in his bedroom, writing in his diary to the light of a guttering candle. And he writes in his diary that his bedroom is really cold. And this is the king. His bedroom is cold and draughty. And oops, the draft blew his candle out.

But then the luxury and the freedoms and the comfort and convenience of our modern world is something we shouldn't take for granted. And in fact, what's happened as well is that while I've been doing this, I've become friends with quite a lot of bushcraft practitioners. I know that's something very dear to your heart, Dave.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah.

Barry Patterson:

And so I get some work every year I get from bushcraft practitioners to come to their events. Last year I was at the big bushcraft show.

Damh the Bard:

Brilliant.

Barry Patterson:

This year I've got a booking, which is a bunch of teenagers doing bushcraft in the middle of a wooded estate in Oxfordshire. And while they're all sitting around the campfire after dinner one night, I'm going to emerge from the woods.

Damh the Bard:

Brilliant.

Barry Patterson:

Scare them.

Damh the Bard:

I've always said that bushcraft to me completed the circle for me, for my connection to the natural world. I could go to a hawthorn, I could tell you all about the mythical stories to it, I can tell you about its folklore, but I couldn't tell you what it was used for. I couldn't tell you about how my relationship could be with it if I was living within the woods itself. And so the fire by friction, the shelter building, the water purification, the navigation through natural bits and pieces within the wood, to me that completed the circle for me. It's like you've got that spiritual connection and it's built around also that very, very deep connection of being able to live there, basically with a shoelace and a knife. That's pretty much all I need.

Barry Patterson:

Yeah. And that was also, that links with the Art of Conversation With the Genius Loci, which is a very practical art. Because one of the things which struck me was that because of this pagan renaissance happening in the nineties, a whole load of Pagans were start starting to go out in the woods. And they can do harm to themselves, physically, mentally, spiritually, if they're not careful. And then there was one time I was at a camp many, many, many years ago, a Pagan camp, many, many years ago. And they said, "Well, Barry, we're going to do a sweat lodge tonight, and we'd love if you could join in with us." And I said, "That'd be great. Great, do a sweat lodge. Yeah." And they said, "We want to build a bender for the sweat lodge, and we need to go out in the woods and cut some hazel poles." And I said, "Oh, great. Do you want me to come and help?" And they said, "Well, actually, none of us know what hazel poles look like."

Damh the Bard:

Right, yeah.

Barry Patterson:

And I said, "Okay, guys, don't you worry." And I said, "Not only do I know what hazel poles look like, but I'll take you into those woods and I'll take you straight to a hazel tree with the right kind of poles in it," fingers crossed behind back. But the local spirit stood me proud. So we walked into the woods and I said, "Here you go." And they said, "Huh, how did you do that?" And I said, "Don't you know? Don't you know how I did that?" Basically. And that's one of the things that got me thinking. But I have also been involved in a number of things now where in fact, you support people to do something like that themselves. So someone comes into your woods and they need a particular thing and you support them to find that for themselves, to find a particular species of tree without spending all day using a grid pattern of searching.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah.

Barry Patterson:

Because there's still very much a tendency, I think, among a lot of Pagans to still be a little bit insulated from this stuff that, Dave, that you and I both celebrate. And I think that more and more Pagans should be heartily encouraged to get out and explore their local landscape. It's also easy to jump in the car and go to Avebury or Stonehenge or the Rollright Circle or Arbor Lo or somewhere like that, because that's special and that's powerful. But there's a lot to be found.

Damh the Bard:

Absolutely.

Barry Patterson:

Simply by exploring, sensitively, carefully, respectfully.

Damh the Bard:

I sometimes wonder whether or not that separation of the woods and nature to some degree comes from... When you look at the origins of Paganism in the States, it seems to have come from protest, from the civil rights movement, from feminism and that kind of stuff. If you look at the roots of Paganism in the UK, the very roots seem to have been basically Victorian gentleman in magical societies practicing indoors in downstairs temples, rather than outside in the woods. Do you know what I mean? And I think we're still trying to unpick ourselves a little bit from that. "Oh, we're going to do an Imbolc ceremony and we're going to do it in the front room," rather than go into the woods and freeze ourselves stupid and connect with the cold and what is actually going on.

Barry Patterson:

Well, agree one hundred percent, Dave, with that. It still goes on.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah.

Barry Patterson:

And you can't take your four-colored candles if it's a bit windy.

Damh the Bard:

Blow out very quickly. Can I get back to yourself a little bit as well? Because I know you love William Blake. I've heard your William Blake poem and I think it brought Cerri to tears. I think she stood up and cheered you at the end of it all because she has the same kind of passionate love of that man and his poetry and his art and everything about him, really. So how did you get into William Blake?

Barry Patterson:

I saw a bit of Blake's art in the newspaper when I was a little kid. It was one of those pictures of Urizen with his dividers, you know? Bearded old guy, he's got his dividers. And I thought it was a bit scary. And my mom said, "Oh, that picture was by William Blake. He was a madman." And I thought, oh, really? But then of course you discover Jerusalem, The Tyger. Think, hmm, not exactly mad. Although, in fact, both can be interpreted as being politically radical and revolutionary if you want to read them that way.

And then I suppose I always had a bit of an interest. And I tried to read Blake in a particular kind of way, in a linear kind of way, and to make sense of it and to try to fit it in with my own perception of the world. And I never quite succeeded. And then one time at camp, I crawled out of a sweat lodge. It was a really hot one, third round, led by Neil, the druid formerly known as Eight, who always used to stretch that third round out. We were palpitating on the floor. Crawled out in this state of absolute relief and release. And somehow everything seemed incredibly intense. The sky, the clouds, the moon, the stars, the trees, the wind, the light, the sound, everything seemed... All our senses, all my senses were really, really, really, really, really ramped right up.

And it was almost as if it was roaring, the roaring of the senses. And I thought of Blake. And I went back and I thought, okay, how about instead of trying to understand Blake politically or theologically, what if Blake is actually practicing something very similar to what we do, and what he's actually trying to do is to put into words, to describe the indescribable? And then of course, we know very well that Blake wasn't just doing that. We know that he had very particular political and religious views.

But after that, I felt a bit of a sympathy with him. And then I began to look more closely at some of the things which have been written about him. And it's a bit sad. There are lots of Blake biographies, but many of them aren't really completely sympathetic. Even the ones that are sympathetic belong to what I call the Poor Blake party. Poor Blake, he was a failure. He never succeeded. His great exhibition was a flop. Poor Blake, he never really had a very good head for business and et cetera, et cetera. Whereas there is one, actually, there's one biography which I really, really like, and that is the one by Tobias Churton. Tobias Churton is famous for writing lots of books about the history of gnosticism and also about the life and works of Aleister Crowley. Clearly Churton is a practitioner of some kind, and his account of Blake is the closest to what I feel about him. And then I suppose you tune into these people, they become like inner guides or something like that.

But Blake became a bit of a presence. Sometimes I'd sometimes just feel, not that he was standing there lecturing me about something or that he was hovering about doing some kind of weird magic thing, but rather that there was some kind of inspiration or some kind of encouragement, that there was a sense of encouragement. That more than anything else personally, what I was now receiving from Blake through his work or his presence was encouragement. And so I wrote the Blake poem, and then I did that, a very big Blake performance one time at the Winter Assembly, of course, when I learned Auguries of Innocence.

And if you learn a big work like that off by heart, that in itself is a magical act and an invocation. And so after that experience, thanks to you guys, on stage in Glastonbury Town Hall, Blake was really there for me. I think he was a prophet of our world. He was a man ahead of his time. He was just a man completely ahead of his time. And you have to see through what sounds like very orthodox religious language about Jesus and Christ and God and suchlike to see what he's actually getting at about the nature of the human soul and the dynamism of inspiration and creativity. Oh yeah, yeah, Blake. Definitely very important to me.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. You wrote a poem about him, didn't you?

Barry Patterson:

Yeah, yeah. Yes. Yep. Blake's Chest. Big Bill Blake.

Damh the Bard:

Could you read it?

Barry Patterson:

Strange as it may seem, I believe it's in here.

Damh the Bard:

Lovely.

Barry Patterson:

There it is. Look, page 12. "Blake's chest is filled by a wind roaring through time that does not heed convention or calamity. His mind, knotted around a divine pressure behind his eyes, like a hangover or a coming beaver. Face, frowning and laughing at the same time and no one knows what thoughts are moving there. He doesn't care what may or may not be visible to his audience, only that they understand. His hands move suddenly and then they're still again. He can't remain motionless in this atmosphere's gloom. Head on fire, eyes burning, voice rising and falling in the song that he must sing. Everything alive within the horizon is stretching into the light but we don't ever see. Some say he's crazy, but there's the only danger in feelings set free into the wild of nature's embrace.

"It's the Garden of Eden every day but no one wants that to be true right now. A rat race run by parasites, all too scared to wake up now and see the sun. The impossible is commonplace to them and innocence and freedom are hopelessly overwhelmed by their serious intentions. If someone mentions the war in heaven, they're not so wisely as if they're really understood. But there is no war and no war to contain the soul. Only a downcast gaze in the heat of the mindmade forge, where chains of belief and disbelief are equal in their power to condemn the human race to slavery, and a chain is a chain, whether it be forged from iron, lead, uranium, titanium, or gold. Mere words you have been told are not enough to show the unseen landscape of humanity's true heritage. No ghost, no machine, no animal red in tooth and claw, no root, no vine, no precious race. Only a heart beating light, a mind made transparent, unimagined, untrammled, set free.

"The guilty globe of waking life roaring with the primary pulsation of the senses is burst open like a salt bubble peeling itself apart from the point of penetration, setting free the reflections from its surface. And a red-haired man shouts and waves his arms about, he jumps up and down, pointing at a wild flower. He says, 'The cistern contains, the fountain overflows, one thought builds immensity. What is now proved was once only imagined. Everything possible to be believed is an image of truth.' And I say, 'We are enslaved by an idea that we have about ourselves, and we mock those who dare to question it.'"

Damh the Bard:

Just fantastic. I mean, yeah, and that was the point where Cerri stood up and just cheered.

Barry Patterson:

Bless her heart.

Damh the Bard:

Your words are amazing, Barry. And I was looking through your website to find some more of your work. And I listened to one that was read out by Steve, I think is both our friend, which was the one about the murmurations. And I think I've never heard you read that out, but that really got to me, it was a

beautiful thing. Do you use the Awen as a term of what you latch into? Because to me that's what it feels like.

Barry Patterson:

Oh yeah, definitely.

Damh the Bard:

Spiritual inspiration, poetic inspiration. And it seems to come from the very land and everything around you itself. And I know there are going to be people listening to this podcast right now who would just love to be able to open up to that stream. Have you got anything you could tell them of what they could do to help them make that connection and turn that feeling into words?

Barry Patterson:

Or any other kind of creativity.

Damh the Bard:

Or yes, exactly. Yes.

Barry Patterson:

Okay. In ritual, we sing Awen maybe three times or maybe we do nine cascading Awens. But as you might remember, Dave, I've very much been an advocate of Awen as a practice. Sing Awen for an hour, sing Awen a hundred times. And in doing so, play with the sound of it. Sing it melodically, chant it, sing it. Allow the word and the energy of the word to work for you. And it's important, because I've done this practice a lot. I'd say it's possibly my most important practice within Druidry, apart from relating to the land and the elements and all the things we've talked about. But I think the thing is to not have an agenda. Sing Awen, sing prolonged Awens without an agenda. Relax and let the magical sound do its work. That's one thing.

Second thing is, when I talk to my poetry friends in Coventry, we often talk about writer's block. But my view is there's no such thing as writer's block. It doesn't exist. There are various reasons why you sat down wanting to write and you didn't. There are various reasons why you need to create a piece of writing for a particular commission. I've got a commission right now, from I think called Thrive Poetry, which is part of the Coventry Positive Images Festival, to write a poem about urban green space. And I haven't written anything yet, but I don't feel blocked because I think that somewhere, somehow there's a sense of trust or faith that Awen is there. It's like getting your old-fashioned transistor radio and turning the little dial and hearing all kinds of funny noises, and going up and down and trying to find a station, trying to find the station you want. It's a little bit like that.

And your own mood, and your location in space and in time, and your motivation and your self-consciousness, all these things interface with this. It's weird, but in my life, one or two poems, which did very well... When you submit, say they say you can submit up to three or four poems. And I don't do that very much. I'm not a great one for submitting. It's a bit of a hamster wheel. But hey, once or twice when I've done that, sometimes the ones which did really well are actually the ones that I knocked off really quickly. I had written the main poem that I would put all the effort into, but I still had one or two spare ideas and a few nice words knocking around. I don't write on lined paper anymore, I write in sketchbooks because... I'm holding one up, folks. It's a sketchbook with scribble all over it.

Damh the Bard:

Just free form?

Barry Patterson:

Yeah. And less linear. You can do flow charts. And so I had a few nice phrases and a few nice words left and I knocked something off really quick with a few of the leftovers, and that's the one they like. It was less self-conscious. And then also, you never know when you're going to finally tune in because you might do a ritual and say, right, I'm going to actually use all those things that I've been learning in order to invoke Awen, in order to get some inspiration, in order to stimulate my creativity for this particular project. I'm going to do a ritual. You do your ritual, but you don't necessarily going to get some kind of instant vision or something from that. But that's cooking. That's in the cauldron now, isn't it?

Damh the Bard:

Bubbling away.

Barry Patterson:

Weird, isn't it? And then it might come out any time. So it's also really, really useful to have a small notebook you can keep in your pocket just in case. That's just the current one, look. And there it is, you see, not in my pocket. If I fall out of the habit of having a small notebook in my pocket, I lose loads of stuff. And by the bed. I wake up in the middle of the night and sometimes an entire poem; rhythm, scanning, rhyming, allusion, metaphor, meaning; poem kind of unrolls in my mind while I'm lying in bed in the dark. And then I go back to sleep and in the morning, all I can remember was that there was a really good poem in the middle of the night at some point.

Damh the Bard:

You always think that you're going to remember it, don't you? And you never do.

Barry Patterson:

Either that or you stagger up in the dark and you get your pen and you scribble in the dark. And then the next morning it's virtually incomprehensible because you write in the dark.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah.

Barry Patterson:

And you think, what's that? Huh? But I think, though, they're practical things, but from a magical perspective, it's the singing of the Awen. And also there's going in search of Awen. What is it which, the way you are now, where you are now in this moment in your life right now, where you are now in your particular pattern of living and being right now, what is going to inspire you? It might not be what inspired you last time. And then it becomes a little bit like a quest, a little bit of a kind of search or maybe an exploration or a bunch of experiments. You know?

Damh the Bard:

Yeah.

Barry Patterson:

You go out and look for it. I remember that we visited the Tree Spirit land. Tree Spirit's a tree planting charity with a strong pagan leaning from the nineties. And then I returned to the land we planted with mixed deciduous trees in the nineties after years. We hadn't been there for years and years and years. It's beautiful. But I was feeling really flat. I was not feeling inspired. I was feeling really flat. And so I went away from where everyone was working and I went away from the group and I wandered around the land. And I just asked them, I just asked the land, I just said, "What is it? Where is it that I should look?" And then I found myself in this place that I recognized visually from years before, where the edge of the land had a funny little opening in it and a gate. And then outside the gate there was this big old piece of stone set on the ground. And then quite literally, quite literally without my inviting anything whatsoever, quite literally, this stone looked at me and told me in one word what I was looking for. And not to say that I hallucinated the stone spoke to me, but I knew the stone spoke to me. This word appeared. And thank you, old friend.

Damh the Bard:

And you were off and it worked.

Barry Patterson:

You see, I think that sometimes we make it hard for ourselves, don't we?

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. The harder I try, the less I manage when it comes to creativity. It's almost an act of surrender to me. It's stepping into the flow and just letting it happen rather than forcing it.

Barry Patterson:

You've wrote some great songs, Dave, so clearly your insight into this process is clearly very important contribution.

Damh the Bard:

Oh, thank you, mate. Well, my friend, we've been talking for nearly an hour.

Barry Patterson:

Have we?

Damh the Bard:

Yes. People can find out more about Barry at [redsandstonehill.net](http://redsandstonehill.net). That's still your website, yeah?

Barry Patterson:

Yeah.

Damh the Bard:

And I noticed that there's some of your books still available to buy on the website.

Barry Patterson:



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Yep. There are. Some of my pamphlets are still available, yeah.

Damh the Bard:

Well, I love your work, and you're an awesome mate, so there we are. Thank you, Barry, for spending this time with me. I will see you at the Summer Gathering, I really hope, if not at the Winter Gathering. And yeah, thanks for spending some time with me on DruidCast.

Barry Patterson:

Thank you very much, Dave. Thanks for having me.