

AN ACT OF PIETY

By Rev. Kirk S. Thomas



A number of years ago a great deal of rain fell at the Sirius Rising and Starwood Festivals held at the Brushwood Folklore Center near Sherman, NY. In fact, so much rain fell that year that the festivals earned the nickname of "Squishwood." That was the year that I decided that we needed to do something about Brushwood's sometimes-violent weather.

A few of us got together that year and built a small altar to Taranis, the Gaulish god of Thunder. I had lots of experience calling on Him in Tucson, where the monsoon storms were so important for the health of the Land. So, I thought, perhaps He would be kind to us at Brushwood and, if plied with enough whiskey, send the rains for those two weeks to Tucson instead.

Skip Ellison had found an old iron wheel in the brush near the ADF Nemeton, and we had taken this as an omen, since a wheel can be a symbol for thunder gods. We got bungee cords and hung the wheel on a tree where it could be seen from the main Nemeton mound. Then we went and scrounged up the biggest stones we could carry and piled them up to make a nice, if short altar, just in front of the wheel. And on this altar much whiskey was poured over the years. We must have been doing something right because we haven't had such a wet year since (touch wood).

But I was never really happy with the altar. It just didn't seem important enough for a god we were relying on so much for good festival weather. So I started fantasizing about building something really wonderful for the god. And this year I got my chance!

When my partner and I renovated our house, we ended up with some leftover column pieces from the area around our pool. When we sold the house to my sister, I had to make a decision – should I cart those pieces of stone to Brushwood and actually make my vision a reality? My sister didn't want the stone, so this would be my last chance. I carted the stone in my pickup truck all the way from Tucson to Brushwood, determined to spend my festival time this year in my act of piety.

I had also naively thought that I would be able to create this column and fire altar by myself. I went to a Home Depot near the campsite and bought 27 bags of concrete and a couple of bags of mortar. These alone weighed around a ton. And I had to cart them and the blocks I had bought for the altar itself to the building site.

I honestly don't think now that I could have completed this project by myself. But happily, ADF folks came to my rescue and worked as hard as I did to see this happen. Grey and Rachael from Snow Water Grove helped me unload the concrete bags. Seamus, Chief of the Warriors Guild and Senior Druid of Three Cranes Grove, and B., who wishes to remain unnamed, helped me dig the foundation hole. I had to leave for a couple of days, and they made the hole even deeper – 3 feet square and 3 feet deep! This column wasn't going anywhere.

They, Archdruid Skip Ellison, and Karen Clark of 6th Night Grove, all pitched in to help with the mixing and pouring of the concrete base for the column, and that was a HUGE job. By the time we were done, and it had cured a while, it was already the second week and the beginning of Starwood.



My volunteer crew for the second week turned out to be Karen, Craig Wilcox of Feather River Protogrove in California, and Cary Carcuro of Tear of the Cloud Grove. Cary was invaluable, helping me lift stone pieces to the top of the column and mortaring in the dedication stone, carved for me by Bert Kelher of Sonoran Sunrise Grove.



The dedication stone was a bit of whimsy for me. I remembered that the ancients always put their names on the temples that they built, so I did the same. The stone first says 'Taranis' with a wheel following the name, and on the second line it says, 'Rev. Kirk Thomas ADF VAD 2008'. Well, at least it's similar to the dedication Marcus Agrippa put on the Pantheon in Rome (M AGRIPPA L F COS TERTIVM FECIT – 'Marcus Agrippa in his third consulship made this', more or less).

The stones of the old altar were either buried in the new one or used for landscaping, and the old wheel was re-secured to its tree.

Finally, the small iron wheel I had brought from Arizona was set on top of the column and the fire altar was finished. We let the mortar at the bottom of the fire altar cure as long as we could, and then we held a rite of consecration and dedication.

It was a lot of work, but the piety of all the folks who gave up their festival time to help me create this altar truly humbles me. This is the power of piety, of *doing* instead of just talking or believing. And I am grateful that these fine folks would make such an effort for me, and especially for Taranis, who is now well honored in Brushwood.

Hail Taranis!