

TEA AT CRAZY WISDOM



BY ARWULF ARWULF

When that I was a little boy at twelve, Nixon was president and the war in Vietnam was televised. Pictures of mangled bodies every night and a strange sensation in my bones as of pain sent round the world via the interconnected heart of humanity. Children, at least those who've not been jaded otherwise, feel genocide in the marrows where the blood lives. Today I am grown older and the world's every bit as twisted and violent. Just lately I'm copping that same bone-rush of violence right out of the air, straight up through the ground. And it cops me.

In 1969 I would walk alone for miles, finding solace in the Arboretum or the swampy stretches of Huron River marsh near Huron Parkway, before Gallup Park got landscaped into a tidier space. It was wilder then. And if the muck sucked the sandal from my foot, so much the better. Plenty of time to stop, reach into the footprint and wrest my leather back from the underworld. Closer to town I would seek refuge in peaceful surroundings: Drake's Sandwich Shop on North University with its ancient green and black enameled wooden booths. Nestling into a warm shadow I could warm my little hands around a pot of loose black tea, reading my books in silence. And soon a semblance of real peace would visit me for awhile.

To be sure there were mugs of Constant Comment at Mark's Coffee House on William, but that soon became more of a scene, while Drake's was a candy shop museum with inexpensive sandwiches and little tins of Assam, Darjeeling, or Imperial Gunpowder. There was a sanctity inside of there that's gotten scarce hereabouts. Somebody gutted Drake's awhile back (*vandalism!*) and installed a bagel franchise which I refuse to enter. Today there's a surly pizza joint where once stood Mark's, and Ann Arbor is crawling with cafés, which are usually crowded and fairly noisy. Zola on Washington is special, run by good people, and I love to set my saucer down on their big stone slab counter. A real café among wannabes.

But as for tea taken seriously in a peaceful setting I've got to sing about the new Tea Room up above Crazy Wisdom, the magical bookstore which has recently moved to 114 S. Main Street. Here they serve tea in diminutive pots of Syracuse china, and it's the closest anyone's come to providing the combination of peace and strong tea which so helped me long ago at Drake's. Specifically I've been grooving on the Ceylon Wewesse blend. It is powerful, positively psychoactive. Along the walls of the Tea Room: ceramic tarot tiles in numerical sequence—beautifully painted antique archetypes. "La Temperance" is near to where I sit; the other day I found myself seated directly beneath the Hermit. Question: where's number 10, the Wheel? Conspicuously absent, it must've broken long ago. Reflection: the Wheel is all around us. We are its pattern. And don't imagine it ever stops or even slows for a minute. Poetically speaking, the invisibility of the Wheel tile is a perfect mystery.

Let's finish our tea. Now please bus your table and we'll wander through the newly expanded Crazy Wisdom Bookstore. First let me say this is exactly what Ann Arbor needs. Bookstores are one vital reason for living here at all. Independently owned are the best for everybody. That doesn't mean you should boycott the chains, just think where your money is going, that's all. Support most often the ones who are irreplaceable: Common Language, Shaman Drum, Jewel Heart, David's, Aunt Agatha's, Books in General, Dawntreader, West Side, Wooden Spoon, Kaleidoscope, Afterwords. The independents.



Crazy Wisdom in her new location combines the beauty and elegance of Shaman Drum and West Side with the spiritual unity of Jewel Heart and the political awareness, the woman-honoring, sexually liberated strengths of Common Language. It doesn't seem like these places are competing. They are rather *conspiring* (breathing together) to provide Ann Arbor with unique and meaningful choices. If you're going to spend money in this town it would be helpful for the general atmosphere if places like these were on your regular beat.

There's more in here besides books. I'll speak of books in a minute. One of the single most important elements in this store as it now stands is the inclusion of what might be termed "hoodoo supplies"—lots of smudge sticks and incense, and a good stash of candles, including "ghetto candles" in glass containers. These often have specific spellwork implied, such as "Run Devil Run" or the "High John the Conquerer" house blessing candle. There are herbs—tonka bean, mugwort, mistletoe, rowan, elder, bloodroot, irish moss, hawthorn, vetivert and dragonwort, to name a few. There are bottles of Florida Water, which is a refreshing splash-on cologne, heavy on the lime juice, good for protection. I go through Florida Water at a terrific rate. How sweet it is to not have to drive to Detroit in order to get this stuff. Crazy Wisdom is the closest thing we have to the botanicas one finds in places like Detroit, New Orleans or San Francisco's Mission District.

There's quite a collection of beautiful objects. The statues of gods and goddesses are inspiring; every deity a metaphor celebrating aspects of the way things really really are. Hekate is real life. So's Legba. My optimistic mind's eye would see the jewelry as hopefully addressing/reflecting grace rather than vanity. The magical supplies as beneficial to sincere ritual full of good intention. And the atmosphere of the place itself as conducive to the furtherance of spiritual and social wisdom. I'm making a wish for the alternative spiritual community to outgrow that jealousy and egotism which so often ruins the collective energy. *May we all struggle together, humbly and clear-headedly, to help make the world a better place in which to live and die.*

Women's spirituality is not a trend. It is the basis for human evolution, and the hope of our species. Without reverence for the Mother and a clear awareness of the divinity which resides in every living thing, there can be no humanity. Not for much longer. All hail the divine cosmo-femine. Honor thy Mother if you honor life. This is what I have learned from my partner Lindsay Forbes: All blood is menstrual blood; everyone gets it from their mothers. Honor the sacred female blood mysteries of birth, menstruation, lactation, mothering, menopause, croning and death. These are the passages of womanhood, which should not be compromised. Most societies, however, have not even begun to respect any part of the female experience. Women have the power to give or not to give life, which is the greatest power of all.

This perspective, which braids firmly together with informed radical feminism, is conspicuously absent from the recently co-opted witchiness so clumsily purveyed by the mass media. Hollywood debases everything—look what they've done with sexuality, which is some of the deepest magic of all. Witches were the original healers. Witches closely observe the moon, stars and sun, following the seasons with great care as turns the Wheel of the Year. Real witches work in support of life on the planet. Real witches demand the truth. Without clarity and rightful ethics there is no witchcraft. Hollywood hasn't figured this out and they never will. Nor will the consumers of Hollywood product. Crazy Wisdom has always had a built-in respect for witches, quite unique here or elsewhere, and it is sincerely appreciated.

The whole purpose of Crazy Wisdom, as stated by owners Ruth Schekter and Bill Zirinsky, is *to create a more permanent home...for a countercultural haven...Crazy Wisdom is a bookstore about consciousness itself, the search for meaning, the search for health and for love and for community.* That's why so very many belief systems are honored and represented here. The word "counterculture" is not obsolete; not to Ruth and Bill, not to Lindsay or myself, nor to many of us in this region. "Counterculture" means self-determination. Freedom of choice. And a perpetual unwillingness to conform to conventional modes of living.

The books are legion, and more are on their way, especially as with so much more room there are plans for including more poetry and fiction than ever before. Yoga, Zen and Vegetarianism; Buddhism, Hypnosis and Egyptian Mysteries; Christianity, Diabetes and Psychedelics; Jungian Psychology, Food Combining and Native American Culture—the book sections unwind down the walls of the place, while upstairs there's room for many more. I get the sense that not enough people are aware of the "Sixties/Counterculture" section. Nor do we fully appreciate the care given to the many different categories of Cookbooks and Herbal studies.

Bill told me that people travel from all around this part of the state to visit the store, from Flint to Temperance; roughly a radius of seventy-five miles. There's obviously a need for such a place, and the move to Main Street, as far as any of us can see, is a major step towards strengthening the real community of alternatives, which can and will survive even the grossest of mass-delusions. The space itself is sacred—as Carol Karr, whose management has helped the store to thrive, explains: *Crazy Wisdom is not just a retail store, it is magic.*