



# Yuletide and Sisterhood

Corinne L. Casazza

A circle of women sits silently in the dark. The center of the circle boasts a Yule log of birch. Three candles - black, white and red adorn it, yet to be lit. Boughs of holly, evergreen and even some mistletoe are festooned around the Yule log. The spicy aroma of the greenery reaches the women's noses as they sit in anticipation. The Priestess seated in the east, the direction of beginnings, starts to speak - calling in the Goddess.

I attended my first pagan circle in New Hampshire where I'd heard my dear friend Patti Murphy talk about "doing circle at Gail's." I knew the circle was closed and I needed permission to attend. Patti told me she went to circle and dreamt of a fiery red-headed woman who gave her the phrase, "Novelty Teachings." She told Gail her dream the next day and got the reply, "My God, that was Brigid!" Brigid is the Celtic Goddess of fire, the hearth, poetry, childbirth and unity. She is the Goddess celebrated at Imbolc; the very one Gail had been calling in that night. "Novelty Teachings" became the title of Patti's first book.

After hearing this story, I asked if I could attend and the circle was opened to me. I loved the pageantry, spectacle and ritual of circle. Calling in the Goddess, praising her, and setting intentions. But the best things of all were the women. This was Sisterhood. Something I'd never known before.

In my corporate life all I'd experienced was the back-stabbing cattiness of women. Here was a group of women working together, helping each other, telling each other they looked beautiful and truly basking in each other's accomplishments. It was amazing; so much so that I dedicated my first novel to this group of women. When I left the east coast, they were the most difficult thing to leave behind.

Yule or Solstice is December 21st. It is a new beginning; the birth of the sun. A time when light returns to the earth and the days become longer. The Pagans used evergreen and holly in their celebrations to represent the promise of life going on; nothing dies completely. The candles on the altar represent the triple Goddess: white being the maiden, red the mother and black for the crone. The Yule

log was burned in the fire as an offering to the Goddess and the ashes were given out for protection. Families would place them in their own hearths.

Gail Nickerson was our High Priestess presiding over all our rituals. "Yule is a new beginning," she explains. "The promise of a new season and life ever-lasting. It's also a time to set intentions for the coming year, to decide what you want to bring into your life."

There's no set ritual; it's up to the celebrant to choose. In Gail's circle each woman lit an individual candle from the Yule log and stated aloud her wishes for the coming year. We raised the energy around these intentions and sent them out on Goddess's ear to the Universe.

Other rituals could include making small gifts for each other from materials found in nature like jellies, incense or ornaments. Bayberry is typically burned as this herb is associated with bringing riches and prosperity into one's home. "Mistletoe was considered a fertility herb. If someone wanted to conceive, you'd give them a gift of mistletoe.