

## Harriet Report #11.5 – Misbehaving Pagan

Everyday Life in January  
January 17, 2001

Let me list the decisions I've made lately so you can pat me on the back (I hope!?)

- 1) ready and wanting to be separate from Alex (but not from boys, sigh)
- 2) I want to stay in Delft until June 4th (looking forward to it)
- 3) 100% sure want to share custody of boys with Alex
- 4) 100% sure want to live in Houghton area until 2013 at least (when Arthur is college aged)
- 5) 100% sure I want to try to travel by myself
- 6) 90% sure want to try to share time with boys while in same big house (if change my bedroom with the boys and have the tv, etc., Alex offered to help with this part)
- 7) keep Oude Delft 46 and renew lease until June 4<sup>th</sup> (I told landlord)
- 8) stop growing out my hair color (mousy brown with gray) and get it colored (it's done, looks like a glowing golden retriever, way swell)

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**PARENTING**

The most consistent thing about me is my inconsistency, and yes I know that's the worst parenting. My big push lately is "use words", "I don't listen to demands" and using time out and removing privileges like dragonballz cards at school. I still try to catch them in good behavior, set limits and stick to them (especially bedtime lights out, the gravy of that one is all for me when they are happier in the morning), and pick my battles. So I'm remembering the learned parenting, but there are daily challenges which I chalk up to both their ages and stress.

**SEPARATION**

Alex and I are planning a schedule of separate time with the boys while living in this big house. Counselor Jane is meeting with us to discuss and with the boys also. I will have a room more like an apartment with the computer and TV so I can stay out of the way. Alex has his office. We'll try it for a month. It's what Alex's wants to try first. I did succeed in finding some rentals and we could spend the savings to have one. I'm thinking my travel will be the rental money instead.

I plan some diverting travel to cope with my separate time without boys and to get a chance to explore more of Europe while I'm still in Alex's bank account, i.e. time and money! But this travel is by myself, also a major growth experience. More detail later.

If this separate-in-the-same-house plan doesn't work, we'll get another rental and ALEX will move out as agreed, if we have both signed our "intent agreement".

He doesn't want his moving out to help the family (and me) to be held against him in any possible custody battle. There will not be a custody battle though because I've decided to share the boys

I decided 100% that shared was the best thing on Monday, January 15th. Was 98% sure before that. Was 90% sure since Dec. 15th or so. Have had extensive talks with Lawyer Manchester about it and with Counselor Jane. Manchester thinks joint is ok as long as I understand the repercussions (can't move away, have to communicate with Alex, have the boys only half the time and that's the emotional rub but cognitively it makes complete sense when considering the "boy's interests first").

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#### FUNNER NEWS: FIRST TRAVEL SOLO PLANS! TO A SPA!

SO, my first trip is booked. I leave Friday Jan. 26 (Alex gets back the 24th and all is arranged with him for my trip). I train to Groningen in far northern Netherlands (4 hours), leaving Delft at 10:14 and arriving in Nieuweschans at 14:10. I'll spend two nights at the Hotel Fontana Nieuweschans (four stars) on the edge of a park.

It is a spa. My first massage is 4:30 that afternoon. I have a single room with cable tv (which means shows in English if I'm bored) and bath. There's thermal mineral bath outside and indoor heated pool and sauna. I could get mud treatments but I'm not going to. I can get a bike and ride around the park and countryside (lots of cows there) or I can walk. I can eat. I can read. Hopefully I will not just eat and read at the same time, but one never knows. I have massage again on Saturday at 3:30. Leave on Sunday at 11:22 and get to Delft at 15:18.

Wish me luck! If it goes well my next trip is: I'll fly to Naples and go to the Amalfi coast and Pompeii and Sorrento for four nights some time in the next few months. The flight is inexpensive, one plane from Amsterdam. I love Italian food and the coast looks spectacular. There are many nice sounding hotels and Italy is always pretty affordable. But have to pass my test run first in Groningen.

Hope it's great, hope it's full of feeling, even if the feeling is numbness. Margreet says I'm perfect for solo travel because I'm so personable I'll talk to anyone around me. I'm hoping I can learn to at least be comfortable sitting quietly, or with a book at a meal and not need to chat. Will report in detail if I'm not too embarrassed. Only the meals alone worry me, the rest is familiar and comfortable.

#### EMBARRASSING GLUE HAIR

Talking about embarrassment. I actually was embarrassed enough yesterday to hide my face in my hands with this silly smirky smile on my face. I had just had my hair "painted" with dye the texture of wallpaper paste and was sitting the 30

minute wait in the window chair watching an MTV clone on TV, when Peter's class walked by on the way back from recess in the market square. A tall girl saw me and recognized me as Peter's mom and started to laugh and wave.

They were two feet away from me through the picture window as they all filed past, checking me out with varying expressions. Peter came towards the end and he looked pretty pissed off. I just feebly waved. He blasted me after school, "why'd you wave?" "What else could I do, they'd already seen me?" Now of course I realize I should have grabbed a magazine and buried my face in it, pretending I didn't see them. But I don't read Dutch, so duh, didn't think of that.

#### BORING INTELLECTUAL ELITIST PAGANS

My trip to UU Women's pagen group was a slight disaster. They didn't introduce themselves and I felt weird, they talk and think and don't make noise or laugh and it was a hassle getting home with missed trams, taxi's that cost too much, running to trains that were cancelled and three trains later I had the boys home from Marie's house at 1:15 in the morning. Now I'm super indebted to Marie for keeping the boys so late. Basically, it was not worth it. Maybe next time when Alex is in town will be easier?? Made me really miss our rituals in Houghton, especially the outdoor ones. Here they have a talking feather, and god forbid you interrupt!

#### DINNER WITH THE ARCH CONSERVATIVE

Margreet brought the boys and I to dinner at her house last night, ostensibly to meet the kittens. I made the dinner. Margreet, at 51 years old, just learned to drive. So she parked five blocks away at the big grocery store parking lot, basically avoiding driving in the city centre completely. Smart woman.

When Dirk, her older husband came home, the dynamic changed noticeably. He's a conservative and he's mad that the Netherlands might get more American. He says the liberals are trying to model the US. He's really an adamant Green who is a religious conservative, but the two go together in Holland as being conservative. Keep the green ways, don't build single houses, suburbs, ban cars, limit personal wealth, and no euthanasia, divorce, immigrants. A dizzying combination that Margreet seemed pretty chagrined about.

I didn't feel too attacked except when he described that afternoon's stop at the bible shop (near the boy's school) where he read an intelligent, well written pamphlet explaining the difference between Catholics and Mormons. After clearly establishing to us that he respected the authority of the author, he added that there was one by the same guy about Unitarians and knowing I was one, he read it. He said simply the author was "against" Unitarianism. This comment was accompanied by a smile that said what? I can't tell, "your a jerk for being such a sucker?" NO clue.

#### CRUSH CRUSHED

I'm sad to report the pudgy interesting bagel man is married. He wasn't at work and the young guy replacing him turned out to be his son. Bagel man was in the Canary Islands with the son's mother. I can only assume they are married. Today saw the bagel man and he came out from the kitchen, looking way tan, and gave me some searching looks. I just made small talk and blushed. It's very Dutch to look into someone's eyes, but I was shy and had to leave after my fourth, or fifth, comment on how nice that he got to go to the Canary Islands.

#### ICED CANAL MISBEHAVIOR?

So, I'm feeling a little isolated but loving Delft and really walking and looking around and seeing with fresh eyes how sweet and wonderful it is here. Thank god it's not a huge city. The architecture is incredible. Poor ducks though, some of the green floaty stuff they eat is frozen in ice where the canals don't move much. They look used to it. It's funny to see them standing on the canal.

The returning light has me cheered. It's been sunny but way cold for here, freezing. Our canal this morning had a skin of ice that I tested by throwing a stick on it. I was surprised first of all that I could find a stick, this is the city center after all. Well, ok, it was a really just a small piece of stick I thought about throwing my bike helmet on there, but couldn't imagine how to get it back. The stick skidded zipping across the surface. Cool! Some kid saw me as I threw a second bit of stick and then a rock before I noticed her commenting to her dad as they rode up on their bikes. Maybe it's against some rule to throw anything into the canal even when they're frozen. Hell, at least I didn't throw trash and there was plenty of that instead of searching for a stick.

#### SNACK BREAK

Just enjoyed a bowl of left over egg noodles with garlic, creme fraiche, leek, mushroom, wine sauce, and parmesian. I'll have to make it for you some day.

#### CAN HETTY VISIT SAFELY?

Four months after her first visit, Hetty's coming today for lunch with Chad, Djoel, Fince, and Igor, to play. Last time they came was September and Djoel fell in the canal in front of our house. I will serve white bread, salami, cheese, peanut butter, cookies, oranges, and Taksi (a sugared juice drink). Hetty and I can have left over bakery cake from Margreet's last night. There's one piece each of bittercookje tart and mokka tart. They're pretty amazing, but not my "coffee cake". Maybe in June when we get back I'll make one.

I hope it goes ok, Hetty's English skills are minor and my Dutch is extremely limited.

#### ZOO BREAKS MOTHER

Took the boys to the Rotterdam Zoo last Saturday, with two of the Welsh boys. It was exhausting. They liked it. Because it's winter, some of the animals are inside in small cages and I've never seen gorillas and tigers up so close. As if I

even got a chance to see them. I had to chase Arthur down outside and get him to come inside. By that time everyone else was done looking. The toughest part was reconciling the different paces of the four boys. Callum and Jamie clearly have longer attention spans than Arthur, as I quickly learned.

The giant net and slide playground, over enticing sand, was a huge hit, but I spent my thirty minutes of “break” time standing in line getting food for them that they didn’t end up eating. Well, at least Arthur ate cold french fries later on the train. This “treat trip” provided lots of opportunity to criticize mom: “why didn’t you get more soda? I’m thirsty still!” (I’m not going back in that line!); “why can’t we buy toys?” (gave in on that one); “But I don’t want to wear my coat, I’m not cold. You carry it!” It was 34 degrees farenheit. Then “I’m cold, are you sure this is the tram stop?”

I learned I should eat more carrots. I couldn’t even see the four boys I was supposed to be supervising in the dark halls of the aquarium. Course that might have been because there were two thousand other people in there wearing the same dark jackets. I also learned I should do something about my claustrophobia.

When we finally made it home, I enjoyed collapsing on the couch. Many hours later I order pizza delivery, am I a God Mother or what? We watched a movie they’d seen before at a friend’s house that seemed way too grown up to me. I laughed alone at the sex jokes, thank god. [It was “Austin Powers II”] The friends slept over. Nobody fought much.

It was single mother heaven to not have another parent there judging my choices: “they need to eat vegetables with their pizza”; “they can’t have soda AND dessert”; “it’s ten o’clock, lights out “ (on a Saturday night?); “you can’t buy any toys” (even though your friends are because their mother gave them each some money); “we can walk the 20 blocks to the train station”; “you can’t watch this movie, it’s too grown up” (wish I could have said that, next time I will); “you should be looking at the animals, not wasting all your time playing in the playground, you can do that anywhere”. Well, I made the last one up. Anyone would be glad to have them running around outside getting fresh air and exercise.