Damh the Bard:

Walking the Talk, an interview series for DruidCast. Well, here we are on the banks of Llyn Tegid. And I am with Kristal Jenks. And well, we're here for a reason. We're here anyway, but you would have brought me to Llyn Tegid as your sacred site for a Walking the Talk session. So as we stand on this bank, describe what you see. Yeah. Go on. What are we looking at?

Kristal Jenks:

We're looking out at Llyn Tegid, Lake Bala. Across the lake and we can see the mist rolling in over the hills on the other side of the lake. And this morning, the lake is rippling gently. It changes. Sometimes it's smooth like glass, like a mirror. Sometimes it's cloudy and it looks murky. Sometimes it's blue. Sometimes it is still like a mirror. It's the most beautiful changeable lake. The most beautiful place in the world to me, I think.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. And standing in the lake itself, is a cauldron on a tripod. So we're not here by accident. We're at the Anglesey Druid Order camp. Right? Yeah?

the Anglesey Druid Order camp. Right? Yean?	
Kristal Jenks:	

Damh the Bard:

Yes.

The first Druid camp?

Kristal Jenks:

No. Yes. We did about five of these camps, about five years running and then had quite a break for a few years. We felt we just hit a point where it had run its course for a while. And then COVID happened. And like everybody else, we felt disconnected and lonely and sad. And just struggling to remember all the good things in life and what we're living for and what we're doing this for.

Kristal Jenks:

And all of us had such a strong feeling that we wanted to go back to the beginning, back to the very first camp we did, to actually undertake the journey of brewing the cauldron of Awen. Starting with a camp here. A devotional camp to Ceridwen to ask her to bless us with the Awen that we were struggling to find. And we've all committed on this wonderful weekend, this wonderful devotional weekend, to spend a year and a day brewing the potion, so that we can come next year to finish the process.

Damh the Bard:

To finish the process.

Kristal Jenks:

To create the Awen that we all desperately need right now.

Damh the Bard:

And it has been just simply magical. Again, to describe a little bit here, we have actually in front of us, a remnant of last night's ritual, which is probably a 20 foot Awen hanging from the tree lit up. Yeah. That we all stepped through and the cauldrons here on the lake shore. And we were stirring the cauldron as people arrived through ... And the trees here, they're all exposed roots. I'll see if I can put a picture of this as the picture for the DruidCast episode, so people can see what we're standing under. And we're standing under a massive Oak. Apparently 500 years old or something like that?

Kristal Jenks

KIIStal Jeliks.
Yeah. It's about 500 years old. It's like a twin Oak. There were two sort of tree trunks and it's gnarled and twisted like a bent old man. And the roots are all exposed because of the erosion of the lake. Most of the trees look like they could just get up and walk at any moment. It's almost indescribable. It's ancient and it's alive and it's the most stunning landscape.
Damh the Bard:
Yeah it is.
Kristal Jenks:
Yeah It's magical.
Damh the Bard:
Somebody said last night, that they reckon that the Ent Wives went into the lake. And these are the Ents walking into the lake to try and find the Ent Wives.
Kristal Jenks:
That's amazing. And I completely Yeah. I get that completely. There's something about this place. They do look like they get up and walk. And the trees are so alive and so responsive. And just this whole landscape, just sings. I think if I had to pick one place that is my favorite place in the world to just be, it would be this place here.
Damh the Bard:
It would be the place and we just happen to be here. And you're here and I'm here and that's great. So why is it special? I mean, there are lots of people who listen to DruidCast. And they may not know the connection to the story and that kind of thing. So Llyn Tegid beside the town of Bala,. It's a massive lake, Isn't it?
Kristal Jenks:
Yes.
Damh the Bard:
So what's the spiritual connection to this place?

Kristal Jenks:

It's not only a very beautiful place, Llyn Tegid is the place where Ceridwen, the goddess of Awen, the mother of the Awen, the initiator and transformer of Gwion Bach into Taliesin. This is where she lived

and where she still lives now. And depending on the translation, it's very interesting because actually she's talked about as living in the lake, or as a part of the lake, or in an island on the lake, which is impossible because there are no islands on the lake. It's a huge, deep chasm of a lake. There are no islands.

Kristal Jenks:

So it just gives us that clue that there's something more than just a sorceress who lived next to a lake. This lake is the cauldron of Ceridwen. It is Ceridwen herself. It is the potion. It is the brew. It is the source of our Awen. And there's nothing more special than that really.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah, yeah. And there's a ... So it's a Gorge apparently. It's so about two or 300 feet deep in the center?

Kristal Jenks:

It is an incredibly deep. Like it's certainly the deepest lake in Wales.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah.

Kristal Jenks:

I mean, just to pick one magical thing about it. There's a species of fish that live in this lake, that live only this lake. They've been isolated in this lake for many, many 1000s of years. They live deep, deep down at the bottom of the chasm. They're called the Gwyniath. And they rise to the surface just for their breeding season and then you never see them at any other time.

Damh the Bard:

Wonderful.

Kristal Jenks:

And how magical is that? They only live in this lake.

Damh the Bard:

It's amazing.

Kristal Jenks:

Little blind fish that live in the depths, in the very depths of the cauldron of Ceridwen.

Damh the Bard:

Is that amazing, isn't it?

Kristal Jenks:

Yeah.

Damh the Bard:

I wish people could see where we're standing right now. It's just fantastic. So tell me a little bit about Kristal. What brought you to Druidry and a bit about your path.

Kristal Jenks:

Oh, goodness. That's always a difficult one. I think this ... All of us have a story. Don't we? Most of us didn't come from pagan or Druid families initially. And we found as adults. For me, I was brought up loosely as a Christian, went to Sunday school, went to church every Sunday. And I had a bit of a moment when I was about 12 years old. Where I started to question. And it sort of sounds really silly, but the thing that really did it for me, I had a pet rat. My rat Reggie. And he used to come everywhere with me. On my shoulder, or in my pocket. He came to the shops, he came to school several times. I didn't go anywhere without him.

Kristal Jenks:

And I turned up at Sunday school and they said, no, you can't bring pets into church. And I was devastated. And that was a massive turning point for me as silly as it sounds. So I thought, hang on a minute, if we're God's children and he loves us all and he created us all, why is church only for humans? And I think I never went back after that moment. So I could never look at it the same way again.

Kristal Jenks:

And I never connected with the Christian mythology. It never really snoke to me. And I didn't like this

idea that, the world was created for us to use as humans. And that God was a man and women were created to serve man. None of it really spoke to me in any way at all. So I was agnostic really for a little while when I was a young teenager. And then I got a Saturday job in a new age metaphysical shop.
Damh the Bard:
Okay.
Kristal Jenks:
I met some amazing pagans and witches and kind of really opened my eyes. And I went out and brought a book by Marian Green called Yeah.
Damh the Bard:
Which one was it?
Kristal Jenks:
Is it
Damh the Bard:
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Kristal Jenks:
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A Witch Alone. What a beautiful introduction for a 14 year old that I was at the time. And I worked my way through that book and the exercises in it. And for the first time, I tried to connect with the goddess and felt her presence. And she spoke to me and it was this ecstatic sense of connection with the world

around me, I'd never experienced really in any organized fashion. As a child, I grew up in a tiny village in the middle of the marshes, in the middle of nowhere. And we had a wonderful kind of lonely landscape.

Kristal Jenks:

And that amazing connection of sense of belonging, of being out alone in nature that I had as a child. And I'd never connected with any kind of religious, or spiritual feeling. Suddenly I realized I could access that, work with it and connect with it and feel that anytime I wanted.

Damh the Bard:

No.

Kristal Jenks:

We learned about the Greek gods and the Roman gods and the North gods. Different mythologies, but we were never taught about the mythology of the land that I was born in and was living in. And how sad is that? And I think that's where this passion in me to kind of spread that connection and that joy and help people to learn about our own wonderful mythology and our own gods and goddesses and heroes and wonderful tales.

Damh the Bard:

And how did the book from Marian Green, The Witch Alone then go towards a Druid path?

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Kristal Jenks:

I think it was, I considered myself just a solitary pagan, a solitary witch for several years. And it was just gradually going to starting to go to camps and chatting to people. And meeting a few Druids that really cemented that for me.

Damh the Bard:

Right.

Kristal Jenks:

And I still consider myself a witch as much as I'm a Druid really, but I don't see that there's a huge separation between the two paths at all. The only reason that I choose to call myself a Druid, it is that strong connection with this land and these gods and this mythology. And having gone to camps and become interested in Druidry, I joined OBOD. I think I'm still dabbling in the bardic grades 17 years later. I will always consider myself part of the OBOD family. And there're so many wonderful, wonderful people.

Kristal Jenks:

And I joined a Seed group who were very sweet and very welcoming. I came along to a couple of the Anderida rituals. This would have been 17 years ago. And I just loved everything about it. I just loved the, not only these people I was meeting took this very seriously, but also found such joy in that connection and in that community, in that celebration with community. And then I met Kristoffer, at the Druid camps. And absolutely, just his stuff really sang to my soul.

Kristal Jenks:

Again, the absolute joy and just infectious laughter and wonderfulness of it. There're some groups that take everything very seriously and take themselves very seriously too. And that works for them. But what I love, is the laughter the joy, just ... Yeah.

Damh the Bard:

It's like mirth and reverence. Isn't it?

Mirth and reverence. Damh the Bard: It's like too much mirth and there's no depth, too much reverence and you disappear up your well ... Kristal Jenks: Absolutely. Damh the Bard: And. Kristal Jenks: Yeah. Damh the Bard: Don't listen children. Yeah. But it's that balance of the two, I think creates the hot and cold. Doesn't it? Kristal Jenks: Absolutely. Damh the Bard: How do you know hot if you've never had cold? Kristal Jenks: Yeah. Damh the Bard: So you have that thing. So this shoreline and it's connection with what, as Ceridwen's cauldron, who is Ceridwen to you personally? I mean, it's different for everybody. But who is Ceridwen to Kristal? Kristal Jenks: So to me, Ceridwen, she is the source of Awen. She is the place where the Awen comes forth into the world. So she is a goddess, she's a goddess of magic and sorcery and witchcraft, but she's more than that. She's a mother and she's the initiator, she's the person that sets us on this path that tests us, that we can turn to for guidance, if need be. She's not gentle. Damh the Bard: No. Kristal Jenks:

Sometimes we don't always need gentle. Yeah. Ceridwen is just of all of the gods, I think Ceridwen is the

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one I cherish the most.

This transcript was exported on Sep 20, 2021 - view latest version here. Damh the Bard: And would you say you were a polytheist, or a animist? Where do you sit on that scale? Kristal Jenks: I love this question actually, because my answer is normally all of the above. Damh the Bard: Right. Kristal Jenks: We all go through phases, don't we? And we kind of first discover paganism and kind of it's all god and goddess. And then I think, oh no I'm a polytheist. And I'm ... And I've kind of come to the conclusion that I am a polytheist, I'm a pantheist. I'm a panentheist, I'm an animist. I'm all of the above. Damh the Bard: Right. Kristal Jenks: Because I do believe that the gods and goddesses to me are real. I am a polytheist. I do believe that they have an existence of their own. But at the same time, I believe that everything is alive, everything around us. And it being in a place like this, that's very eminent and very easy to understand and connect to, where every tree, every rock, the lake itself, the mountains around us, are just so alive. Kristal Jenks: And then beyond that, I do believe that the universe itself, is alive and aware and conscious. And at the same time, we are the universe. Every single person, every tree, every rock, every lake, every mountain, we are all part of the universe just being and expressing itself. And the weird thing is, I've kind of come back to being able to understand and connect with some people from a Christian background. Because some Christians kind of equate God to being not a man in the sky with a beard, but actually the universe itself being aware. Damh the Bard: Yeah, yeah. Yeah. Kristal Jenks: Yeah. So I've kind of come back to thinking, God, fair enough. The universe, is there that much difference at the end of the day?

Damh the Bard:

That's right. Yeah. Yeah. Well, as we arrived, there was a Cormorant just swimming around, which has a deep connection with the story. And I hadn't seen one all weekend, but there it was as we walked down to the lake shore. And there's probably, I think there's been about 55 people at this camp?

This transcript was exported on Sep 20, 2021 - view latest version here. Yeah. 57 I think was actually-

Damh the Bard: 57 plus the kind of crew. And you've been part of the crew. And last night ... Well, the sun did set somewhere, but we didn't see it. It was behind the clouds. Kristal Jenks: It's been very cloudy, rainy ... Damh the Bard: It's been a very cloudy ... Kristal Jenks: Wet, but wonderful. Damh the Bard: Yeah. But we took a journey through, do you want to describe some of the ritual last night? Is that possible? Kristal Jenks: Yes. Damh the Bard: Just a little bit. Kristal Jenks:

Yeah. So the whole camp has been very heavy on the ritual, the devotional rituals. But the culmination of it really is our Saturday evening ritual, where the participants undertake a journey. And they undertake a journey through the underworld. Yeah. To meet three cauldrons. The cauldron of testing and the cauldron of transformation and the cauldron of inspiration. This little wonderful stretch of lake shore with its gorgeous twisty trees. We turn into fairy lands.

Damh the Bard:

You really do too.

Kristal Jenks:

We make the underworld a place that's very, very beautiful. It's very dark at night. And with solar fairy lights and candles. And we kind of make a magical journey in and out of the trees with beautiful lit up little grottoes, where people meet the guardians of three cauldrons and undergo testing. Make an offering to the cauldron of transformation. And then at the final one, the cauldron of inspiration, they're given a guide to help them in their journey for the year ahead. And this year, their guide has been a tree.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah.

Kristal Jenks: So they picked out a little wooden disc with an Ogham. Damh the Bard: Yeah. Kristal Jenks: To give them a clue as to what tree they should try to work with over the coming year. And then they ended up on the beach, by a fire with the cauldron. And this cauldron contained the potion that we spent all weekend brewing with an overnight 24 hour vigil, that we've all brought offerings of ourselves, to put into the cauldron. And they chanted and they stirred and they raised the energy and it was beautiful. And then at the end, Ceridwen appeared in the lake and it was magical I think. Damh the Bard: It really was. Sometimes I take a step back when I'm in these things. And I try and see what people might see, if they weren't within it. Kristal Jenks: Yes. Damh the Bard: And we're all on the scale of weirdness. Aren't we? Kristal Jenks: Yes. Damh the Bard: Somewhere. And some people are further along the way, what we consider to be the weird scale. But what is it about ritual, do you think that really kind of ... People going through that ceremony and ritual last night, you could have read it in a book couldn't you? You could have sat down and done it in meditation, but what about the movement? What is it about the ritual, that really do you think that-Kristal Jenks: I think sometimes we just need to get out of our heads and experience something with our bodies and with kind of an interaction with the world around us. There're people who everything's in their head and it's all in books and it's meditation within, but sometimes you just need to kind of forget that stuff and connect on a deeper level, on a more subconscious level. And the only way I've ever found to do that, is just to go out and do it. Damh the Bard: Yeah.

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In a moving kind of a ritual, where people are moving through a landscape. I don't know what it is about it, but it just works on such a deep level for so many people. Damh the Bard: Yeah, yeah. Yes, it is. And it's not reenactment. Kristal Jenks: No. Damh the Bard: One of the things I've loved, is how people have literally thrown themselves into this. This morning, we all were paddling out into the lake around the cauldron that is sitting out there, on its tripod. And then afterwards, everyone just went right, that's it. And they just dived in and-Kristal Jenks: To a freezing, cold lake. Damh the Bard: To a freezing, cold lake. Kristal Jenks: In Wales. Damh the Bard: Yeah. Confusing my dog. Actually Oscar just looked to him and said, "Finally, you know what to do with water. Come on, let's do this." Kristal Jenks: Actually, of all the camps we've ever done, I think this one is going to just go down in our memories as the best one, in terms of how much everybody is literally throwing themselves into it. Usually, I mean, we're British, people are a little bit reserved. Some people kind of gain more than others out of an experience. But I think there's something about the aftermath of this pandemic. People are hungry for this experience. I know I've been. Kristal Jenks: We've all needed it so, so badly. And I don't think we've ever had a group of people who every single person, has wholeheartedly and completely entered into the experience. They've been amazing. Damh the Bard: Done everything. Kristal Jenks: They stood in that lake, in the pouring rain, in the freezing cold. There's not a single person who hasn't just thrown themselves into the experience, with abandon and it's been beautiful.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. And the canoeist who paddled past us this morning has got some stories to tell. Legends as they say will be made in Bala.

Kristal Jenks:

I think we've already made a few legends in Bala. Yeah. There're actually people who now book their camping holidays here, when they know that we're here.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. I can imagine.

Kristal Jenks:

Because they like to sneak down and kind of just have a little look through the forest, or will come and have a little sit by the campfire and just kind of ... Yeah.

Damh the Bard:

So your ... Well, I won't say away from Druidry because I don't think that's the way it works ever. Is it? But you have another role in life and that is as a midwife. Is that right?

Kristal Jenks:

Yes. Yes. I'm a midwife.

Damh the Bard:

So, I mean, that must work with your spiritual path and Druidry. Or do you separate the two? How does it work with that?

Kristal Jenks:

It's an interesting one. Isn't it? I step into a different role. When I'm at work, I step into my midwife shoes, just as I step into my Druid shoes.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah.

Kristal Jenks:

And yeah. I don't think they often meet so much. I mean, midwifery, what drew me to it, was just the magic of the entire process. I mean, that's manifestation in its purest form. The fact that a woman can just grow a baby inside her from two cells. I mean, yeah, I know it's science, but science is also magic. And that's what I love about Druidry. That so many of us are scientists, or in the medical field. You don't have to kind of believe in the world of Harry Potter.

Kristal Jenks:

And on a really fundamental level, science is magic. There's nothing that's not magical about everything in the world. And the way it happens, it's mad and it's weird and it's wonderful and it shouldn't happen, but it just does. And birth is like that for me. I've never got over the fact that something can come from

nothing. And that really is. I mean, that's ultimately kind of Ceridwen is a creator. She manifests from the void, from kind of nothing and manifest the Awen and out into the world. And that's what happens with a woman when she has a baby. I've just never got over it. And I do understand how it all works. I'm a midwife, but there's never a time when I'm not amazed and awed by the process.

Damh the Bard:
Yeah, yeah.
Kristal Jenks:
Yeah.
Damh the Bard:
And it's like when you go right to the basic level of nature, somewhere within Darwin's theory and all that kind of stuff. Nature has chosen to create life in that manner. And you think, how did it How?
Kristal Jenks:
Yeah.
Damh the Bard:
How did it get from coming out of the ocean. It just blows my mind.
Kristal Jenks:
It's just mental. It's completely improbable that our planet is here, that we're here, that everything has just come to the point that we're standing here on this beach.
Damh the Bard:
Yeah, yeah, yeah. Absolutely.
Kristal Jenks:
How weird, wonderful, improbable and how is that not magic?
Damh the Bard:
And if you had kind of peak experiences, I would call them maybe on your Druid path. So things that really stand out in your memory, as moments where you feel like you've connected with something else
Kristal Jenks:
Oh my goodness. Yes. Yeah. Quite a few really.
Damh the Bard:
That you're going to talk about on DruidCast that will be here forever. Of course.
Kristal Jenks:

Of course, and that's what of these kinds of camps and rituals, that's kind of what we're trying to achieve and help people to achieve, is that we're trying to ... But yes. I mean.

Damh the Bard:

It's always ... I know myself when you're a facilitator, you have to hold the energy. And so sometimes you can't thoroughly surrender into the moment. You have to be there for other people, as well as for yourself. So you as not as facilitator maybe, but as just yourself.

Kristal Jenks:

Yeah. So yeah, I mean, so it's so many experiences that just reinforce that the universe is alive and it appreciates us. And I'm going to quote Dr. Graham Harvey. He's a lovely, lovely man.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah.

Kristal Jenks:

Because there's one quote of his that I will never, ever forget that moved me so deeply. And it describes so well what we do and why we do it, which is that, ritual is currency in the deep world's gift economy. Basically, that ritual is a gift that we give to the world around us, to the universe, just to say, we appreciate you, we love you, we see you. And what is ... And I will never ever get over, is that so many times the universe and the world around you goes, yeah thank you. And it does something incredible, almost like it's acknowledging and thanking us for what we're doing.

Damh the Bard:

Yes.

Kristal Jenks:

A couple of examples, I mean, we tend to get this up on this Mon, on Anglesey, so much. And one of the reasons we really threw ourselves into the Anglesey Druid, because that place is amazing and she loves a bit of a ritual and she really likes to give back. So once we were up at Barclodiad y Gawres, which is a lovely ancient burial chamber right up on the Headland on a cliff. And it's normally locked, but they're really nice to the Druids and they let us have a key.

Kristal Jenks:

So one Calan Gaeaf, one Samhain, it also happened to be a lunar eclipse. A full moon, lunar eclipse, total lunar eclipse on Calan Gaeaf. It doesn't happen very often where you can't get much more liminal. So how liminal are we? Kind of a blood red kind of full totality eclipse. On Calan Gaeaf and we were up on this Headland surrounded by the sea on three sides and this burial chamber. And we went in and we drummed with the ancestors and it was beautiful and it was wonderful.

Kristal Jenks:

And then we came out and we were just ecstatic and walking back along the Headlands, back down to the beach where our cars were parked. And all of a sudden, the entire little bay there just burst into phosphorescence. Phosphorescence, when the sea literally glows blue. I mean, it's like little microscopic plankton it's bioluminescent, but it just looks like blue fire dancing along the waves.

So there we were at midnight. Freezing cold, but paddling in phosphorescence and it's the most

incredible experience. You kind of as you move in the water, it kind of ripples out from you when these bursts of blue light. And you can't get much more of that.
Damh the Bard:
It happens too often.
Kristal Jenks:
Yes.
Damh the Bard:
When you do lots of rituals.
Kristal Jenks:
Yes.
Damh the Bard:
These things happen too often. There was a moment that stands out for me, was when we were standing in the lake chanting, the Welsh words together in the lake. And just as we And the lake was calm.
Kristal Jenks:
Yes.
Damh the Bard:
And there was nothing.
Kristal Jenks:
Yes.
Damh the Bard:
And we started chanting and suddenly some waves just came in across where we were standing. And I looked out and there were no waves. There were no waves, but they just seemed to appear just on the edge of the circle. Come through the circle just for a little while and then disappear.
Kristal Jenks:
Yeah.
Damh the Bard:
And it was like, the late just saying, oh yeah, I see you.
Kristal Jenks:

Yeah.
Damh the Bard:
I see you. I recognize this. I remember this.
Kristal Jenks:
Yes.
Damh the Bard:
And it does, it just happens too often to be a coincidence.
Kristal Jenks:
Yeah. Too often. Absolutely. And we all know that in the ritual, when you call the spirits of air, how often the wind will rise, or a beautiful bird will just suddenly fly out from the undergrowth.
Damh the Bard:
Yeah, yeah.
Kristal Jenks:
And I think if you just trust that, that's going to happen. And I think with I mean, you guys in Anderida, we kind of, we like to do big, exciting rituals and really go to town on them. But actually, just having audacity, just getting out there and just we're going to do this and just trusting that it's going to work. Just reaps kind of like magic. It happens. If you just trust that, that's going to happen, it does in abundance.
Damh the Bard:
It does in one second. Well, thank you. Thank you to the crew who've put on this camp. It's been wonderful to see people in 3d again. It's hard to realize that people have the back of their heads, as well as their front of the heads and not everyone looks at you directly all the time, like they do on Zoom.
Kristal Jenks:
Yes.
Damh the Bard:
But it's just been fantastic. So thank you for that. And thank you for bringing me down to the lake shore here and chatting for DruidCast. Thank you, Kristal.
Kristal Jenks:
Thank you.
Damh the Bard:
Blessed be.
Kristal Jenks:

Blessed be.		