

A Letter from Creative Director Honora Foah

There is a lovely little restaurant in midtown Atlanta that has a wood-burning stove and serves pizza cooked in it. It's just a few blocks from the house where Margaret Mitchell wrote *Gone with the Wind*, and where a little while later she was killed by a car while crossing the street. But that's another mythology.

I wanted to talk about BARAONDA. That's the name of the restaurant. After consultation with Italian relatives, we came to a consensus translation of this untranslatable word, as, 'beautiful chaos', 'hurly burly'. It suggests a movement of people. 'Onda' means 'wave', so it has a sense of rhythm and natural order, but is often translated as 'confusion' — but a benevolent confusion. It has a root that comes from 'uncertainty'.

Why, you may ask, is this my new favorite word? If you were at Mythic Journeys last year, you probably would not wonder for very long. One year from now, we will be at Mythic Journeys again, and the thought fills me with joy and terror.

Here at MII, we are in the midst of planning and creation. So we look at what happened last time and there are several things that are very clear. Despite the fact that thousands upon thousands of hours of work and thought and heart and planning went into it, the thing took on a life of its own that one had to stand back from taking credit for. It knew what it wanted and the collision of people brought it into the world. The result wasn't something that could be planned.

What we are trying to set up is a controlled nuclear reaction. While that may be possible with uranium, with people, doing your best and hoping are the only way I can figure for dealing with a situation with so many known and unknown variables. This is also where prayer comes in.

Because the amazing thing, and the main thing to try to allow--is life. You can't ask a couple of thousand people to come to something that isn't organized, but you can, you must, put yourself into the love and the intention of baraonda.

I have this image of the MJ Leadership group splayed around in a circle, on our bums, leaning back on our hands behind us, hair sticking up and out and sideways. We have pie all over us and occasionally lick our lips or fingers, gazing toward the now empty center where the sweet explosion took place. 'Well, whadaya know? It worked.'

So we picked ourselves up and began again. But it isn't the same, that's the point. Enjoy what happened last time, let the next thing speak its mind. If we want to allow for life, we have to live with more uncertainty than is truly pleasant. And that discomfort, not to mention terror, is part of the aliveness, too. We are all volunteers, a few of us full-time, but volunteers. The thing is driven by love and need. One of the needs is to be a part of something good. When we fight, it is difficult, because we love so much, we need so

much. If we disagree on how something should go, it is immediately personal, because what we are doing is about persons, by persons, for persons. So much heart. So much uncertainty.

I am quite sure that the uncertainty is necessary. As we planned MJ 2004, we came up with the Big Conversations because Ari Berk said in one of our planning meetings, 'Well, the best thing about any conference is the conversations in the bar.' In the bar, people are not 'panelized', they find friends or randomly have a seat next to people whose work is quite different from their own. One doesn't 'prepare' for a conversation in a bar, one is prepared by the nature of what has come before, in work, in thought, in life. Now someone asks a question, and the preparation flows into the talk, which is for pleasure.

Pleasure. Joy. Pleasure in each other's company, even the bristles. Joy at the resulting hum, the life, the life.

There are a lot of things about MII that can get very pretentious, very fast. (Quick story: I send Peter Beagle an email saying that one of the Big Conversations he was on would be entitled 'Return, Renewal and Resurrection' and he sends me back an email that says, 'Honora----- GEVALT!!!!!!!!!!!!!!') My hope is that the pleasure in each other's company will help us to stick closely to the profound and unspoken things that lead us here, to mythology and story, while keeping us down to earth in the bar, even as the tales get taller.

Yours in baraonda,
Honora