

*The Movement of Lesbian Wicca:
An interview with a Witch*

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Intro to Folklore
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My first impression of Erica was one of gentleness. Erica worked childcare at a Womyn's Music Festival with me and I was impressed with her warmth with children. I was amazed with her creativity as she interpreted for a Deaf child and later played an unplanned, stunning improvisational piano piece for an audience of about fifty. I was also struck by her unusual temperament. Although she can be incredibly out-going, she is generally very shy and is surprising with her spontaneity.

On the afternoon of November fourth, the sunlight floods through blue, lace-light curtains into the dining room of Erica's home which she shares with her lover and their three children. The apartment in family housing is quiet--Erica's children are off playing with friends in the building and the atmosphere is relaxed and lazy. Erica feels nervous about the tape recorder as we prepare to begin the interview-- we discuss the project and smoke, and sit down to face the patio windows.

Erica wears easy jeans and soft cotton. As the interview begins, she speaks easily about her spell-casting with a soft voice. She thinks carefully about each of her responses, giving each expression of thought consideration. Her effect is one of gentleness. She is calm, almost reserved at first, as she describes how she became involved with Witchcraft through friends as a teenager in Kansas City. She points out that her friends were interested in love spells and spells for peace and prosperity, and credits them for encouraging her to purchase her first deck of Tarot cards, a form of divination. Interestingly, she moves into a memorate of a revenge spell almost immediately and becomes very animated and out-going as she describes the spooky consequences of her spell. Erica says, "...I would do ones for, uhm, prosperity and peace... only once in my life I did one that was like for bad things--for revenge and (here Erica laughs nervously) it had great consequences!" This would indicate that Erica shares the "positive" use of spell-casting with others and does not usually condone the use of witchcraft for getting even or affecting others in a negative way. She goes on to say:

"...whatever you do will come back to you three-fold...if you put out bad energy like revenge energy or black magic...then it will come back to you....I think the universe has given me back the energy three-fold."

Erica describes the process of her only revenge spell in great detail. For the spell, she uses a form of *contagious magic*, or the magic of touch (The Emergence of Folklore in Everyday Life: Schoemaker, George; pg. 61). This magic enables one to have power over another by using the person's hair, clothing, etc., . As Erica describes her spell, she becomes surprisingly animated. This memorate was previously told to me on a dark, windy night as Erica and I engaged in a rather eerie discussion of the occult. I believe Erica might normally tell this story in this type of a context; with close friends during an intimate conversation. Erica says describes freely sharing her apartment in Evensville, Indiana with teenaged runaways whom she didn't want to be out on the street. After they stole her Renaissance dagger and a Spanish sword she got at a S.C.A. event, as well as destroyed new pans, she made them move out and cast her revenge spell to send back the unfortune to them. Erica says:

"...I got their hairs from the bathroom...wrapped them up in this little ... black cloth...inside the cloth I put their names and wrapped it all up and tied it with a red ribbon and burnt it in this ashtray (Erica laughs) and said...the 'TUSK' spell which ... uses different Runes. Tiwaz is the first one and its ...the Rune of like uhm, the warrior... it's shaped like an arrow...then there's Uruz, which is the ox, and it's sorta the Rune of strength. And then Sowilo, which is the sun and it's, it's the Rune of like,uhm, energy and ... natural power...then the last one...Kaunaz...was directed energy--directed energy--so I kept saying this over and over (Erica now reenacts what she did, moves her body in a rocking motion); Tiwaz, Uruz, Sowilo, Kaunaz, as I was burning this. And it turned out that it worked, I mean, their new house was just a total disaster and they ended up like moving home. Uhm, you know there was like fifteen people living in a room and they had nothing to eat and there were these violent people ther also. So, they moved home which is good 'cause they really seemed like they needed to be home at that time."

We can see that Erica has consideration for others, perhaps even at her own expense. Yet, after the runaways take advantage of her, she uses the symbols of warrior, strength, natural power and directed energy to get even by "sending back" their disrespect with the "TUSK" spell. She justifies her actions by stating that in the end, all turned out well and the runaways lives changed for the better. This shows that Erica may be uncomfortable with wishing harm on others, and believes that to do so is wrong. She may also be uncomfortable with anger, which is common with womyn who are

frequently discouraged to think of themselves and encouraged to caretake others during the our socialization process. Erica believes that she was paid back by the universe for her revenge spell. Erica says:

"...later on, the morning after I'd done the spell this really weird thing happened...we woke up and ...we heard the sound of rushing water ...I went to look out the window...it was perfectly nice and sunny,like it is today(Erica motions to the window), and it was not raining at all....we walked into the living room and there was just sort of this circle of water just sort of pouring from the ceiling to the floor. It was just like, like a waterfall...like raining in my liiving room(emphasized)....it wasn't a leak or something--it was really wild! It was like rain had been transported inside my living room (Erica laughs) in about a...nine foot circle(Erica makes the sound of rushing water)."

She is creative as she tells the story, and refers to several pseudo-witnesses as she recounts her tale; a friend spending the night, her friend Jan (who is also a witch), and the plumber they called to check for a leak. Erica immitates both the plumber and Jan:

"...'No, there's nothing wrong ' (she laughs) 'Absolutely nothing'...'Wow, it sounded like you had a faucet behind you or something really turned on full force.'

Erica is a private, yet friendly person. She is at once "open-hearted" as she is leery. She keeps in mind the potential for trouble, and even seems to expect it. Yet, even so, she does not perceive the world or others as "bad" or dangerous, but rather as naive. She believes that spirits may not know they are causing harm when drawn to a spell and strives to protect them as well as herself. She explains, "...I also don't really believe in good or bad spirits...they're all just spirits." In this way, Erica expresses a sense of control over her life and over the unknown. People are the ones with the power, not an unknown diety. Erica takes her spell-casting seriously, and considers it a great honor. She is careful with her spells and works magic for good. Erica focuses on peace, prosperity, and the release of negative feelings in her spells. Erica says:

"...I've used candles before and thought about...purity of mind, purity of spirit and soul, and sent peace out into the universe because see then if

it's returned three-fold then that's a really good thing...all the energy can flow and it can flow up through me and through my hands and come back and stuff and then like when I want it to be settled I do this(Erica gestures) with my hands. I'll just sort of flick my hands out sort of like I'm giving it....Kali is the Goddess of destruction(Erica speaks with excitement). I like to do sort of a 'loose-it' spell with Kali, like giving up my destructive energy to her when I'm feeling really out-of-control. She's very good for taking that...she can go destroy something...get rid of it, taking it from me..."

We can see that Erica perceives her spell-casting as a power. To her, spell-casting is a very powerful, very permanent way to act in one's life. She values her spirituality, as well as her spiritual self. She refers to nature frequently, and to the serenity she experiences when working with nature during her spells. There is a great connection for Erica between Wicca and nature. She uses spell-casting as a means of communicating with it and gives it a meaning of its own. Even her wand, which she uses to cast her magic circle with, is made of natural items (see material folklore of project). She says:

"...I like to do spells with natural things...I believe that nature has...four aspects, you know--actually five. Four main ones and then it has like spirit....there's earth and air and fire and water and each has its own attributes. ...if you were going to cast..a prosperity spell you would want to use something probably from the earth...like a stone or ...some oil..in a goblet and then...use a green candle...incense is used as fire...and then there's air which is the...athame...a ceremonial knife that you've blessed in your own way or if you're with a , a coven you've blessed with them...to like cut a pentagram in the air (Erica demonstrates with her hand)...and air is like communication...and the last thing is water which is uhm, which is emotions...I guess emotion spells can be used in a lot of different ways. ...if you want a really clear spell...then you'd do like one aspect of nature...The fifth element which would be just sort of spirit is called Ethel....It's everywhere and it's just sort of the elements rolled together and the spirit of nature too."

As I began this project, I thought of Erica's identification as a Witch and as a Lesbian as intertwined. Myself knowing many other Lesbian Witches, I expected Erica to have a strong sense of interconnection within

these aspects of her lives. This was not the case, however. Erica's spirituality is private to her and she hasn't thought of it as important to combine the identities. Erica explains:

"...I think other Lesbians know that I'm a Witch. Uhm, I haven't really come-out formally as a Witch to the Lesbian Community, but I've worn pentagrams before...and sort of witchy shirts....I haven't actually decided (Erica deepens her voice) 'Well, I'm a Witch so..' (she laughs), I say 'Hi! I'm..' (she laughs again)....I know of other Lesbian Witches but I don't really know them...I think because I've learned Witch stuff first and feminism second and Lesbianism second, when I start to do my witchy stuff uhm, it's, my Lesbian-Feminism side sort of starts to take a back seat just because that's what I learned first as being a Witch."

Yet, Erica does perceive a connection between her sexuality and spirituality in terms of healing power. She says:

"...sexuality is a very spiritual thing...there's a definite connection...there's a lot of womyn out there who survive sexual assault or sexual abuse...if you're a Witch...it can be a little easier because you've got a storehouse of knowledge to tap from about nature and Goddess energy and womon's life-giving, earth-giving energy...you can use to heal a lot more easily than if you're caught up in uhm, a Christian Church, which is very male-oriented and doesn't leave us much room for womyn and womyn's power..."

As Erica speaks of the power of womyn, she increases the speed of her articulation and becomes dynamic. She refers to the times of Witch burnings:

"...obviously we must have been powerful because the Christian Church was so afraid that it burned millions of innocent womyn (Erica sighs), you know, who were doing nothing but perhaps being midwives..."

Erica is clear, concise about her opinions. She does not see herself as differing so much from the Christian Church as she sees the Christian

Church differing from her. She does not tolerate patriarchal influences and sees male dominance as more of a burden than of a help. Erica expresses ideals for diversity and nonconformity. During the interview, she refers to the influence her parents have had in her life, and how they encouraged her to question and try new things. She is liberal within the context of societal norms and liberal within the context of the Lesbian community. She does not conform easily to outside expectations, as she does not think she must be a "Lesbian Witch" but can give each aspect of herself room and creativity. She is good-hearted and careful of others. She seems nonjudgmental towards most people, and gives others a great deal of freedom. She is skillful with her spell-casting, and uses her spirituality as a means of having a strong, functional means of acting within her life. Spell-casting is serious to her. She believes in the power of Wicca and respects the consequences of her actions. As Erica's spells are powerful, so is Erica herself.

Interviewing Erica Inanna has been enjoyable as well as informative. I have learned many things as to the values of a Lesbian Witch, and have gained a better understanding of Wiccan spell-casting. I have especially enjoyed the opportunity to interview such a fine person, and exploit the common stereotypes of Witches and/or Lesbians. I appreciate Ms. Inanna's cooperation with this project and wish to extend my thanks to her for her help. I especially appreciate her permission to photograph her wand and provide me with additional information as to its meaning and art. She is a knowledgeable informant and a terrific Witch. Erica Inanna is indeed an artist of her craft.

As Erica speaks of Wicca as a power, she uses a great deal of gesture and becomes very involved in what she is saying. She sees spells as a way to control her life, as a way to have positive influence in the lives of others. She refrains from casting spells for "selfish" reasons and takes into consideration all the people and consequences of the spell. She takes her spell-casting seriously. To her, spell-casting is a very powerful, very permanent way to act in one's life. She sees spell-casting as a responsibility, and as a great honor.

Erica is liberal. She expresses ideals for diversity and nonconformity. As the interview proceeds, Erica frequently refers to the influence her parents have had on her life, and how her childhood was more of a time of carefree exploration than of sternly defined dogma. Her parents encouraged her to question and try new things. She laughs warmly as she reminisces about dragging her parents from church to church as a young child, and her eyes light up as she speaks of her family "wish-charts". I sense a great deal of hope within Erica as she envisions the world as a peaceful place in which she may self-actualize independently and freely.

Also, Erica honors the Witches of the past and the Goddesses. She straightens her back and increases the speed and volume of her articulation as she discusses the power of womyn. She becomes motivated and uses spells to help her sort through and process her emotions. When she speaks of her favorite Goddesses, she is dynamic.

Erica Inanna is clear, concise about her opinions. She lives as a Witch more than she identifies as one. Her spirituality is private, and for this interview she chose to use a pseudonym because of her desire to remain anonymous when she teaches Folklore herself at I.U. . She is an informed woman who considers a vast array of knowledge and information . Her gentleness is incredible and evident as she speaks from her heart. She genuinely cares for people and her willingness to consider others is great. Erica Inanna is bright and witty and interviewing her was enjoyable as well as enlightening.

Excellent paper. You've put a lot of time in thinking about your project and it really shows in your paper. You could have talked more explicitly about the definitions of folklore (as they apply to your data), but this is only a minor weakness. You do a good job revealing how Erica's witchcraft, while both creative and artistic, reflect her values. 25 A+

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The following are photographs of Erica Inanna's wand. This wand was given to her by her first magic teacher, Geoff, who hand carved the the circular ornament which hangs from the upper area of the wand. The ornament was given to Erica as a graduation present, and it was designed with Erica's astrological chart in mind. One side of the ornament houses a pentagram, the ancient symbol of Witches which represents the five walks of life, or the five elements Erica described during the interview. The other side of the ornament houses a design of Runes, ancient letters used for divination. Erica's Runes are centered to the North because of the strong presence of earth in her sign, and the four Archangels protect the directions. Erica made the wand herself from a Birch tree limb she found in the woods. She has peeled the bark and smoothed it, and attached an owl's feather to the top of the wand. She did so for wisdom to use the wand appropriately as owls represent the Goddess wisdom in Wicca. Erica describes her wand as "Very Powerful".

