

Chad Chandler

Interviewed by Diana Brown in Lawrence, Kansas

July 1, 2014

Transcribed by Diana Brown

Abstract: Oral history interview with Chad Chandler conducted by Diana Brown at Henry's coffee shop in Lawrence, Kansas, on July 1, 2014. Chad is 36 and lives at "Thistle Hill," a piece of rural property in Bonner Springs, Kansas. This interview discusses Chad's ambivalence about the "Pagan" label, his engagement with Tarot, and his search to understand connection with deity. This interview was conducted for the Religion in Kansas Project as part of a summer fieldwork internship funded by the Friends of the Department of Religious Studies.

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DIANA BROWN: Alright. So. [. . .] give me some basic information like your age, your name, where you're from, what you do.

CHAD CHANDLER: Well my name is Chad Chandler, I was originally born in Topeka, um, I work at Kacey Abrasive, um, what else do you want to know?

DIANA BROWN: Um, where do you live now?

CHAD CHANDLER: Well, I live in Leavenworth County, just outside of Bonner Springs.

DIANA BROWN: And how old are you?

CHAD CHANDLER: Uh, 36.

DIANA BROWN: Okay. So did you have, were you raised with any kind of religious anything, do you have prior religious background?

CHAD CHANDLER: My, my grandparents were Christian, um, on my dad's side. My mom's side weren't really practicing in any form, but they had Christian influence, um, and my parents themselves both, well my dad at least was, was so tired of going to Sunday School and the whole nine yards that by the time I was around, he just had nothing to do with church at all, um. I wouldn't call him atheist or anything like that, but he certainly didn't see a point in, you know, going to church every Sunday, and my mom really was more, well she was akin to like, the hippies of the '60s, um, and, and very open minded, and continues to impress me on that front because like all the changes within the last two years, she has just totally rolled with and is cool with. Um, her husband now is, um, a recovering alcoholic and drug, um, and also is now a counselor for those, um, very very Christian, um, very much believes that you know the church

and Jesus saved him, um, so they can be a little difficult sometimes to talk about my religion now with them, but he is very open at least to the idea of you know being accepting, um, he doesn't necessarily push things or, or try to be rude about it, but it can be a little bit interesting to go over to family dinner and try to talk to him, so.

DIANA BROWN: Okay. So then, when did you become sort of introduced to, you know, broadly speaking, Pagan related things?

CHAD CHANDLER: Well actually, um, when I was living in Topeka my first job was working at, um, well my first job was working at Wendy's, but my second job was working at McDonald's, I have to think about this, it's been awhile, um, but my second job I got introduced to a manager by the name of Harry and we turned out to be pretty good friends, um, and he helped run the shop in Topeka called The Enchanted Willow that was run by a family, um, that just didn't have enough time and so they would hire him to help run the shop, and that was my very first introduction into Paganism.

DIANA BROWN: And you were how old, about?

CHAD CHANDLER: 18 to 22, in that range. Um, me and Harry are still friends, we've been friends for over almost twenty years now. So it's kind of hard to nail down a time. But the first time I met Harry I was probably 17. Uh, and then you know I asked him a bunch of questions and we you know kind of got on to the same page as to what his beliefs were and that was my really my introduction, I never really pursued it. Um, I just kind of accepted who he was and went with that, and then later on of course I met Jeremy, who introduced me to Kacey and that's when I started looking a little more deeply into the religion.

DIANA BROWN: And that was when you were how old?

CHAD CHANDLER: I met Kacey two years ago, so 33, 34. Um, it was right on that skirt of time when my birthday is, so, um, and then yeah. The big of course change there because when I was married, um, my, my wife at the time and her family were all very Christian. And so I kind of followed that out of you know, politeness, more or less, but I never was really drawn to it. Um, but we went to church on Sundays, my kids went to church, and so I would go to be supportive and be nice about it, and it just kind of went from there. Uh, but, yeah, after the, after the divorce and the death of my daughter, it kind of brought some real questions up and that's when that, that drastic kind of change happened.

DIANA BROWN: So, what was it that was appealing for you at that time about what you were learning about?

CHAD CHANDLER: Well Paganism to me was always fairly appealing, um, in, you basically get to, the thing with Paganism is that the belief structure is very open in it, so you can believe in the God names that you choose to belief in, and you can do what you want, but the real draw for me is that I grew up kind of on a farm, and in the country, and I've always been kind of a firm believer in you know, being good to nature and all of

that, so there really was never a question that Paganism was kind of a, a neat idea for me. Um, and so, but I would say the real appeal for me was the openness, um, of the people that were, that participated in it. Uh, because it was always, you know, it didn't matter really what you believed, it was the acceptance that was kind of interesting, um, you know, uh, when you, like with, with Christianity, it is, "This is the way, and either you're part of it, or you're not," but with Paganism, it was all "Okay, you believe in this, well, let me ask you this question, let me ask you that," and kind of get a chance to talk about things that normally are not even in question, um, and so it's, it's very refreshing to meet with a group or an individual that's Pagan and discuss their belief structure and actually have a very valid, very open discussion, um, instead of, you know, say, pretend we're talking to someone who is Christian or Catholic, because they're very close minded about their belief structure, and it's it's a very rough discussion, generally speaking, um, if you bring up any kind of questions about their beliefs.

DIANA BROWN: So the practitioners are really appealing then?

CHAD CHANDLER: Very much so. Very much so. Um, and because it's not, you know, what I would call an organized religion. Um, the, the differences in the systems are pretty drastic and pretty open and so it can be very appealing to learn from that, um, as opposed to like Christianity, where it's all the same.

DIANA BROWN: Well, then, how has your own sort of , I guess what do your own personal kind of like practices and beliefs, maybe look like, that's a very broad question, and how have they evolved since you first, you know, in the last couple of years?

CHAD CHANDLER: Well definitely to a degree there is some spirituality there. Um, but, for the most part I'm very grounded in you know practical applications to Paganism. Um, so, you know, while I certainly go to rituals and attend those for spiritual effect, my, my belief structure is more grounded in what can I physically or energetically do. Um, and so there's a lot of study on, um, symbolism and perceptual effects, um, for me, you know, to try to figure out a way to in a way work with the spiritual side, but not through the normal channels, I guess, is the way to say that, um, in that, you know, I have a very hard time connecting spiritually to certain things, and so for me, it's much more of a scientific approach to the spiritual world.

DIANA BROWN: Can you talk about what that means, concretely?

CHAD CHANDLER: Um, I think the best way to explain it is that to me the people that, that are very spiritual and very open to that effect, meaning that they feel like they hear the voice of God or they work with the voice of God, um, or with the influences of the Gods in the case of Paganism, um, is that I've never had a connection like that, and so it's kind of my own scientific approach to how can I have that. Um, so it's kind of an ongoing study for me because I had never experienced that, um, to try to figure out how. Um, and so a lot of the times, well, and one of the scientific approaches I've always had is, you know, it's very easy for me to kind of emotionally jump into other people's shoes, so to speak, like, within walking into, say, well, say this coffee house

we're at right now, I very much can get a feel of, of emotionally where everyone's at [. . .], fairly easily, and so for me it's always been very easy to kind of perceptually put myself in other people's shoes, and understand what they're going through, and part of that study is that disconnect that happens with let's say a very spiritual person, because emotionally I can feel what they feel, but I've, I've never had that same experience that they have to create that emotion. Um, and so, you know, even when I was very young, I, I realized pretty quickly that at least there was something going on with me that was a little bit different than say my parents or my, my family in general, in that, you know, there were certain situations and certain things that would happen with people that I would just completely avoid, uh, because the negative energy around that was just so horrible, um, you know, and a prime example is several of my family members about ten years ago passed away, and so it was like, funeral after funeral after funeral all within like six months, and I think I went to one, out of all of them, because it was, and it was the very first one that happened, and I realized how disgusting it kind of felt, and to be in that much of that negative environment was actually just draining for me, um, and so those kind of, you know, this approach of, well what is it that causes this and how, you know, how do I [. . .] because it was not something my parents ever taught me about, um, you know, and it was, there was never really this connection of being able to talk to my parents anyway about a lot of stuff, and so, it was kind of this interesting challenge for me to figure out how to deal with that and how to, how to work with it, and up until I met Kacey, I really had not gotten any kind of straight answers about, you know, what is going on and how do I deal with it, and she kind of explained it to me, and helped me figure it out, um, and that's when all the jewelry started happening, 'cause that was kind of her solution to figuring out how to deal with it, see how it worked.

DIANA BROWN: What does the jewelry, for instance, do?

CHAD CHANDLER: Well, the, you know, obviously you can't see on the recorder, but, but I basically am wearing a lot of hematite, and, um, also wear pyrite and both of those are supposed to have at least according to the lore have, um, protective properties, and in particular, they protect against negative energy. Um, and so that negative energy can be, you know, uh, emotional as well as anything else, and so, you know, tis' not some magic where I have a force field around me, but, but it definitely does at least act as a tool to remind me to help control that empathic awareness, and so it, it kind of helps to tone it down so to speak, or to, to make sure to check my defenses, um, to help resist that negative, nastiness that happens.

DIANA BROWN: Can you talk about, um, after your sip of coffee, can you talk about, um, what, um, kinds of strategies you're pursuing to try to have that kind of spiritual experience?

CHAD CHANDLER: Well certainly the first thing is to participate, um, participating in ritual, um, talking to people that do have those experiences and trying to figure out where that comes from for them, um, but there's, there's certainly another level of that in that, you know, there's a definite energy that happens, like, for example, if you go to a

Baptist church, and you experience what they call the Holy Spirit, um, which, you know, in a lot of ways is the same thing, um, it's just different names, um, and so, you know, getting a broad stroke of these different experiences certainly helps with understanding what that is, and I would, I'd, I tend to describe it as just kind of an energy that happens, um, but certainly it, it, it occurs on a certain level in group, um, individuals can have experiences of course, but those experiences amplify a lot when there's a group, um, and figuring out how to distinguish between people that, that have a strong desire for attention versus a real legitimate experience can be difficult. Um, but once you start understanding personalities, that's when you can start figuring out the difference. Um, 'cause certainly some people have a strong desire for attention because that's something that they lacked in their life, and so they will act out, do things that aren't necessarily spiritual, but that's what they call it. Um, and so figuring out the difference between the two can sometimes be a little difficult, but you know, like I said, once you get to know certain people, you can tell which ones are legitimate and which ones are not. Um, you know, the ulterior motives are a pretty big deal on the experiment because obviously you don't want to use results that are skewed, so, and again that's kind of the scientific approach towards doing that, um, but uh, there's, there's definitely a change, or an amplification of energy inside of a group, even if there's no, you know, even if someone doesn't raise their hands, and, and say, "Oh my God, the spirit's here," uh, or, like for example in certain rituals, and I believe you've even attended one or two where there's drawing downs, um, that's kind of what I'm talking about, in, in baptism they call that, you know, receiving the Holy Spirit, um, but they're very similar in that they both, you know, are touched in a way by an energy that's not theirs, um, and so--

DIANA BROWN: Do you think it's the same energy, or do you think they're different?

CHAD CHANDLER: Well, and that's the thing that's hard to say, but my theory is that no matter how humans describe, um, God or Goddess or any of that, I believe that those energies are kind of all the same pool, um, and I believe that how their, their symbolism that is used is actually what determines how that energy works. Um, so just like for example, if you study light versus electricity, they're both forms of energy in a way. Um, light, light can act like energy just as much as it is a solid, um, form, but it, you know, may behave differently according to whether it's observed or unobserved, I don't know if you've seen those studies. Um, it's kind of the same idea, is that spiritual energy obviously if you have a big structure in mind than say spiritual energy and you're just, you know, super high energy that week because of these things going on, but you don't explain them or define them, um, and so that's, that's one of the new studies for me is, is energy itself, and how it affects us, and you know, the differences between defined energy versus undefined.

CHAD CHANDLER: Um, and so, and how that all works out, how you judge results is, I've been you know basically looking and observing on how it affects people, um, 'cause obviously if you're doing a drawing down and it's supposed to be this God in particular, how that affects them mentally, versus um, just having an amped up day, full of energy

because of a good ritual, um, I really believe that those two energies are the same, um, it's just a question of how, how does it manifest itself.

DIANA BROWN: So, I guess, what other things are sort of important in your personal practice?

CHAD CHANDLER: Um, I'm not what I would call at a level yet where I have defined my own Pagan beliefs and practice, and so I'm fairly open ended, but the big thing that irks me, or that, that I absolutely maintain is that no matter what someone's beliefs or system, if you're gonna talk about it to them, then respect is the first thing that has to come across, you know, I don't, I don't expect people to believe what I believe, and I don't expect to believe what other people believe, but if someone is willing to talk to me about it, then I should be at least respectful of what they're saying, and you know, it's just like if someone produces a thesis, or a hypothesis, um, then you know, whether they're right or wrong, you definitely sit down and listen to what they have to say because, um, part of the system is that it's completely unwritten or unfinished, and so everyone kind of has this piece of it that's going on that works for them and so being respectful of the fact that they're both wrong and right in a lot of ways is, is the first challenge. Um, to anyone's belief structure, you know, I wouldn't say that Christians are bad and wrong, um, they definitely have that piece of it, um, just like Catholics do and Baptists do and, and all of this, but, but their own definitions I think are actually damage them from finding more. And so, you know, I, I've actually had a belief for a long long time because if you look at the way religion evolved it kind of branched out and it was due to the strictness of the belief structure, um, but if you cobbled everything back together, eventually you would see this connection of everything all at once. Um, and so trying to study and figure out how to do that and, and obviously learning multiple religions is kind of an important factor in this study, um, and I'm nowhere near complete, you know, but I haven't experienced a lot of religions that I'd like to try to sit in on, um, and, you know, kind of understand what it is that draws the people to those religions as well. Um, so it's, it gets very very messy at a certain point because when you start including all of these religions, it's trying to figure out, you know, which pieces are correct and which ones aren't, and so, it can become a very challenging kind of experience to determine where my own head is. Because you, you know, you have to latch onto certain things that work mentally for you at the time and then obviously after many many years, the chemistry in your brain changes and so your thoughts change on certain things, um, and so you know, it's just like, I am a firm believer in science, but at the same time, to be spiritual requires something that's a little bit different than just scientific study. Um, so you have to be willing to accept things that happen to you and, and, and figure out later on how that applies. You know, there is a certain skepticism as well, which kind of, you know, it, it, in a normal religious community that would be very hard to deal with, um, because people would you know just feel like you're a downer, you're a non-believer, um, and that's one of the great draws to Paganism is nobody ever says that. "Oh, you're not a believer because this didn't happen or that didn't happen," um, whereas with organized religions, that can happen, you know, people come up to

you and say, "Oh, you must not believe hard enough, or you don't have faith." No, that's not true at all. Um, I just, you know, I'm not willing to accept things at eyes' first glance. Um, you know, and certainly later once things can be defined then you will change your beliefs based on that, but I don't just openly accept something for what it is, and never have.

DIANA BROWN: Um, can you talk about tarot, 'cause that's how we met.

CHAD CHANDLER: sure, sure, that's a very open category. What would you like to hear about?

DIANA BROWN: I guess, um, when did you start learning tarot, um, how did you learn, and do you consider that to be sort of like a part of this spiritual or religious practice, or a skill, or?

CHAD CHANDLER: It's definitely a system that I'm using to help define things within my own spirituality, but it is more of an energetic, uh, study, uh, because, and to go back to what you were saying, I first started learning tarot two years ago, um, Kacey was the one that taught me tarot to begin with, um, I'd always had a fascination with tarot, um, but you know, I'd had a tarot reading done in a Ren Fest years and years and years ago, and also had had a palm reading which both fascinated the hell out of me, but both were very similar in that they were both a form of divination. Um but I had the chance to learn tarot and I seized it. Um, I was all about it, um, I bought probably the worst, hardest deck to learn on, um, but, in a sense it was very good for me because it made me actually go to Kacey and ask questions, um, but, as a tool, energetically, what it's doing is it kind of helps me you know being empathic what it does is it kind of helps focus what exactly is my, where are my feelings and what is the stuff I'm reading off of other people, um, and so as a focusing tool, it has helped me immensely to realize you know, energetically speaking, when, when, when you're an empath, not always can you distinguish the energy that is yours versus the other person's that you're feeling, um, and so tarot has helped me kind of, you know, realize that much easier, um, you know, obviously if you're at a party and everyone's in a good mood, then it's very easy to be in a good mood also, um, and so, you know, by using tarot that helps me determine how much of that is actually mine and how much isn't, um, but in a, in a nutshell for me tarot definitely works just like any other tool in that once you learn how to use it, it can be very effective, um, and so it's, it, you know, tarot readings for me also have been a fascination because you, you know most people will claim that tarot is kind of a charlatan thing, um, and that the reason is because everyone who does tarot is very very vague, um, but I think that, uh, that vagueness is obviously, you know, there's a certain level of vagueness that can happen because as a reader, you don't necessarily know the person and so just, you know, going straight to them and saying, "well, this is what's happening to you, blah blah blah," is very difficult to do, but also because as, you know, just like an interpreter, it's not the interpreter's job to figure out what's being said, it's their job to repeat what is said, um, and so the vagueness is there for a reason, in that, you know, the tarot cards are not, you know, in a way if you treat the tarot cards as

one of the, one of the people, two people, and you acting as an interpreter, um, it's not my job to tell the person, you know, what's going on or how the tarot cards feel about this interaction, um, it's just my job to kind of tell them what is being said by those cards, and it's up to the other person to take away from that what they feel is necessary.

DIANA BROWN: Yeah, what the significance is for their situation.

CHAD CHANDLER: Yeah, and so, you know, and also being empathic, you know, emotions are not necessarily, um, the most perfect system for determining what's going on in someone's life, um, because there's, there's this kind of cloud of affect that happens where you can certainly be deceptive, um, with the emotional content, um, and, and part of that is because some people just don't want to wrap their brain around what's actually happening and so they will emotionally feel, um, differently, because they can't handle the situation that's going on. And so tarot can be kind of interesting because what I think is going on emotionally, what I'm feeling off of them, can sometimes be one hundred percent different than what the tarot cards are saying, and so that becomes interesting to try to do a reading, um, just because people do self-deceive a lot, um.

DIANA BROWN: Do you have that experience with yourself, when you're reading for yourself ever?

CHAD CHANDLER: Oh, absolutely, sometimes what I feel is going on and then what tarot tells me is going on are not the same thing. Um, and so, so that's, that's kind of the fun of being a Tarot reader is that, you get to see those interactions as they happen and, and change the, the trick to doing a self-reading of course is to be willing to accept the fact that what you're feeling is happening, and what's actually happening are two different things, um, and some people have a very hard time with that. Um, one of the interesting things, or side effects of being an empath and studying perception is that I'm very easily willing to accept that I'm wrong, um, and so for me to do a self-reading is not that hard, but for some people that can be a huge trick, um, because when you do a self-reading you have to be very kind of, um, very third person about it. Um, and some people aren't very skilled at that. So.

DIANA BROWN: What else have I got here? Oh, I guess, um, are there any other sort of tools, like tarot, that are, that are particularly important for you, or, are becoming important?

CHAD CHANDLER: Um, certainly I have been studying for a long time now dreams, um, and the reason is is because I have not actually remembered a dream in many, many years. Um, I definitely dream. Um, I definitely experience that, and sometimes I'll remember glimpses or feelings about what was going on in the dream, but I never remember what is actually happening. Um, and there have been a few exceptions in my life where I have remembered a dream that obviously when I was, I was young, I was exposed to the movie "The Thing" back in the '80s, and I was born in '77, so I was very, very young when that, when I experienced that movie, and so I do sometimes

have a reoccurring nightmare of that movie, certain scenes in it, and, um, you know, so one of the, one of the dreams that I do remember that, that does happen occasionally is that, and it can be quite terrifying and interesting, but it's, you know, the, the, on any given day, I couldn't tell you what anything about what I was dreaming. Um, I do tend to sleep pretty sound, so that's part of it. Um, but you know, ever since my, I want to say my early twenties, I have not remembered my dreams. Um, I did have, when I was younger I would have certain dreams that were, you know, like for example just very very down to earth kind of dreams where I would experience something, say, as an example, say, walking into the coffee shop and buying a coffee, um, and then later on, the next day, I would do that and it would be kind of this Deja vu effect. Um, but one of the really weird dreams I had when I was younger was getting into a car wreck, and a week later I did, and it was exactly the same as what happened in the dream, and what, what made that so unusual is that it was not my car I wrecked, it was somebody else's, but in the dream, it was the same car, um, and so there was this weird kind of, you know, is this a coincidence, or is this kind of a foretelling of what was going on, um, and you know, having to wrap my head, I never have decided which of those it was, um, but wrapping my head around it I certainly, that's a study that I continue on if I ever have more dreams like that, and I can say that, you know, in my lifetime I've had about three of those type foretelling dreams. Um, where things have happened that I thought were coming, you know, I never really thought about but they happened, and then it does, um, and that can be very eye opening in a way, um, so trying to figure out where that comes from as well, um, but where I'm at right now is I haven't remembered a dream in many many years so either things are happening just like they should, and there's just nothing to report, or they're not, and I'm, something's happened, you know, yeah, and so trying to figure that out can be kind of interesting too, um, I'm also working on different forms of divination, specifically, um, meditation based divination, so, one of the things that I've always noticed and I think this is a very normal human effect, um, is that, you know, we, we are fascinated by fire, um, but I had found that I trance out very easily while watching like a candle flame or a fire, um, so I'm using that to hit a meditative state to kind of analyze um, or gather my thoughts, so to speak, on things that are going on.

DIANA BROWN: So you're meditating on a situation, sort of, or?

CHAD CHANDLER: Not necessarily, just kind of hitting that meditative state and seeing where my head goes. Um--

DIANA BROWN: Just watch--

CHAD CHANDLER: Yeah, just kind of patiently seeing what happens, um, and, and certainly when trancing out, you know, when, when you get done with that, kind of analyzing, okay, where exactly, what happened, did I just go blank, or did, did I experience something brain-wise, um, when that happened, um, and working on that kind of study [. . .] as well, but again very basics, very beginnings of that, because I just started doing that this year, um, so, lots of little things that I'm working on.

DIANA BROWN: Um, I guess, how would you describe your self, would you call yourself a Pagan, would you call yourself something else, would you--?

CHAD CHANDLER: I think obviously when talking to anybody it's easiest to say, "Yes, I'm a Pagan," um, but on the spiritual side of that I'm, I'm definitely not on the same level that a lot of Pagans are, like I don't, you know, feel myself drawn to speaking to gods, or doing anything on a ritual level, um--

DIANA BROWN: Beyond like participating in [. . .]--

CHAD CHANDLER: Right, obviously as study goes you participate, you wanna do that stuff, for my studies, but, but I , you know, personally am not drawn like you know, they talk a lot in Paganism about the solitary practitioner, um, where a lot of solitaries would actually communicate with the gods and take that time to do a ritual, um, I don't see myself as necessarily doing that, um, you know, I, for me it's much more of a practical system than a spiritual one, um, so I do set up my altar because that represents, that, that is a form of symbolism, um, and recognizing symbolism to get into certain head space is obviously very important, um, but aside from the symbolism and doing basic things, um, I probably would not be defined as Pagan.

DIANA BROWN: And why do you think so you think, do you think of Pagan necessarily as this other aspect?

CHAD CHANDLER: I think that, as, as far as Paganism goes there's obviously two approaches, in that, you know, you can be what, well, and here's the terminology, you know, there's, what I would define as Pagan is someone who's very spiritual, um, but then there's, you know, someone like me who's more sympathetic-Pagan, um, in that, you know, we recognize that, you know, Paganism is, is, is a religion, but, and, but we're not necessarily drawn to the spiritual side of it, um, it's more out of respect, um, you know, obviously there's such thing as nature, naturists that go out and do their thing, um, and you know, having a love for nature doesn't necessarily make you Pagan, and so figuring out where that line is can be the challenge. Um, but there's a lot of qualities to Paganism that are very much, um, congruent with my own beliefs, and so that's why if anyone would ever ask me, I would say, "Yes, I'm a Pagan," um, and let them determine, you know, what, how Pagan I am, I guess, um, but most Pagans won't go there, you know, it's, it's not like Christianity where there's this kind of comparison and contrast to your beliefs versus my beliefs, um, with Pagans it's just kind of accepted as to you know, if you call yourself Pagan, then you're a Pagan, and they will accept that. Um, so, it's, it's, and part of that is because the religion is so undefined, um, and, the other part of that is that I think that for all the damage that has happened and that a lot of Pagans are, um, there is this very open-minded-ness and acceptance to everyone's unique kind of effect, and that no one, no one Pagan knows everything, and they accept that and so it's much easier to have a very real conversation and really try to work with each other as opposed to say, a higher end clergy in the Christian community because there's kind of this, uh, the community puts this person or that

person on this pedestal that they now have to conform to, um, which can be very difficult, but within Pagan society, other than the initiations, there's no real structure that says, this person knows more than the other, um, and so it's, it's, a much more human level interaction, um, that allows for a much easier time of communicating with people, um, that definitely has some advantages. So.

DIANA BROWN: Can you talk about, um, I don't know, community or communities that have been important for you as you've been, I don't know, involved in Paganism?

CHAD CHANDLER: Well actually I have not had a chance to really work a lot with multiple groups, um, obviously Kerry has her coven, I have mine, um, there's, you know, the, the big, the big event that is really interactive is Heartland because there's so many different covens and communities there, um, but I think some of the big, the big things that have happened to me was, um, the first time I was at Temple Indigo was the first time I'd really experienced so many different sexual orientations, um, which, for me was very appealing in that you have this opportunity presented to you where you get to learn about all these different things that are so taboo normally, and, and in this event they're so open about discussing their systems and what they, how they feel and, and, and mentally where they're at that causes them to do the things they do, um, that it was just very refreshing and I loved it and it's awesome, and there was a distinct acceptance of, "do whatever you want to do as long as it doesn't hurt anyone," um, which is one of the big advantages to going to Camp Gaea is that, it is so accepting of anyone's religion, doesn't matter who you are, and the fact that, you know, you can be comp--, one hundred percent yourself and not worry about being judged by society, um, that I think is why that place has become so popular, um, in that, there's, there's this almost overwhelming social structure that you have to conform to in day-to-day life that can be so against sometimes what your own practices would be otherwise, um, so, you know, I used to never take vacations, um, when I was married because I just felt there was no need and then I finally found camp, and now it's like I can't wait to go on vacation, um, because it's just so refreshing to get away from that normal, uh, limitations that you experience within normal society.

DIANA BROWN: Can you talk about whether land, speaking of Gaea, is like uh, or particular pieces of land are important to you, or--?

CHAD CHANDLER: Um, obviously from a religious standpoint, the farm becomes, because that's where our coven practices, then the farm itself is very important, but I think that, um, obviously, for most people, the, the land itself is less important than their attachment to it, um, so, you know, just like the Vatican City, um, would be very important to Catholics, but really the land itself is not so important as the structuring of the Vatican and Vatican City, um, and so people are drawn to that because that's kind of their symbol, um, and like I said I was talking about symbolism, well land is just as symbolic to people as anything else and that's why you see like farmers and stuff refusing to leave their land, or refusing to move back when the railroads were made, because that, that, that symbol of establishing themselves and the work they'd done has

created that effect, um, but as far as the land goes, I think that any land can be important to anybody at any time, um, but once you're attached to a certain spot then obviously that emotional status changes, um, and so like for example, you know, camp could be really anywhere, uh, it wouldn't matter, it's not necessarily the land to me that's important, it's the social group that has decided to gather there that becomes important.

DIANA BROWN: Um, what else have I got here...um, oh, um, are there any sort of books or anything that have been important books or writings that have been important for you, um...

CHAD CHANDLER: Oh, geez, um, almost all books are important to me, um, even, you know, I read a lot of science fiction, um, and that helped shape a lot of how I think or how I act from a scientific viewpoint because, you know, most science fiction obviously is based in some kind of science, um, you know, as to how real that science is, really is determined by the timeframe, um, you know, obviously Isaac Asimov never really worked with robots, but he loved the idea, um, and, you know, so there's a lot of shaping kind of mentally where I'm at due to science fiction, um, but I, I'd always been drawn towards science to begin with, um, and that, that kind of mindset, that scientific mindset that happens, um, but in Paganism, obviously, the more you can get ahold of and read, the more you can shape your mind around your religious belief because in Paganism, there isn't a set structure, so, the more you read and the more mentally you figure out for yourself, the more your own religion gets defined, um, or your religious belief gets defined, and so, um, obviously the, one of the very first books I ever read was Scott Cunningham's, um, Living Wicca, and, and that series, um, and while Wicca is not quite what I would call myself, or Wiccan, um, it still has a very Pagan based belief structure, it's just a more modern version, um, but Wicca is closer to an organized religion than Paganism in general, um, because it was, the, the belief of Wicca was kind of started by a, a small group of people, um, and so it's much more organized than just general Paganism, um, and, you know, in reading through Scott Cunningham obviously there's a lot of work that he talks about, about symbolism and all of that so study-wise it was very good for me to read through those, um, but right now I've been getting my hands on about any book I can find involving Wicca or Paganism, um, and in fact I've got like two in my car that I have to read still, but, uh, you know, that's one of the advantages of working where I work, is I get a chance to read quite a bit, so, it's, it's been very handy and I've gone through more works here in the past two months than I've read probably in a year, so, which is handy.

DIANA BROWN: Um, has the Internet been important for you at all?

CHAD CHANDLER: I don't necessarily trust the Internet. Um, while the Internet is a wonderful tool, what it is not is refined, um, anyone can post anything any time, and so you get a very, um, potentially a very misguided viewpoint of what something really is, um, but, as a tool, in, in, in trying to define your own religion, obviously reading anything, good or bad, can be potentially good, um, and even Scott Cunningham talks about this, he says, you know, "Don't worry if you read a 'bad' book, quote, unquote,

um, just read it and understand that if there's something that works for you in that, then it is okay to use," um, but obviously when you start getting into experiments that may be dangerous, you want to be extremely careful about who you're gonna trust in doing something and in fact, um, you know, in shamanism you see a lot of, um, hallucinogenic drug use, um, because they're trying to achieve a higher plane and they use hallucinogenics as a tool to help them achieve that, um, obviously if you're using hallucinogens you've gotta be careful, um, and I see a lot of people on the Internet trying to use things, especially herbal systems, that are just retarded dangerous, um, but because the Internet said so, they go and try it, um, and that's not what we're supposed to do, people. Um, and, and so, you know, Kacey talks a lot about this at the shop, you know, people come in looking for certain herbs and then not even know that they're dangerous to the body, um, and so you, you know, there's, there is a certain skepticism on my part on using the Internet as a tool, um, but if, if it's just basic ideas or just basic study, then the Internet can be extremely useful, and would highly recommend it, um, but just like any tool, there's good uses and bad.

DIANA BROWN: Let's see here. Oh, is um, do you feel like creativity, or, um, or art, more specifically, well art more specifically or general creativity, are, are they important in your practice, do you feel like?

CHAD CHANDLER: Um, in, in my religious practice?

DIANA BROWN: Yeah, yeah.

CHAD CHANDLER: Just like with anything, um, art is a form of symbolism, um, so obviously one of the neat things that you can do with art is use it to kind of help achieve a mindset, um, so you can use art as a meditative practice, you can use art in your altar to achieve an emotional status, um, but almost all art is designed to invoke an emotional response, and so as far as symbols go, it is a very powerful type of symbolism, um, you know, because an artist, when they, uh, perform a form of art, they, they specifically are trying to invoke an emotional response. Either they want to draw something that resembles their own emotional feelings at the time, or they do something to invoke a response, um, and so art as, as, as a study of symbolism can be very powerful. Um, do I, do actually practice any form of art? No. I am not gifted in that way, but I certainly can understand the emotional effect.

DIANA BROWN: Don't you make some of the jewelry?

CHAD CHANDLER: I do make some jewelry, um, I would not call myself an artist in that, though--

DIANA BROWN: Well, but it's creative.

CHAD CHANDLER: It is creative, and I do have certain creative elements in me, but I, I would not say I am particularly skilled in any of those, um, but that does not stop me from doing things and trying things. Um, obviously, you know, the, one of the fun facts about working with anything is that, you know, if you don't ever do it, you can't ever

achieve anything, and so, um, there is a certain level of trying to, you know, achieve something, but obviously I don't do too terribly bad because my jewelry does sell at the store, so, you know, I can't complain [. . .]. Um, but yeah, art, art can be very very powerful, um, and can work, you know, either positively or negatively based on what it's trying to achieve.

DIANA BROWN: And how so negatively?

CHAD CHANDLER: Well obviously, you know, an artist can try to achieve an, a negative emotional response, um, but the negative I'm actually speaking of is when somebody tries to, uh, display a piece of art that has an emotional attachment or an intention, and it does not achieve it. That's what I'm speaking of as negative. Um, when, when an artist tries to portray something and it does not happen, then obviously that is a negative effect in that it's not achieving what it's supposed to.

DIANA BROWN: It's almost like when a ritual doesn't come off right, or something.

CHAD CHANDLER: Exactly. Exactly the same idea, and part of that is my own self definition, in that, you know, when, as a scientific approach, if you try to do something to prove a hypothesis, or to work on a theory, then if it has a good effect, then it becomes positive. If it has, if it does not achieve it, then it's a negative, and so that's what I'm speaking of when I say negative, is that, you know, it will not have the intended effect.

DIANA BROWN: Let's see what I've got here. Oh, I guess, have you ever experienced any, um, problems, um, because of your religion or anything related to it, I guess?

CHAD CHANDLER: You know, honestly, I'm always kind of aware of the fact that, you know, Paganism is kind of new in how open it is, um. That does not stop me from being honest with people, and, and as far as things go I have not had any drastically negative effects from being Pagan, um, you know, when I went into my job interview to get my job, I, I very, you know, proudly proclaimed that I was Pagan and that I had holidays that I had to adhere to and that that was very important to me, and it actually created a pretty open discussion in the interview which was neat, um, but on reflection I probably should not have done that.

DIANA BROWN: Why, why why do you think that? Since you had a positive--?

CHAD CHANDLER: Um, you know, part of, part of the thing though is that I kind of opened myself to get a really nasty response that could have cost me a job. Um, now my mindset at the time was, if it's gonna, you know, I wanna be upfront with these people, and if it's gonna, if I'm not gonna get the job, then I 'm not gonna get the job, and that's fine, but potentially I could have, you know, not gotten the job, and not gotten the next job, and not gotten the next job because of the same thing. I, I, you know, I would call what happened to me very lucky in that I still got the job, but a lot of people still do not want anything to do with the, with the term, "Pagan," because it's been so

misconstrued in literature and in, especially the Christian religions, um, so, people do not necessarily, are not necessarily open minded.

DIANA BROWN: Oh.

CHAD CHANDLER: Okay, um, so, potentially it could have opened me up to emotionally be pretty hurt during that interview, but, you know, at the time it was one of those things where I just didn't care and it was like, I need to be honest here, um, because one of the important factors for me getting a job was that I had to be available still to help with rituals, um, because that was something that Kacey needed help with, um, and so, uh, that's why I went in doing what I did, but, you know obviously if, if people are not actively involved in setting up rituals and needing the time, then I don't necessarily, would recommend interviewing for a job and explaining that you're Pagan, um, because--

DIANA BROWN: Unless it's necessary for logistical reasons.

CHAD CHANDLER: Right.

DIANA BROWN: It doesn't come up.

CHAD CHANDLER: Well, it's, it's the old adage--never talk about religion, never talk about politics, and there is a reason for that, but it doesn't necessarily stop me. So.

DIANA BROWN: Okay. Well, I think that's pretty much all my specific questions, but, is there anything else you want to say, or feel like is important?

CHAD CHANDLER: Um, no, actually, I think I'm pretty good, we've covered quite a bit in this interview, so, you'll be, you'll be busy for a while.

DIANA BROWN: Yeah. Oh, actually, I wanted to ask, um, about your children, um, [. . .] you have a son?

CHAD CHANDLER: I have a son. He's eighteen.

DIANA BROWN: He's eighteen. Okay. And, is he, and was your daughter, you know, at all sort of, or does your, does your son have anything to do with, does he know about your religious practice, for instance, is what I'm trying to ask.

CHAD CHANDLER: Well my son who's eighteen actually biologically is not mine. Um, and so--

DIANA BROWN: He's your stepson?

CHAD CHANDLER: Yeah. And, you know I spent, well, seventeen of the eighteen years raising him, um, and so, you know, very much as far as he's concerned I am "Dad," but he is in a position now where he has gotten out on his own and he's doing his own thing and I actually don't hear from him much. Um, but because all his life he has been raised Christian, um, to try to have a discussion about my change of religious practice would actually cause more harm than be helpful.

DIANA BROWN: So he doesn't even know.

CHAD CHANDLER: He doesn't even know. Um, I have not, you know, it's not one of those things that I have sat down and said, "Look, I'm changing religions," um, but because the rest of his family, you know, his mom's side is so deeply Christian, um, and because actually he is looking into going into, uh, theology school, um, I have decided to leave it all alone and let him pursue his own beliefs, um, and, you know, obviously there's a certain level of hope there that he will maintain an open minded viewpoint about religion in general, um, but he has chosen his religion, and so me jumping in with my beliefs is not necessarily gonna be helpful for him, so I have left it out.

DIANA BROWN: Interesting. Has he, I'm assuming that he hasn't been to the covenstead.

CHAD CHANDLER: No, he has not actually been out to the farm, um, he is now moving to Kansas City though, so I will have a chance to see him a little bit more, um, he has known most of his life that I was not deeply Christian, um, so, I think that if I were to present to him, "Hey, I'm Pagan," I don't think it would necessarily draw up anything negative towards me specifically, but it certainly would, um, be interesting to see what his thought process would be about Pagans, um, because I know that he knows nothing about Paganism or Pagans, so, it would be, you know, to present him with that, though, and shake up his religious beliefs is not necessarily something that's, you know, a good idea, um, I, I would rather him kind of, you know, get a chance to mature and learn at his own rate, and see what happens, than for me to directly interfere with his own beliefs.

DIANA BROWN: yeah. So that's a future discussion, perhaps.

CHAD CHANDLER: Potentially, you know, but if he's happy being Christian, then by all means he should be happy being Christian.

DIANA BROWN: No, of course, but that doesn't necessarily preclude you from being open and [. . .].

CHAD CHANDLER: Right, and certainly there's a level where I would love to be honest with him, um, and be myself around him, and, and now that he is of age, the potential there is, is much greater but, it's still at a time period where his own thought process is still forming, so I would want to wait until he was a little older, if I was gonna present this info to him.

DIANA BROWN: I think that was really my last question then, yeah.

CHAD CHANDLER: Okay, fair enough.

[01:03:31]

[End of recording]

See:

Camp Gaea, Heartland, and Temple Indigo on the Resources page.