

Kristen Adams

Interviewed by Diana Brown in Leavenworth, Kansas

August 12, 2014

Abstract: Oral history interview with Kristen Adams conducted by Diana Brown on August 12, 2014. This interview was conducted at The Herb Charmer in Leavenworth, Kansas. Kristen is the owner of this metaphysical store. In this interview, we talk about the store, and about Kristen's evolving religious practice. 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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Adams: Vacations to Colorado, I would always feel closer to god, the divine, whatever you want to call it, outside. And I wasn't whether somebody wanted red carpet or gold carpet, you know, people having all this division in the church about what it really meant to be Christian. And I could, you know I could go outside and sit on a hill and feel very spiritual and not worry about whether somebody was mad at me for how I dressed that day. The people that I watch come in here that will only get something if it's Christian.

Brown: How do you finagle that into the box that you want it to, to.

Adams: Well I look at it as everything in the store is energy, and made by god. If you're going to believe it follows that path, god created everything, everything in this store was created by him. Or her. Or both.

Brown: Or whatever you wanna.

Adams: Or whatever you wanna call it! You know, it's the divine to me. I am pagan, I seem to just follow that much more naturally and I was told when I started studying it that if it was a path that was right for you it would be a lot like coming home. And it did. I didn't feel the hypocrisy anymore. I didn't, and I'm a solitary practitioner. So for a very long time no one even knew. It was just something that it was, very quiet, very personal, very mine. No one knew including my family. My husband knew, but not much until I opened the store two years ago. And then I was told that my broom closet suddenly had great been windows and I could no longer hide. That was terrifying the very first time somebody ever walked into the shop and said "You're a witch". That's the label I give myself, but it was very disconcerting to have somebody that I didn't know come in and just say that. And I froze for a minute, and well, yeah, **[ya are/y'are](2:38)**, so own it. So that's

when I said “Yeah, I am, how can I help you?” And it’s kind of what I feel my path is. It’s what this store does, it helps people. They come here, they feel more peaceful. They feel more at ease. They don’t feel judged; they don’t feel anything other than peace. I have people that frequently come in here, cock their head to one side and say “I never want to leave.” Well, I’ve done my job, you know? That’s, that’s what I think people should have and I don’t care what faith they are. I want them to have that same feeling. I don’t want people to come in and be afraid. They’re candles, well what do they do, you know, you light them. They illuminate a room. If you are of that spiritual path, whatever spiritual path that is, I’ve noticed that Catholics burn a lot of candles as well, I’ve noticed candles in just about every faith I’ve seen, I haven’t seen them all. I’d like too, that would be cool. But, maybe you can tell me more about that!

(3:47)

Brown: Well, I mean they definitely play a big part in my childhood religion which was Judaism, you know every Friday you would light the two candles.

Adams: Right, so yeah, they provide light.

Brown: Say your blessing.

Adams: Yeah exactly! I find not that much difference between spells and prayers. It’s your intention, it’s your spoken intention to bring something about and I think words have power and I don’t think people pay enough attention to that. Because I think a lot of things get spoken into existence that shouldn’t be.

Brown: Hm.

Adams: And, I think that if I do teach a class it will be very much on the power of words, the power of intention, the, you know, the coming away from the magic has to have an altar and candles and all of the accoutrements that it can be nothing more than just the spoken word. You’re speaking something into existence, you’re giving energy to something and something’s going to happen. Whether you want it to go wrong is not, something’s going to happen. And you need to have personal responsibility. People come in, people say that people that practice witchcraft worship the devil. Well I don’t really know any pagans that believe in a devil. I don’t believe that there’s some entity out there that forces me to do bad things. I think that the divine gave me free will. When I get up in the mornings and I can choose to do good things or I can choose to do horrible things and at the end of the day it’s my responsibility, I believe in Karma. I believe that I’ll have to answer for that and it’s not anybody else’s fault other than mine. So you know, people will want to make magic white and magic black and I think it just is. It’s just magic, like it’s just energy. And it flows in whatever path it gets fed on.

(6:18)

Brown: That’s kind of going on all the time it seems like.

Adams: Yeah, every day.

Brown: Every action.

Adams: I don't spell cast a lot, I really don't feel the need to do that but I practice magic every day, everything I say, every person I help, everything that goes on is part of it. So I'm a little unconventional in the way that I think because I think that I kind of have taken from many paths and kind of made my own nice little nest for myself.

Brown: Well I have heard from some people and read that over the years that you get more advanced, for some people; more advanced in term of you know you have yeas under your belt of sort of doing this. Some of the sort of the accoutrements, like you said sort of fall away and you get kind of more elemental in your approach. Don't use as many tools and things and it becomes more of a way of life. Do you find that to be the case? Did you start out with more stuff?

(7:28)

Adams: Oh I think yeah, I think, you know, when you start reading the books you go "Oo!" But it's because it sounds cool and fun and shiny like a new pair of shoes to go with an outfit you know, "Oh well I have to have this and I have to have that" and "Oh the ingredient list says that I must have these things". Well, no, no, you don't. A wise person uses what they have, so you start learning that. So you do fall away from the tools, and that's what they are. They help, I think they help people who are just starting out. And whatever path that is, you know, whether its folding your hands in prayer, or lighting a candle to say a blessing, or whatever it is you're doing it helps focus your energy, it helps focus your intention, draws you back into what it is that you're trying to accomplish. So I think it very much is very helpful for people all the way along if that's what they need. I certainly don't begrudge anybody the use of tools. I've found that I don't need as many anymore. So, I'm kind of glad it helps save money. You know, it is what it is. I certainly don't think anybody that doesn't do it my way is wrong.

Brown: So, do you have a sort of a personal focus on, I mean your store is called The Herb Charmer. Do you have sort of a personal connection with plants?

Adams: Plants? I am, probably a frustrated botanist at heart that never took any of the right classes because I was a music major.

Brown: Oh cool!

Adams: So, pretty much I can ask you if you want fries with that. (laughs) Or sing it maybe!

Brown: (laughs) You can teach us all music theory, behind the counter!

Adams: Oh no! Those were the worst classes; those were my 7:00 classes.

Brown: Oh, I can just imagine your training at 7 in the morning.

Adams: Luckily I grew up with a father who really liked classical music so, theory wasn't quite as hard because I had been brought up with it.

Brown: Were you a singer or, that was your main sort of instrument?

Adams: Piano, a little bit. A little psychology, I liked religion, so I ended up here!

(laughs) And that was by accident as well, this was not on purpose. This was, a girlfriend of mine that had a store in town was in the army active duty, and I don't know quite how she thought she was going to run a shop during the week and have a full time day job. Not quite sure why that made sense to her but it did and she opened the shop and then found out subsequently that that doesn't work. So she decided to close the shop up, and move to parts unknown out east and she goes "You'd be perfect", at what? She goes, "you should have a shop" and I'm like oh, I don't know that but that's very scary. Because then people would know who I am. And I'm very used to being very quiet about it because I don't wish to push my beliefs on anybody, so it was, it was very scary to have the shop. It's fun, and I've met a lot of really amazing people, there is a very large pagan community in this town that has so far been under rocks, not wanting to come out because of fear of being judged or you know, having negative public opinion against them. So, it was quite interesting to listen to all of the people that wanted to see if they could use the back door to the shop that I had, so that no one would see them.

Brown: Oh wow.

Adams: And they would lose their job, you know, and to have that type of pressure, I would imagine was very hard and so I suddenly felt silly about being worried about being the person standing up front. Because I thought, well, if I can help give them a little bit of security in knowing there's someplace that they can go and feel accepted, then I think that's awesome.

(12:11)

Brown: Who are these people, were they in the army?

Adams: All over the place.

Brown: Just from everywhere?

Adams: From everywhere, working in every job, every section of this town. Just you know, people would come in and everybody says pretty much the same thing. "I can't believe a store like this exists in Leavenworth."

Brown: I sort of can't, I was surprised that it was just like here on this main drag. You know, just right here! In Leavenworth! In this army town, on this main drag.

Adams: Here I am! In Leavenworth! Well you know the army kind of helped out because they recognized pagans and Wicca is a recognized religion now. So that helped.

Brown: That's interesting.

Adams: The chaplains I think still don't quite know what to do with the wiccans that serve in the army, they're not quite sure and I've heard varying stories from soldiers who are like "Yeah they kept trying to convert me and finally"--

Brown: "I understand what you are now, can you not to that?"

(13:22)

Adams: Yeah, [unintelligible] that's not good. I understand it's now recognized, but! Really it's not the right path for you! (laughing) And I think that's the height of arrogance to try and decide what somebody's path should be. Which has always been another whole problem with most religions that they, they think that they have the right to make people believe any certain way. I think if you believe people alone to it, if you make it inviting and kind, and teach people about it, I think perhaps, honey would work better than vinegar. My mother in law was Lutheran, well I think she started Catholic, and she raised my husband and his brother Lutheran, and has returned to Catholicism, and we were out at her house and she has a DVD now explaining that the Crusades were a humanitarian mission.

Brown: Good to know.

Adams: I have trouble swallowing that one! I don't remember a whole lot of humanitarian tales about the Crusades!

Brown: What was the idea that they were going to save who?

Adams: I don't know! But it's, you know, be saved or die!

Brown: Yeah.

Adams: That's not much of a choice! Of course they thought it was, but I thought that was rather interesting.

Brown: Humanitarian mission (laughing)

Adams: That's a stretch! (laughing)

Brown: However you want to spin it.

Adams: I think the new pope is amazing, and I worry for his safety sometimes because, I think he's an amazing man. Still would like to see him do a little bit more for women's rights but, I think he's, you know, kind of blown the doors off that whole "I have to stay in a little glass box and nobody can touch me" so I think that's huge. And trying to expose some of the corruption that exists is fabulous. I love that. So, I have great respect for him.

(15:54)

Brown: Do you find that you get people of different? Like Catholics or Lutheran that come in the store?

Adams: Yes, sure!

Brown: And what are they usually looking for? What kinds of things?

Adams: It depends on their comfort level. I have a guy that, um, her husband is a Baptist minister, whatever their clergy is called, that comes in and picks out different stones for her Sunday school class.

Brown: **[What would they use the stones for?/unintelligible] (16:27)**

Adams: I've had several of the sisters from Saint Mary's come in and get oils to help with massaging some of the elderly people's hands that they do homecare for. I've had them buy incense. Really Catholic mass and a Wiccan ceremony are not all that different.

Brown: I wonder what the stones were used for at Sunday school. Just like shiny?

Adams: Part of God's earth! The amazing things that come from God's earth!

Brown: That's a fun lesson!

Adams: I thought so! I thought it was cool! You know and she and I had a rather spirited discussion because um, one of the stones she found and the description that I have sitting with it is kind of an awakening of magical sensibilities.

Brown: Oh, which stone was that?

Adams: Arbitrate. And it's a beautiful stone, it's kind of a, I'll go get it, it's green and when you move it into the surface of the light it's blue. So it's, it's one of those things that just is absolutely amazing, the way the light catches it. This is it here.

Brown: Oh wow, look at that misty green. Oh!

Adams: Yeah! And she put it down like it was a piece of hot coal and said "Oh, I can't do that, can't have magic." And I was like "wait a second. Wait a second."

Brown: Those are just the words sitting in the front of it!

Adams: Yeah, yeah. It's a beautiful piece of the divine creation and she goes "well that magic is, you believe in the devil." "No, no we don't even believe in a devil! There's no devil!" I hate Hollywood! I cannot make anybody go scooting across the floor on their tippy toes, you know. There are people that can master using that amount of energy to move objects, but on that level? That doesn't happen. The whole broom riding thing, I think that was some hallucinogenic things, some herbs that they took.

(19:02)

Brown: Some other herbs!

Adams: And those exist whether you're Wiccan or not! I certainly don't think that's something that we have owned rights to. And I don't even do that, so.

Brown: Do you think those have a place in magic? Hallucinogenic type herbs?

Adams: I think they do hold a place in some shamanic traditions and some Native American traditions, whether they should or not, um, worries my consciousness as a healer. Because I don't want people to be ill, you know, I seek to try and heal people and have them live better lives, see them be healthier so I think I am nervous about hallucinogenics. I don't know. That one would be a hard one to answer.

Brown: Yeah. Not something that you would recommend for instance.

Adams: No, oh no. No no. I'm not looking at my herb jars and going "Hey, if you mix this and this together you can, no." Even though I've been told that some of them do quite that, yeah. No thanks! That makes me nervous, but I was never one of

those people that really wanted to do drugs either. Didn't smoke pot. I realized I'm probably starting to become in the minority of people that like to think of pot as amazing.

Brown: It's gonna cure you of everything!

Adams: Well I think it probably does have some very good medicinal effects, but my husband had a rather interesting, and I think correct question on the legalization of marijuana because he was a police officer for 18 years and his point was you know "medical miracle" aside, how do you quantitatively decide whether somebody shouldn't be behind the wheel of a car, what's the test? How do you decide that? And I think that's a very valid point. There's no breathalyzer. How do you determine if they had just been smoking or smoked two hours earlier or this morning or you know what happened. How do you decide whether somebody shouldn't be beside the wheel?

Brown: Aside from just smelling it on them which isn't very scientific.

Adams: No, not at all. So I think that's, we went to Denver. That was interesting.

Brown: Oh yeah, what's it like?

Adams: There's a dispensary just about in some places, every other doorway. So there are a lot of people dispensing. Quite a few people falling off sidewalks.

Brown: Yeah I have this very sort of crazy image in my mind of just like everybody walking the streets.

Adams: In places I saw that, yeah! Not everywhere but yeah I saw that in quite a few places. It does give off kind of that vibe, and yes you can smell it.

(22:36)

Brown: Yeah I'm sure.

Adams: So it's, but I think it's because it's new.

Brown: Yeah I think that's probably true.

Adams: So I was like oh, it's legal, so everybody can run out there.

Brown: Even people who wouldn't normally are like "well I got to try it now, because I can just get it."

Adams: "I can just get it, I can just walk in." Don't have to smoke ditch weed or whatever. Yeah, I don't know, I'm kind of on the fence about that one but a lot of people do come in and ask if I have that herb and I do not have that herb. And nor will have that herb.

Brown: It's in the back!

Adams: No it isn't even in the back!

Brown: Oh dear.

Adams: If I'm not proud to sell it, it isn't here. And there are a lot of people who have tried selling things here and asking me to carry their line and I haven't. Kind of picky.

Brown: How does that work? How do you sort of supply or get your supplies?

Adams: Um, it's turned into kind of an intuition.

Brown: Okay.

Adams: And it was hit or miss a lot, at first when I first started stocking the shelves they were all things I liked.

Brown: (laughed)

Adams: So it was a personal shopping trip for me, I was like "Oh that's awesome!" And it's better than **[hoarding because then I can just turn to the stuff in the store!/not sure]** (24:02) (laughs) So it's perfect, you know? And now it's kind of turned into more of an intuition, what I see people looking at, I watch them and ask questions and try and figure out what they like. And then I have a mental little Rolodex in my head that says "this person likes this and this person likes that, this persons always looking for this and this persons always looking for that." So that's kind of how it's evolved. Sometimes it still is a personal shopping trip though.

Brown: It's got to be to some extent, just because, you're not going to be, even if you're trying to supply a need you're not going to get something you don't like.

Adams: Right, yeah, again, I don' have a lot of skulls.

Brown: It is 10:12.

Adams: Oh dear, I should definitely open the shop.

Brown: Okay.

[00:24:58]

[End of recording]