

Shiloh Williams

Interviewed by Diana Brown in Overland Park, Kansas

July 31, 2014

Transcribed by Tirzah Chesky

Abstract: Oral history interview with Shiloh Williams conducted by Diana Brown on July 31, 2014. This interview was conducted at a Starbucks coffee shop in Overland Park, Kansas. Shiloh helps run Gaea Goddess Gathering, a weekend of Pagan workshops and rituals for women held in September at Camp Gaea in McLouth, Kansas. In this interview, we talk about Shiloh's discovery of Paganism, her involvement in Cheryl Locke's coven, and with Gaea Goddess Gathering. 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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(Indistinct music plays in the background)

DIANA BROWN: Perfect. Continue.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: And there was this paragraph in the book that talked about how—Paganism and people who are drawn to it believe that, you know, there's many different ways toward, you know, Enlightenment, Nirvana, the End, you know, whatever. (Alarm goes off) And because that they realize that there's so many different options out there, they're more accepting of people who aren't a specific way, who don't fit a specific mold.

DIANA BROWN: Yeah.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: And, you know, people who follow monotheistic paths, they have like that strict set of rules and you have to behave a certain way, and so it's hard for them to wrap their head around the fact that there's people out there who don't live in that specific way and they're not wrong.

DIANA BROWN: Right.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: And so that helped me kinda figure out, yeah, I'm far more Pagan than I could ever be Baptist. And I still kind of have leanings towards it

once in a while because it was so great. I grew up Baptist, and I still have those, “What if I’m wrong? What if I’m going to Hell? What if God doesn’t love me?” sorta things.

DIANA BROWN: Interesting.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: And the funny thing is I didn’t even believe that people who weren’t Christian were going to Hell anyway before I converted to Paganism. And so having those thoughts now is very weird and trying to reconcile that with what I believe now and what I believed then is—I get thrown into this little momentary spiritual confusion. And it’s something I have to really—be aware of, otherwise it—it’s very oppressive.

DIANA BROWN: Yeah

SHILOH WILLIAMS: And it’s hard knowing what I know and believing what I believe in a family that is very strictly fundamentalist evangelical Christian. And my dad, a couple years ago, he came down and spent some time with us for Christmas and we went down to my husband’s mother-in-law’s [house] for Christmas. He expressed to my mother-in-law that he was worried about my being Wicca, and he didn’t know where it was coming from because I was always such of a Christian girl and, you know, I had to—I wrote him a letter explaining it because he wouldn’t come to me and talk to me about it. He still hasn’t. But he—I think that he’s torn between, you know, “I love my daughter no matter what,” and, “this thing that she believes has been taught to me to be a bad thing, and I don’t know how to deal with that.” And I’m very thankful he hasn’t gone off the deep end into the, you know, “I’m disowning you,” “You’re going to Hell,” etcetera. So.

DIANA BROWN: How long ago did you write him?

SHILOH WILLIAMS: It’s been about three years.

DIANA BROWN: Okay. So he knows—

SHILOH WILLIAMS: He knows.

DIANA BROWN: And it’s been a while, and if something horrible was going to happen it would have happened

SHILOH WILLIAMS: (laughs) Exactly! Exactly.

DIANA BROWN: So what was it, I wonder then. So it sounds like you didn’t have, like, any sort of negative experience particularly of like your childhood religion.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Uh-huh. (4:08.4)

DIANA BROWN: So what happened? How did you sort of get interested in Paganism? What was it about it? Were you looking or were you—

SHILOH WILLIAMS: So, growing up, I went to church Sunday, Sunday nights, Wednesday nights, did youth group, vacation Bible school, the whole nine yards. And, throughout the whole thing, I believed desperately that, you know, Jesus told us to be good people and to love people, and, you know, to spread that love. And the things they said, the way they behaved, was always contrary to that. But it never—I don't look down on them for it because I kind of always felt that I saw something that they didn't.

And when I got married and my husband—my husband now is very supportive and “Hey, you have a new idea? Go explore it.” And so we would have these talks, and he would just kinda sit there and nod and, yeah, you know?

DIANA BROWN: Yeah.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: And I came across a link on BeliefNet, that was, you know, it was one of those quizzes, “What religion do you most lean toward?” And I took the quiz and it said, “Hey, you have leanings toward Neo-Paganism.” And I'm sitting here going, “What is this?”

DIANA BROWN: If they only knew how dangerous...those little quizzes. Oh, BeliefNet

SHILOH WILLIAMS: (laughs) Yeah. Yeah, I told my husband, and I said, “Isn't it funny what this thing said about me?” He's like, “Yeah. I know that. I was wondering when you were going to figure it out.” Oh. Okay. So then I did digging and, you know. I looked online for local groups, and just kinda seeing what it was all about. (6:10.7)

DIANA BROWN: Uh-huh.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: And— (coughs)—excuse me. And I came across a posting on Witch Vox for Cheryl's coven

DIANA BROWN: Oh, cool. Okay.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: And I emailed her and, you know, we talked, met at a coffee house, and, you know, it's kind of, I've been with her coven ever since. It, uh, I'm not as far as I'd like to be in my studies, but it's coming along slowly and—yeah. I have no ill feelings toward Christianity or Christians. I feel that there's a lot of good there, there's just people who like to pervert it. Just like any ideal—what's that word? Idea(logy?)

DIANA BROWN: Yeah, Ideology.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Yeah. Thank you. And I still—I do feel very connected to it still. It's just not—in the way that would benefit me if I stayed Christian.

DIANA BROWN: Yeah. Not in a way that would prompt you to engage in it--

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Right.

DIANA BROWN: in the practices I guess.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Right, Right.

DIANA BROWN: But a still sort of closeness of like this was my spiritual home and I don't have any issues with it.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Yeah. Exactly.

DIANA BROWN: Yeah, I kind of have that relationship with my own. Like, I was raised, um, Jewish and I still definitely feel connected with it and never really had, like, issues with it.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Right.

DIANA BROWN: So it's just kind of like—I even—I still call myself Jewish. I'm just also doing this other stuff. (Laughs)

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Right, Right.

DIANA BROWN: It's interesting. I dunno.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: There's a—I always thought that if I went back to the Judeo-Christian God, then I would probably look more into Judaism than Christianity because, because of all the symbolism and ritual. (8:17.5)

DIANA BROWN: Oh, yeah.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: And, you know, there's just always that tight knit community they have.

DIANA BROWN: Tribal thing.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Right, right.

DIANA BROWN: Yeah. I do feel like there's a lot of overlap that not everybody necessarily gets if they're not coming from a Jewish background, but it's totally there--

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Uh-huh.

DIANA BROWN: In terms of the, like, tribal sense and the, like, heavy ritual. It's very seasonal. Again, too, it's on a lunar calendar. Like, you know, I dunno. So—but, um, so you mentioned *Drawing Down the Moon*?

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Uh-huh.

Brown—Were there other books that were sort of important to you?

SHILOH WILLIAMS: A lot of fiction books. Um, some of the fantasy and science fiction ones that kind of—made me realize that there was probably things out there on earth that we really don't have any idea about because we don't see them.

DIANA BROWN: Uh-huh.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: And, uh, *The Spiral Dance* was a big nonfiction book that I read. I'm currently kinda digging through old online-pedia of some out of print witchcraft books that aren't really necessarily related to Wicca. Just like old European—just your regular witchcraft that, you know, there's a little ceremony in it, there's a little—it's not really your, uh, oh, I don't-- I can't really think of the word. But it's that stuff that really hasn't been touched and changed by modern New Age thoughts. Not that I have a problem with New Age thought, I just, for me personally, I like to get to the root of things.

DIANA BROWN: Uh-huh.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: And to me that's the base, the root, and even if it's not ancient, ancient, like people like to believe, there's—it's definitely a building block into things that I believe and want to believe and want to experience. (10:49.3) And I read a lot of blogs, and message boards because I learn more when I experience other people's experience and I read their reactions to it. And I have found that most of my practice and most of my beliefs come from—how others react to emotions and—seasons and their jobs and their kids. And it's very easy for me to see the web between people and what others would say is magic and I don't really pursue it I just kind of see it. And--

DIANA BROWN: It's like magic is an attitude or interpretation of the world or something.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Yeah. It's-- a lot of people will say it's seeing the things that are not seen, you know, um—bending things to your will, and, to me, it's a lot more—natural?

DIANA BROWN: Uh-huh.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: It's not something that's definitely manipulated by a person or persons it's just those threads that—you see their reactions and actions between people. And I haven't found a book or anything that kind of explains that and I'm still searching for that. So.

DIANA BROWN: I wonder if—is it like sort of a synchronous connections or--

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Yeah.

Brown—Sort of?

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Yeah. And, um—and it's not you know, not just, you know, once you see a blue car all you see is blue cars. It's, you know, I see that in, like, game things and things that people take for granted. And—

DIANA BROWN: Could you give me an example?

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Um—I have a friend, somebody I haven't talked to in years, and we used to kinda work together on a volunteer basis for a message board. And her husband died, and just seeing how everybody who came on and said, "You know, I haven't talked to you in a long time, but I felt this need to look you up or, you know, contact you and see how you were doing," and, you know, just seeing how, how they have this urge to contact her on the worst day of her life and they hadn't talked to her for so long, you know, there's magic there (14:31.9), and that's really the only word I can put to it.

DIANA BROWN: I think of, uh, I dunno when you talk about magic as something like that or as a sort of natural thing I think of the way, like, cats behave and how they just sort of, like, know things or know what to do about things. That always seems—which might seem silly because like, of course. They're cats and they have instincts and they have—but it seems very magical to me when they know what to do about whatever their issues are.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Right. Right. It's just that automatically knowing what to do, when to do it without being prompted

DIANA BROWN: Yeah. Yeah. What are these sources that you're reading? These PDF's online?

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Um, I have a couple [rustle of paper and humming noises]. Those two are the ones I'm working through right now. Obviously not the Java Script one.

[Both women laugh]

DIANA BROWN: Can be a different kind of magic.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: [laughs] Yeah, exactly. It's a little bit above my reading level so I kind of, uh, I have to actually absorb things paragraph by paragraph. And--

DIANA BROWN: Yeah—*The A's Alicia* by Andrew Chumley. How did you find this? This is so cool.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Reddit actually

DIANA BROWN: Reddit? Really.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Has an Occult subreddit, and they were talking about—um, like what books they've read [rustling of paper] and I love those threads because they just fill me full of ideas and I usually end up with more books than I can read in a lifetime.

DIANA BROWN: Oh yeah.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: I like looking at the pictures because, like--

DIANA BROWN: Yeah. Oh, that's neat.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Yeah.

DIANA BROWN: I just wanna like blow that up and, like, paint it or something. (17:02.4)

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Right. I was thinking like that would be a great embroidery pattern.

DIANA BROWN: Project. Yeah. I wonder what the symbols are. I don't know enough about symbols.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Yeah, I don't either. I have—my therapist has a book called *The Book of Symbols* that I—I looked at all of them on Amazon and it was like 80 bucks and I'm sitting here going, "Do I really wanna drop 80 bucks on a book that's going to sit on my shelf?" [laughs]

DIANA BROWN: Yeah, really. More embroidery projects--

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Yeah. That's very true

DIANA BROWN: You know? You can try to justify it by, you know? Give you a pattern for all kinds of things

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Definitely. And then just set up shop at the festival and—

DIANA BROWN: Exactly. Sell your wares.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Yeah, yeah. So yeah, I—I'm in my last week at my job next week.

DIANA BROWN: Oh, you are?

SHILOH WILLIAMS: And part of the reason is because I felt a deeper pulling to study more and do more for the community.

Brown :Uh-huh.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Especially the GGG community. You know, when I was asked it last year, I had lost a different job that I loved dearly, and one of the staff members was like, "Hey, we have an opening." And was just like, "Eh. Why not?" Yeah. And then as time went on I was like, you know what, we kind of have something special here. And-- I don't know how much I can influence it, but I have like these grand visions of what it can be. And it's like that there's just this big-thinking community. And there's obviously a little brain trust here and there, but there's not really something geared toward women that isn't just inclusive because we want all women to come. [19:27.6]

DIANA BROWN: Right

SHILOH WILLIAMS: But I personally don't feel like we're meeting the needs of all women, but just kind of, you know, our workshops fill up the schedule, our rituals are there to—there's obviously meaning behind it, but they're not very participatory for people.

Well this year we got new ritual, that committee has. And they're getting very, you know, "this is a deep meaningful thing." Ritual is supposed to connect to things. If you don't connect to things, you're just sitting there watching other people do it. So, they're making this year's rituals very deep and have everybody participate who wants to participate in them. And it just—you know when they were talking about it, I got goose bumps. Like, that's what I want because I had stopped going to Heartland because it was just like that. You had your rituals and everyone just kinda sat around it and not really understand. It's hard to do big rituals where everybody participates when you have 800 people.

DIANA BROWN: Yeah.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: But, you know, I—I think that with as many different groups of women, like women of color, transgender women, lesbian women, bisexual

women, there's a lot of women out there who are kinda lost in Western religion as it is. You know, especially something like Wicca where everything is very polar, very female.

DIANA BROWN: [unintelligible]

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Right. So what I would love is to see, you know those women use the GGG space as a way to figure out how their spirituality fits in whatever sphere that they want. And—I'm so excited I'm, like, shaking— And I just, I feel like we can fill a bigger need than what we are.

And I haven't really brought it up to the other women yet because we're kind of in the last months before the festival itself and I don't want to say, "Oh, hey, by the way--"

DIANA BROWN: And I do think that's a pressing topic we sort of need to face.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Yeah.

DIANA BROWN: Yeah. Serve the needs of people who aren't necessarily identifying with, like, that, specifically sort of like (unintelligible) polarity.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Right, right. [22:13.1]

DIANA BROWN: More and more in the last few years that's been really a topic, hot topic, for them. I was just talking to my male friend who participates in a coven that would like, open celebrations sometimes, and sort of noting that that's sort of, like, an issue.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: (Laughs) Yeah, definitely. I have a friend who—I'm watching her transition into all her female glory. And she has a very loving family and she's very much Christian, but I also see how she's going from, you know, being a male in the church to being a female and the different ways people treat you based on gender and how lessons in things just don't fit perfectly anymore.

DIANA BROWN: That's very interesting.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Yeah. Yeah, and I never thought about that before, you know? People who don't identify as one or the other or both of either, whatever, just, they don't really have a place.

DIANA BROWN: Yeah.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: I definitely don't wanna tell them what to believe or anything. I just want them to have the safe space so that they can figure that out on their own.

DIANA BROWN: Yeah.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: And what I really want after this year's GGG, I'd love to sit down and say, "Hey guys. Have we were had a meeting where we just kinda talked about the future of the festival and what we want from it?"

DIANA BROWN: Yeah.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Because I feel like that would be a good time to bring it up.

DIANA BROWN: Yeah. I know that Cheryl was telling me yesterday that they, you know, had to have a few years of discussion about the transgender issue specifically, were able to sort of resolve it such that basically, like, if— what was it? If you'd been living—living as a woman for a year, then you're welcome, basically.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Right.

DIANA BROWN: Whatever your sort of state— of bodily state is.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Right.

DIANA BROWN: [Unintelligible]

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Yeah.

DIANA BROWN: I dunno how much ritual actually ends up accommodating that kind of identity or that kind of state of being but—but at least people are welcome.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Yeah. And I'd love for them to—feel more welcome than just, "Hey, we're not going to tell you 'no, you can't come here'."

DIANA BROWN: I see. Yeah.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: So, yeah. Yeah. I was very glad last year when we were approached by a transgender woman asking and everyone was like, "Yeah." It was like, okay. This is the right place for me. I'm good.

DIANA BROWN: Yeah. So that'll be interesting to see then, what happens next year, for instance. What that could be.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Yeah, yeah. And I obviously want to start small.

DIANA BROWN: Yeah.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: The rituals that they have planned this year are definitely a good start.

DIANA BROWN: Yeah. They work slightly better than before

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Yeah.

[25:43.5]

DIANA BROWN: This whole thing is very new to me because this is like my first year really participating in any sort of community. So I'm like, "Oh! I can go to all these things! They're like thirty minutes away!"

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Right, Right. Yeah, since I'm not—I don't have a job now everyone's like, "Hey! You can come to this festival and you can come to that festival now."

DIANA BROWN: "I could."

SHILOH WILLIAMS: I could. Do I want to?

DIANA BROWN: Yeah. Yeah

SHILOH WILLIAMS: And the women who put on GGG are some of the most accepting and amazing and loving women I have ever met. Um, one of their actual bylaws or rules or whatever it is, is that, you know, everybody's opinion is important and we aren't allowed to say, you know "this might sound stupid", or, "it's a stupid question, but," because it kind of invalidates and diminishes how that person feels about their own opinion, and they don't want that.

DIANA BROWN: Yeah.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: And it's something that I take in and kind of apply to my life in general because I never realized how, you know, those types of thought processes can be damaging to just about anyone. And I have seen them come together at a moment's notice to help someone out. If something needs done, nobody, grumbles, it's like, you know, "What can I do to help? Let me know when or where, and I'll be there if I can." And they—they really made me realize that I was kind of missing the whole female friend thing in my life.

DIANA BROWN: Yeah.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Because—I dunno. I've kinda noticed this among my Christian friends versus my Pagan friends that a lot of my female Christian friends are very much standoffish with other women and, you know, they do—they have the thought process of, “I can talk easier to men than women. Men are better friends.” And so, I was always one of them. But when I started participating in more women-focused get-togethers with these women before I was with GGG and after I was just like, [Laughs] “There's something wrong here because, you know, groups of women aren't at all what anybody portrays them to be. They're so much better. And I want other people to see it that way. Not just about women, but, like themselves and whoever they choose to be friends with. And I think that's a very important part of any community is that closeness. [29:13.3]

And I think that that's kind of what I miss from church and Christianity is that every Sunday you had kinda, you know, supper at Grandma's and family because you know, everybody came from church. And, you know, you went to church with the same people every week, and there is this sort of forced community that I really haven't found in the Pagan community very much. It's more, you know, “We have an event planned. Come if you want! Don't come if you want!” whatever. And--

DIANA BROWN: Yeah, I think there's sort of an ethic of its good to have a tribe but it's harder to put into place. Harder to enact than to say that you value. [30:07.7]

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Yeah. Right , right. And I think it's one of those things you don't really realize the value of until you don't have it anymore.

DIANA BROWN: Uh-huh.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: And I know I'm not the only one that feels that there's something missing in the Pagan community because I've seen Facebook discussions on that and things like that. And what I've found is that the—the big, um—there's no hierarchy. There's no people telling you what to believe, what not to believe. You can't tell us what to do. Free—free feelings, free think kind of makes it so that can't happen.

DIANA BROWN: Uh-huh.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Yeah. [Coughs] You now, not that having a hierarchy is good or anything, but I do think that even though a lot of people believe that we're all connected and we should one another, we really haven't, as a community, found that sweet spot where we actually kind of come together as a whole, you know, to do it. Everybody's very generous one-on-one, but—it—

coming together as one body, [alarm goes off in background] kind of, is far more difficult because there are so many different groups and so many different beliefs.

DIANA BROWN: Uh-huh. And what would we—like what would bring us back together as one community? Like one larger community to do. What kind of things would you do? Would it having something to do—would it be something that—well. I don't know [32:13.0] What would it look like, I guess?

SHILOH WILLIAMS: I was just thinking, um, maybe more charity work. Uh, you know, a lot of Pagans identify as environmentalists but the most they'll do to help the environment is put a recycle bin out.

DIANA BROWN: Uh-huh.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: And—I, I feel like we can be so much more. We can make a bigger impact if we came together, you know. If we did, you know, have a clothing drive, or a food drive, or have our own, you know, hunger pantry that, you know, if somebody in the community can't go shopping for a week because they lost their job or something they can go shopping at the Pagan Pantry, which, actually, I think there was one of those. I might have not heard much about it lately, though.

DIANA BROWN: That does sound like something that could be. I mean, I think it would require some one or more small group of people saying, "We wanna do this." And then sort of advertising it as a thing--

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Right.

DIANA BROWN: Among the larger community.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Right, right.

DIANA BROWN: I could see that being a thing though. You know?

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Yeah.

DIANA BROWN: I mean, definitely there's not necessarily gonna be a sort of institutional push from it because there aren't really institutes. I mean there are some, but.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Right.

DIANA BROWN: But, um, but.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: And, uh, so I think that since we are so fragmented as a community—just because of the nature of it—the different group that put on the different festivals kinda have a better chance of accomplishing something like that.

DIANA BROWN: Yeah.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Because they are non-denominational and they are already sort of an organization and—

DIANA BROWN: you could almost say, like, “And by the way, while you’re here.”

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Exactly.

DIANA BROWN: You know?

Williams :Yeah.

DIANA BROWN: Donate to this, or whatever it is.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Yeah. Bring your old clothes to festival so that we can donate ‘em. Yeah.

DIANA BROWN: That’s a cool idea.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Yeah.

DIANA BROWN: I’d like to see that at festivals. That’d be neat. You know?

SHILOH WILLIAMS: That would.

DIANA BROWN: Yeah. (34:36.8)

SHILOH WILLIAMS: One of the fundraisers for GGG is a craft fair we do in December.

DIANA BROWN: Oh, okay.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: And we have a raffle that the proceeds do go to women’s shelters or some-- a place we decide that would have the most use for the money that year.

DIANA BROWN: Yeah.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: And.

DIANA BROWN: Yeah I have the—Kasey Carlson, the woman who runs the coven I go to sort of open Sabbaths at has, several times a year, sort of charity parties at a local bar in Lawrence.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: That's cool.

DIANA BROWN: Which is cool. For instance, recently she had like a birthday party that raised money for Operation: Wildlife. And--

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Oh, way cool.

DIANA BROWN: You know, she usually has a Halloween one and a Yule one and just—she just kinda is good at rounding up everybody she knows to come out and, you know.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Right.

DIANA BROWN: Again, like buy raffle tickets or buy tarot readings or whatever it is.

Williams. Yeah. Yeah.

DIANA BROWN: So. So that's kinda cool. It would be cool to see more things like that.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: On a bigger scale.

DIANA BROWN: or on a bigger scale. Yeah. Yeah.

(Stop in conversation from 35:45.4 to 35:51.0, at which time both women laugh)

SHILOH WILLIAMS: So yeah. I'm kind of, um, a little excited about not having a job so I can devote time—

DIANA BROWN: Focus on.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Yeah.

DIANA BROWN: Yeah.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Yeah. I, uh, I'm not sure how much of a splash I can make, but, you know, if I can make a little one it'll be worth it.

DIANA BROWN: Uh-huh. So I guess if that's sort of like a bigger picture thing that you're concerned about—

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Uh-huh

DIANA BROWN: What is your kind of smaller picture, personal practice look like?

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Uh—personal practice I’m—I’m kind of in—still in the seeking--

DIANA BROWN: Uh-huh.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Portion where I’m—I don’t have a ritual of rituals.

DIANA BROWN: Uh-huh.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: I kinda do ‘em as I need ‘em.

DIANA BROWN: Yeah.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: You know, beginning of the year we do our house blessing and, uh, if I’m having a hard time, you know, I’ll sit, and I’ll meditate, maybe light some candles, do a small ritual, just kind of bring myself back into focus.

DIANA BROWN: Uh-huh.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: And—

DIANA BROWN: So it’s not necessarily, like, “everyday I do these three things,” rather it’s like, “On an as-needed basis I’ll draw on this resource.” Or—

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Right. Right. And the problem with that, though, is I’ve kinda found that I’m not really growing.

DIANA BROWN: Hmm.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Because since I’m not doing it in practice every day I’m not—getting better is kind of a bad word but it’s you know, like if you don’t practice your violin every day, you don’t get better. And so I’m really wanting to pick up little things every day. Maybe, like a little meditation towards whatever goddess or make an altar and clean it every day. Just something that to focus my spiritual life and just kinda re-center myself.

DIANA BROWN: Yeah.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: I think that—because my whole practice is kind of getting myself in a bubble that, you know, this is my space in the world. This is what I choose to do with it. You know, what am I going to do with it sort of thing.

[38:39.7]

DIANA BROWN: Yeah.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: And, you know, I kinda want to expand that bubble and learn more and maybe see how—what others would consider magic. The whole making things happen here while changing how you view things, how you react to things. And, uh, I really kind need that in my life right now because I have found that I've been very susceptible to negative emotions and negative feelings and negative words lately. And I'm not a negative person, so it's been weighing very heavily on me. And so I'm really trying hard, mainly with meditation right now, to just kind of shield myself against that.

DIANA BROWN: Yeah. Yeah.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: And I've been—so, I've been reading and talking to people about how, how to do that because I have some really empathic friends who just kind of feel everything and, you know, I wanna learn her secrets to block it all out

DIANA BROWN: Yeah.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Yeah, I've—I'm definitely not as far along as I would like to be, but it's been an interesting journey so far. I've met interesting people, I've kind of validated thoughts that I grew up with like, you know, you love people no matter what they are, who they are, uh, the best time to be compassionate is when you don't feel like being compassionate at all, and just kinda things that really weren't reinforced with me as a kid. And I kind of thought something was wrong with me because I was the only one that was thinking that.

DIANA BROWN: Yeah.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: But when I'm sitting alone in my room with the candles and the incense and I'm just still and quiet, I can see through that and it's—it's very grounding. I can—I dunno. I can see again, if that makes sense. [41:32.5]

DIANA BROWN: Hmm. I guess I'm curious; it just occurred to me as you were saying that, um, for some reason, (Williams laughs) when, I guess, what was it about—so you said you took this quiz.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Uh-huh.

DIANA BROWN: That sort of made you think, "Oh. This is"—like what was it that was on that quiz for instance that, you know, or what was it that sort of made you feel like you were in alignment with this kind of religious practice?

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Well, the questions that I remember were mainly focused on do you believe there is one path toward the end or many paths? Do you believe

in one God or many gods? I believe in everything because, you know, how do I know that there's not.

DIANA BROWN: Right.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: And when I got the results that said, you know, you do believe in many different paths, you believe in, you know, helping the environment, you may believe in God but he's not the God that, you know, I was just kinda like—I didn't realize that people actually thought that, because growing up in the church, you know, it was an insult that, "Oh. You believe in Zeus? That's—our God is alive. Those gods are dead." You know. Fairytales. Magic. Woo Woo. And so when the questions on the quiz were very serious it got me thinking that people actually believe this stuff. And it was kind that light bulb moment. I went, "Hmm. What else don't I know that I think I know that I want to know more of?" [43:41.0]

DIANA BROWN: And as you've come along, like, what do you think are some kind of the most important things about Paganism for you that make you feel like it's the right place to be.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: I wanna say that mainly how they feel about love and sexuality how yes, it's okay to love more than one person, or love a person of the same gender, or both genders as long as there's a communication of consent.

DIANA BROWN: Yeah.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: And to me, communication and consent are very big, um—you have to have a respect and compassion for the other person in order to get their consent on something so intimate. And-- it's less of the religious, ritualistic parts of it and more how—they treat the human interactions with one another. Uh, it was a very big culture shock going from Christianity to Paganism, and the biggest illustration of it, one that I can't—I will never forget it: growing up in the church, when you would hug it was very standoffish.

DIANA BROWN: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: And the first time I went to a ritual out at Cheryl's house and everybody was hugging, it was full-on body, let me embrace you, you know? We are together in this. And I was just like, "Holy cow." You know? When they hug you, they mean it. And it was the sincerity and the genuineness of how they interacted with everybody that—it draws me to them. It draws me to Paganism and it makes me want to be like that more.

DIANA BROWN: Uh-huh. Yeah. Hmm. [Pause] What else was I gonna say? I feel like we've covered a lot of ground. Um, oh. I guess, you know, you mentioned, um, like needlework, or embroidery, rather, for instance. Is creativity an important part of, I dunno, maybe ritual or the religion in any way for you?

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Yeah. I—other than the meditative aspects, I very much feel that there's a connection between creativity and your connection to the body and it's kind of this language that you're really not consciously of thinking of. Um, it's very much the way I think the universe speaks to me [Brown laughs]. And, I think that's very evident, you know, in songs and art work and how people are seeing things and how they interpret life in general. [47:34.6]

DIANA BROWN: Yeah. Yeah.

[Pause]

SHILOH WILLIAMS: When I was in high school in youth group, one of the big things was that you had to listen to Christian music. If it wasn't endorsed by God then it was bad. And my thing was that, you know, I-- how can art and music be bad if these are emotions? It's traditions that God created because people are expressing how they feel about this stuff. How could it be bad, you know? You're getting a glimpse into their lives.

DIANA BROWN: Yeah.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: And I think that's kind of how all of creativity is, is that you get a glimpse into the supernatural, divinity, people's minds, hearts, lives. It's all one and there are times I'll—I'll just be writing, it doesn't have to be a poem, or short story, just kind of free writing—

DIANA BROWN: Yeah.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: And I'll see things about myself that I didn't know. And the only way I could know it is if it was given to me by an outside force somehow.

DIANA BROWN: Hmm. [pause] So you wouldn't psychologize that and say like, "Oh. Like, I knew it somewhere in my subconscious and it's coming out now because of this medium." You feel like, it's like, almost like a guide kinda thing or—

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Yeah. I think there can be two avenues and one is definitely, you know, the writing brought out something that was hidden away in my subconscious and—but I also definitely feel that it's a medium where the universe or higher power goes, "Hey. Hello."

DIANA BROWN: Hmm. Uh-huh.

[Williams laughs]

SHILOH WILLIAMS: “Do I have to hit you over the head with a two by four?” And I dunno. Maybe they’re the same thing, maybe they’re not.

DIANA BROWN: Uh-huh.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: I just know that it didn’t consciously come from me.

DIANA BROWN: Yeah. Yeah.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Because when I consciously try to create it doesn’t work at all. (laughs)

DIANA BROWN: Uh-huh. I’m gonna run to the bathroom real quick.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Yeah.

DIANA BROWN: I will be right back.

([Recorder is paused])

DIANA BROWN: Um, so I wanted to ask—I thought of this as I got up—um, you were mentioning you feel like you’re not quite where you would want to be. Where do you do you wanna be? What does that look like?

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Um, more of a day-to-day practice. A deeper knowledge of-- basically the book knowledge that have come from reading, studying, and just kind of figuring out where the beliefs come from. Like, you know, you read in just any 101 books and it tells you, “We do this, and we do that, and we do this.” I wanna know why.

DIANA BROWN: Yeah.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: You know? It’s nice that okay, we walked around in the circle three times, but where did that come from?

DIANA BROWN: [echoes] Where did that come from?

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Why do we do that?

DIANA BROWN: Yeah.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Because otherwise it feels empty to me.

DIANA BROWN: Uh-huh.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: So I want to do more book-knowledge reading. More day to day practice sort of thing. [51:27.1]

DIANA BROWN: Yeah. Some more knowledge about origins and reasons why combined with like more personal sort of—

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Right, right. Right.

DIANA BROWN: Yeah. That's—[both women laugh] common goals. Common goals.

[Brown Laughs]

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Yeah. Yeah.

DIANA BROWN: I would definitely personally like to do more day-to-day practice, which I also find sort of grounding and centering sort of stuff is really helpful when I'm prepared to do it on a day-to-day basis.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Yeah. It's—it kind helps you realize that whatever's going on around you, it'll eventually go away.

DIANA BROWN: Yeah.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: But, you know, it helps me from being overwhelmed with just stuff.

DIANA BROWN: Exactly, which is like a deep breath kind of thing.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Uh-huh.

DIANA BROWN: Yeah.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Exactly. Uh, the- uh, teacher T. Thorn Coyle –

DIANA BROWN: Uh-huh?

SHILOH WILLIAMS: In one of her books—I don't know if you've read any of her books?

DIANA BROWN: I haven't read any of her books. I know who she is and I've read some blog posts by her.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Uh-huh. I haven' read all of her books all the way through, but she has this method of staying in the moment and she calls it a touch key.

And basically what it is is you take a mundane thing like reaching for your mouse or car keys and that's a trigger to your mind to just kinda stop and say, "Okay. I'm in this moment." You know? "Okay. Now I can move on." Just so that you can not get caught up in the day-to-day things. And it helps.

DIANA BROWN: Yeah.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: I've not been able to put it into full practice, but, when I do think about it, it slows my mind down and it's finding those little things throughout other people's books and experiences that I really wanna know.

DIANA BROWN: Yeah. You do. You can find some sort of—I dunno. I'm kind of caught between like I wanna read and find all those things, and like, at the same time it's like—it's never-ending. I mean—

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Right. [Both women laugh]

DIANA BROWN: It's like—so I'm like I've gotta stop myself sometimes and be like, "Now do something."

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Yeah.

DIANA BROWN: I'm really bad about that. That's why I was armchair for so long. I feel like—I dunno. So.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Yeah, I—I have lots of ideas and things I want to do, and I'll start a lot of them, but I'll get like ten percent in and just kind of abandon it.

DIANA BROWN: Yeah.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: And, um—

DIANA BROWN: But that's why it seems like it would be, um, helpful to be in something like Cheryl's coven—

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Right.

DIANA BROWN: Where you do at least on a certain basis. You are being trained and you do have to sort of, like, do something even if it's just like going to the celebrations.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Right. Exactly.

DIANA BROWN: Yeah.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Yeah, it's—she's been pounding me on a while to start my studies back up and so I'll be able to do that once I no longer am working. And I hate that it kinda took me to not have a job to do it, but hey.

DIANA BROWN: Yeah. Sometimes--

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Yeah.

DIANA BROWN: You know?

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Life gets in the way of life.

DIANA BROWN: Yeah. Definitely.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Uh-huh.

DIANA BROWN: The job can be—depends on what you're doing—can be exhausting.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Yeah.

DIANA BROWN: Even if it's regular hours or whatever. You know?

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Yeah. I work 8:30 to 5:30, but when I get home I just like I don't wanna do anything.

DIANA BROWN: Oh, yeah.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Not a damn thing.

DIANA BROWN: Yeah. It's really—I dunno. Hopefully you'll find something that won't be or feel so tiring next time, you know?

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Yeah, I hope so, too. I kinda wanna just take a couple months off first.

DIANA BROWN: Yeah.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: And—mainly because I can.

DIANA BROWN: Yeah, yeah.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: My husband's just like, 'yeah, we'll be tight on money for a while, but eh.'

DIANA BROWN: That's cool.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: It's worse—it's not worse than you being miserable at your job. So.

DIANA BROWN: Yeah.

[Williams laughs]

DIANA BROWN: Well, I dunno, I think that we've sort of gotten through my questions. Um, is there anything else you wanna say? I dunno.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Well, I think we covered just about everything. Yeah.
[56:07.0]

DIANA BROWN: Okay. Alright. Very cool. Oh!

SHILOH WILLIAMS: Including some other stuff I ramble on that—

DIANA BROWN: No, it was awesome. I just remembered though, I forgot to—I usually start out these interview by saying, “Can you just say your name and where you're from?” So we can end it on that.

SHILOH WILLIAMS: [laughs] Um, My name is Shiloh and I'm from here, Kansas City.

DIANA BROWN: Awesome. Beautiful. This was wonderful.

[Recording ends 56:30.2]