

Cheryl Locke (with Mike Nichols)

Interviewed by Diana Brown in Kansas City, Kansas

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Transcribed by Diana Brown

Abstract: Oral history interview with Cheryl Locke conducted by Diana Brown at Mike Nichols' apartment in Kansas City on July 30, 2014. Cheryl runs a coven, and is involved with the running of Gaea Goddess Gathering, a weekend of Pagan ritual and workshops at Camp Gaea in McLouth, Kansas. This interview discusses those experiences, as well as Cheryl's discovery of Paganism, and the role of sexuality in Paganism. 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, if you just want to say your name and where you're from, which can be sort of a story—I know it is for me, but...

CHERYL LOCKE: No, for me, it's just, um, well, I'm Cheryl, Locke, and, um, I'm from Kansas City, was born and raised here, um.

DIANA BROWN: Alright.

CHERYL LOCKE: Lived a couple of other places, but...

DIANA BROWN: Always on, the, uh [. . .], always on the Missouri side?

CHERYL LOCKE: Yeah, actually I got married in Germany, so I spent nine months in Germany, and, uh, we spent a little bit of time down in Montrose, Missouri, and moved back to Kansas City, and now I actually live in the country, I live, uh, just in between, um, Harrisonville and Clinton.

DIANA BROWN: Oh, okay.

CHERYL LOCKE: Got forty acres.

DIANA BROWN: Oh, wow.

CHERYL LOCKE: Five horses.

DIANA BROWN: [. . .] Animals.

CHERYL LOCKE: Oh yeah, lots of animals. A llama, three dogs, two cats, an angora rabbit, I think that's it. Beehives.

DIANA BROWN: Okay, well, I guess then my next question would be sort of, um, what, do you have any prior religious background when you were growing up?

CHERYL LOCKE: I was raised Catholic.

DIANA BROWN: That's, again, I think I said this to Mike, too, I get that answer a lot.

CHERYL LOCKE: There's a lot of us reformed Catholics around.

DIANA BROWN: And then, I guess, how did you, how were you introduced to Paganism, or witchcraft, or...?

CHERYL LOCKE: Well, um, gosh, back in nineteen eighty...I'd say about 1985, I think. I was working nights and I came home from work, I got off work at like 10, 10:30, and I-- 'must have been ten, I got home--and my husband's a hunter, and he was in the kitchen cleaning his gun and he just had the tv on just for noise, I think, in the living room, and I came in, and I caught the tail end of a program, it was around Halloween, which is when you get all the witches come out. Yeah, and seriously that's the only time tv shows and radio shows and stuff ever really want us around, is around Halloween. Anyway, it was around Halloween, and there was a program on, I don't even remember the program, but there was a witch on it, and she, I just caught the very tail end, like the last sentence she said, and it was, "if there's anything I want people to understand about witchcraft, it's that we're nature worshippers, not Satan worshippers." And I said, I didn't know that! And it was like, I don't know why it struck me as important even, but it did, and so I had to find out what it was then. And so I went and asked some friends who I knew were kind of into occult stuff, anyway, they sent me to Mike's bookstore at the time [The Magic Lantern, Mike Nichols' Kansas City bookstore in the 1980s], and we, gosh, I got the book, *Drawing Down the Moon*, and read it, and then went to my husband and I said, "I think I'm a witch." And he goes: "Uh, yeah, well, whatever." And I said: "And I want you to read this book that I just read, because I'm very serious about it. This is something I'm, that, that, for whatever reason has really struck a chord, and it's something that I need to follow up with." And he read it, and he said, "I think I'm a witch too."

DIANA BROWN: Nice. Nicely done.

CHERYL LOCKE: Which was really nice, because that was an area we had never shared before. He had always been pretty agnostic ever since I'd known him. So this whole...

DIANA BROWN: Were you still a practicing Catholic, or?

CHERYL LOCKE: I was not practicing regularly, but yeah, I would still go to church occasionally and the kids went to Catholic school, and...

DIANA BROWN: Yeah...

CHERYL LOCKE: So yeah, we were still, we weren't real active, but...

DIANA BROWN: But you were interested in something...

CHERYL LOCKE: Yeah. And so after that, 'went back to Mike's bookstore and got more books and, and, and at first, even before I had found his bookstore, I had gone to the library looking for stuff, and all I could find was stuff about the witch trials and Satanism, and, no, that's not right, that's not right [I thought]...Actually it was a friend of mine who'd lived across the street and I had asked her, and she said, "Well, Cheryl, I have a book, but I don't think it's what you want, it's not Christian." And I said, "Yeah, that's what I want!" So she had given me the book and let me read it and sent me to Mike's store, told me where she got it, so that's kind of how I had found his store.

DIANA BROWN: Was that *Drawing Down the Moon*, or was that...?

CHERYL LOCKE: Yes, it was *Drawing Down the Moon*, yeah.

DIANA BROWN: Do you remember some of the other kind of early books?

CHERYL LOCKE: I do. After that, I got, what's the one by Marion Weinstein?

MIKE NICHOLS: *Positive Magic*.

CHERYL LOCKE: No. Was it? I thought it was *Earth* something? Isn't there an *Earth, Earth Magic*?

DIANA BROWN: There was something with "Earth" in it that she wrote, I don't remember what it was...

CHERYL LOCKE: Yes, it was *Earth*, whatever the *Earth* book was.

MIKE NICHOLS: [. . .] the follow up.

CHERYL LOCKE: But I got that and *Spiral Dance*. I got, boy, brain-dead, what's the one by Leo Martello?

DIANA BROWN: Oh, *Weird Ways of Witchcraft*?

CHERYL LOCKE: No...

MIKE NICHOLS: Something, *the Old Religion*?

CHERYL LOCKE: Yep, something like that.

MIKE NICHOLS: His first book.

CHERYL LOCKE: Yeah.

MIKE NICHOLS: Yeah.

CHERYL LOCKE: Yeah.

MIKE NICHOLS: Yeah, I can't think of it.

CHERYL LOCKE: I actually read another one by Sybil Leek.

MIKE NICHOLS: *Diary of a Witch*.

CHERYL LOCKE: I think so. And got, let's see, *Spiral Dance*, got *Rites from the, Magical Rites from the Crystal Well*. And basically just went crazy, just kind of developed my library all at once.

DIANA BROWN: Yeah.

CHERYL LOCKE: And then ended up getting things like *Eight Sabbats for Witches*, which were, you know, they, they were a little later. And that's kind of, when I did classes, those were the ones that I had my students read a little later, you know, I'd kind of do the bas...oh, and the Scott Cunningham book...

DIANA BROWN: *The Solitary Practitioner* one?

CHERYL LOCKE: Yes, no, and another one too. I did have *Solitary Practitioner* too. That wasn't the first one I got. *Truth About Witchcraft?* Something like that?

DIANA BROWN: Oh yeah, *Truth about Witchcraft Today*, the little...

CHERYL LOCKE: The little bitty one, yeah, that was it. I had that one. Then, did a lot of reading about Celtic mythology. Did reading on divination practices, like Tarot and scrying and stuff like that. Oh, and then Ray Buckland, I loved Ray Buckland too. I had, gosh, I had a bunch of his books. So, anything by Ray I probably had it.

MIKE NICHOLS: She never took any of my classes, but she sent her husband to me.

CHERYL LOCKE: Yeah, my husband went to his classes. I worked nights, so I couldn't go to his classes. [You] act like I chose not to go! Yeah, so, while I was at work, my husband went to his classes.

MIKE NICHOLS: Yeah, he would record them and bring them home to you, right?

CHERYL LOCKE: Yeah, he did. Yep.

DIANA BROWN: So then how did you, I don't know, when did you start sort of like, doing things, I guess?

CHERYL LOCKE: Actually, right away. The neighbor that brought me *Drawing Down the Moon*, she decided she was interested, so we kind of started our own group even though we didn't know what we were doing. And then somehow, probably, oh yeah, when we went to his store one of the times, he had a flyer up for the Heartland Pagan Festival, and I said, "Ooh, I want to go to that." And it was like, really close to when the festival time was, and I hadn't seen it before and he was being very coy and said, well, you'll have to give me your name and number and I'll let the organizers get in contact with you.

MIKE NICHOLS: It was my way of getting her name and number.

Laughter

CHERYL LOCKE: Oh whatever. So, we went to that festival, and that's actually where I met my first, well my only high priestess. And had met some other people, and went to some open rituals, and, you know, just kind of had gotten an idea of what we were supposed to be doing, but then once we went to the festival and I meet Rhiannon [spelling uncertain], I immediately joined as an organizer for Heartland Pagan Festival, I joined Heartland Spiritual Alliance, and also joined Rhiannon's coven, and got, stayed in the coven, got my first and second degrees there.

DIANA BROWN: Rhiannon, I've heard of a couple of Rhiannons.

CHERYL LOCKE: Rhiannon Bennett.

DIANA BROWN: So that's not Rhiannon of Rhiannon and George.

CHERYL LOCKE: No, no different Rhiannon. Rhiannon is actually one of our oldest Kansas City Pagans, next to him [Mike] I think. She, she's organized a lot of things and one of them, she started Heartland Spiritual Alliance, which puts on the Heartland Pagan Festival. She doesn't live here anymore. She moved down to Alabama. Which is where she's from, originally. But, after my second degree, I studied awhile longer, and got my third degree from the same high priest who had done all my other degrees, so, even though Rhiannon wasn't here, he, he did that with another lady who had been a priestess for a long time too, so. So, got all three of my degrees, started my own coven back in 1994, I think, 2 or 4, something like that.

DIANA BROWN: And started teaching yourself.

CHERYL LOCKE: Yeah.

DIANA BROWN: And where were you teaching when you were doing that?

CHERYL LOCKE: Out of my house. Our tradition basically was like, you, you asked to be a part of our coven, or our tradition, and then, so, it was teaching from our coven's point of view, I mean, it wasn't his [Mike's], which were just very general Wicca, this was so that you could join our coven.

DIANA BROWN: Yeah. And what, can you tell me a little bit about your coven, and its sort of point of view?

CHERYL LOCKE: It's British Traditional. We actually can trace our lineage back to Wheelwright, England, back in the 1960s, I think. We traced back that far. And basically, it's pretty much a handed down tradition. We write everything out. It used to, back like when I first joined, I had to write every--, my whole book of Shadows was by hand. I don't make my students do that anymore.

DIANA BROWN: What do you do, just like photocopies, or?

CHERYL LOCKE: They can put it on the computer. They basically have to have a Book of Shadows.

DIANA BROWN: Okay.

CHERYL LOCKE: That's pretty much a given for any kind of traditional witch.

DIANA BROWN: Yeah.

CHERYL LOCKE: You have to have your Book of Shadows and you have to have a book of spell work. And it contains, I'm not real picky what it contains, usually it will have rituals, it will have readings that they've done, it will have poetry they've made up, or that they copied and like, you know, it can have lots of things in it. But...

DIANA BROWN: It doesn't just have to have the tradition's stuff in it.

CHERYL LOCKE: No, it can have, it's, it's a choice, and, and, and truthfully, I really see religion as something that is evolving, and I can't say I do everything exactly like my old coven did. We really do things—and I always tell my students, "We are a Celtic coven, and we follow a Celtic pantheon, which does not mean that you don't study other pantheons," or that we never do a ritual using gods and goddesses from other pantheons, or, it never, it doesn't mean that you can never change the aspects of a ritual, but, give me a good reason for doing so. You know, give me the purpose that, that you want to accomplish and, and we'll do it that way. So, yeah, we, we've changed quite a few things from the way I was originally taught, just because they make sense for us.

DIANA BROWN: And do you think that's more or less common, that people in a tradition will kind of be open to--?

CHERYL LOCKE: Boy, it depends on the tradition. Some traditions will not allow you to deviate at all. And others are a little more lax. But I think a lot of people leave some of those real rigid traditions and go on to form their own groups and use what they want out of that tradition and then make up the rest with what makes sense to them. But they could no longer call themselves members of that tradition.

DIANA BROWN: Even...

CHERYL LOCKE: Even though [. . .]. I mean, they, they could still, like if they were Georgian [a witchcraft tradition], they could still call themselves Georgian, but their coven—

DIANA BROWN: But their coven wouldn't be.

CHERYL LOCKE: Right.

DIANA BROWN: I see. Okay, okay. Let's see here. [. . .] Um, would you say that you're sort of, your practices and your theology have changed much since when you started [. . .] up to today?

CHERYL LOCKE: It's evolved. It's filled out. It's grown through my experiences. Boy, different...Yes and no, I mean the basic tenets are still there. But like I said, they're just

more fleshed out somehow. You know, they're, they're not as confined. I, I think I had to figure out what God and Goddess meant to me, like, you know, how literal did I want to be as far as a male god and a female goddess, as separate entities.

DIANA BROWN: And what kinds of conclusions did you come to about that?

CHERYL LOCKE: I am pretty much of the thinking that there is one deity or primary god and goddess that encompasses both aspects. And, and at some point, something within that deity came together as male and female, you know, or as positive/negative, or however you want to describe it, but that, that union took place to begin creation, I guess, or begin the creative process, you know, so I, I don't know how I'd, I still don't know that I have a literal definition of deity, but I, I guess I would consider, I, I guess my definition, what sums up my definition best is gestalt.

DIANA BROWN: Can you say a little more about that?

CHERYL LOCKE: Yeah. Just, first of all, I'm pantheistic, so everything is God. But I think that all these pieces put together are so much more, and that's what makes up true deity.

DIANA BROWN: I see. Okay.

CHERYL LOCKE: You know, whether it's, you know, pieces of, of, yeah, it, it's just, it's going from that microscopic and, and to the point that we don't even understand microscopic, you know, to, to this macrocosmic thing all, all being interconnected, and being greater than each piece alone.

DIANA BROWN: Let's see. Well I guess I wanted to ask then about community since my impression is that you're one of the people who started Gaea Goddess Gathering.

CHERYL LOCKE: I didn't start it, but I, I am the coordinator at this point. And I actually, I started out with Heartland Spiritual Alliance. I was in that in various capacities for, oh I don't know, probably three years or so, and then I became president of that organization. I was president for four years of that.

DIANA BROWN: Oh, wow, okay. And what did that entail?

CHERYL LOCKE: That was organizing our festivals, which went from about a hundred and fifty people to, the last year that I was president we had twelve-hundred. It, it's a lot of organization [. . .]. Yeah, a lot of administrative stuff and just keeping everybody doing what they're supposed to be doing, pretty much. We have a pretty big group [. . .], we had. I'm actually not, I'm still in it, technically, but not, I'm not real active. But we did have a pretty good sized organization, you know, we put on rituals, we had vendors, we had concerts, and we had guest speakers, and so it was just kind of overseeing all that organization.

DIANA BROWN: And what made you want to take a sort of leadership role in that organization?

CHERYL LOCKE: You know, the whole Wicca thing...when I first became Wiccan, I told a girlfriend of mine, one of my best friends, that I was a witch, and she said, "Oh, Cheryl, do you really know what you're getting into?" And I said, "Gail, I have never been so sure of anything in my life." I said, "Finally, I have a purpose, I have a reason for being here, I have something to do, something that is important and it's like I've found my place." And so I, this was kind of following through with that. It was, I found so much satisfaction in just being Wiccan in general, and then to actually help people connect and find new ways for them to, I don't know, the classes and you know, for them to relate to each other, and, and their God and Goddess, you know, it, it was, it was—cool. So yeah, I loved it. It did, after, oh, gosh, I was in that organization about twenty years before I kind of started letting go a little bit, and then two years ago—I was never real active in GGG [Gaea Goddess Gathering] when it first started, because I was so active in Heartland, but I, some friends of mine had started going and then they became active in it, and somehow they twisted my arm, and I ended up as coordinator a couple years ago, so. I do know the lady that did start it though, the, the lady whose idea it was at the very beginning, and, and she just, she's dead now. Her name was Kerry [sp?] Moonstar, and she really, she was lesbian, and really felt like there should be a place for women to be able to relate to each other—in, in a feminine way. You know, we relate to each other so differently when guys are around, and we relate to men differently, and you know, I don't know, there is something very special about this women's gathering, where we all feel like we're sisters and like we're heading in the same directions, where we're so supportive of each other. A lot of the women have been rape victims or been victims of abuse, and so having this space and this very safe and sacred space is so important to them. And so in a way, it is very much as fulfilling as Heartland was. It's not as big a festival, but it serves its purpose for sure.

DIANA BROWN: And what do you think about, I guess, this is reminding me of some of the controversies of however many years ago at Pantheacon, the women's only festival [a women's only ritual was held at the Pagan conference, Pantheacon] where, I think there was like a transgendered male to female tried to come in, that there was all kinds of controversy about how that was handled.

CHERYL LOCKE: We have, we have really struggled to come to terms with that. We had, a couple years ago, a transgender lady come and talk to us about, you know, just what is transgender, and this is probably the part I don't know if you should print or not, or make public—we do allow transgenders. Presurgery transgenders even. As long as they have been living 24/7 as a woman for at least a year. Not everybody can afford those surgeries, you know, or get them done all at once, but that doesn't mean they're not a woman, you know, that they don't behave and live as a woman. So all we ask is that they be discreet, and not go flaunting that they're still male—technically. And most of them don't—most of them wouldn't. Yeah, so it's, we just really don't have a problem with it, but we did struggle with it for a long time, for a long time it was post-surgery only. But it got to where we just, we couldn't leave them out. If they really wanted to come, and some of them did—I mean, it was a huge issue for them. But it's also a huge issue

for those women that need to be with women, and women only. That they feel safe, and comfortable at the festival too. So that's why we ask them just to be discreet, and we have not, knock on wood, had any problems yet. I mean, and again, it's only been a couple years that we've been letting them in pre-surgery, but...

DIANA BROWN: How old is the festival now?

CHERYL LOCKE: 17.

DIANA BROWN: 17. Okay. Cool. [. . .] Has the Internet played much of a role for you in terms of....?

CHERYL LOCKE: Boy, it sure makes registrations easier.

DIANA BROWN: So, administratively.

CHERYL LOCKE: Administratively, yes.

DIANA BROWN: Yeah.

CHERYL LOCKE: As far as, it, oh, boy, as far....I guess yes and no. It's become *the* networking device now, it's our, it's almost like our festivals aren't quite as important as they used to be, because that used to be pretty much the only way to do any networking, was if [. . .] come and did the festivals. But now you've got the Internet, so, it has changed. You've got a lot of Internet groups, you can find tons and tons of information, you know, whereas we used to have to go up and out and make up our own rituals, now we can go look at other people's rituals for ideas, or, you know, as long as we give credit, I mean, I always tell my coven, I don't care if you copy a ritual, as long as you give credit to whoever wrote it. I mean that doesn't mean, you know, just because somebody else wrote it, it doesn't mean it's not a worthwhile ritual that we shouldn't be doing, so. So, yeah, as long as they give credit, we, it's made it very easy for them to get, at least get ideas for rituals, for us to get all kinds of information. I mean, that's where he had all his articles [Mike] before he wrote his book, so, yeah, the Internet's been great. It's also been, I think, a little bit of a curse. It's, I, I think it hurts traditional witchcraft.

DIANA BROWN: How so?

CHERYL LOCKE: I see coven memberships declining, people are more solitary and less, they, they are more inclined to form their own groups without traditional teachings, without that handed down tradition. And I think that's sad in some ways, because I think they're missing a lot. We were just talking not too long ago, and I can't, now I can't think of some of the things that we were talking, that they're kind of missing out on. Do you remember, hon?

MIKE NICHOLS: Well, we're losing a lot of knowledge as older folks die off, if they haven't written it down and handed it on, you know I think a lot of that traditional lore is being lost, unfortunately.

CHERYL LOCKE: Well, and just a lot of the coven traditions, you know, just the background traditions, and you know, this, the kind of sense of history, I guess. I used to think that lineage in witchcraft wasn't important, and I don't care which lineage it is, but I think it gives you a sense of history somehow. You know, to say, this is where we came from.

[00:30:34.11]

Um, and this is the way...even if it's only this is the way we used to do things, we may not do them that way anymore, but this is, this is the progression.

DIANA BROWN: And this is where we came from.

MIKE NICHOLS: There are [. . .] odd little traditions that never get written down even in Books of Shadows—you've gotta be there. Like, like when you're passing the mead chalice around or something, and somebody [. . .] and when it gets back to the high priestess, she has to down whatever's left. Just a silly little thing, but a lot of covens did it, but you'd never see it written down. Our group always did it.

CHERYL LOCKE: Yeah. In fact Lane would always make sure there was a little bit left.

MIKE NICHOLS: There had to be a little bit left [. . .] the high priestess was always the last one to drink. And if there was a lot, then she had to down it! Which led to a lot of merriment, but you would never see, you know, you'd have to be at a coven to encounter that, I think. Little things like that.

CHERYL LOCKE: Yeah, I mean, and just, our whole tradition, I mean, being in our coven, you know, there's a whole bunch of little things that we don't write down, you know, just the, we always at the end, when we close the circle, it's always done with a song and grounding that other covens don't do, and then we always have this little tradition of everybody gets hugged afterwards. Not anything that, you know, is going to change, I don't know, somebody's practices or anything, but just little things that, it seems a shame to lose to...

DIANA BROWN: That tell you something too about sort of the kind of community it is, but you wouldn't necessarily prescribe, like, and after this, then you hug everybody, or something. You know. Oh, I was gonna ask, do you think that, so you were saying that festivals used to be sort of the major source of networking and now, you know, the Internet more is, do you think that's changed the tone or the way festivals are? Do they feel different?

CHERYL LOCKE: Oh, boy, they do, but I'm not sure it's because of the Internet.

DIANA BROWN: Okay.

CHERYL LOCKE: I think it's because I'm getting old, but...[laughter]

DIANA BROWN: Well, say more, I guess!

CHERYL LOCKE: I guess before, when I was younger, I used to go to meet people and do my networking. Now, it's like, I know those people, and I only get to see them once or twice a year, and I won't miss festival because that's the only time I get to see these people that I really care about. So even though they're on the Internet, and I do keep track of them through Facebook and stuff, but it's still, it's not the same.

DIANA BROWN: Okay. Let's see. Oh—I was gonna ask too about, so, using different words, Wicca and witch and Pagan and...do you make a distinction between, or among them?

CHERYL LOCKE: I don't make a distinction between witch and Wicca. I do make a distinction between witch and Pagan, because witch is like a subset of Pagan.

DIANA BROWN: That's the distinction.

CHERYL LOCKE: Mhm.

DIANA BROWN: Okay. Let's see. Oh, I guess, is land, you were talking about earlier too that you saw this person on television, and they said, witches worship nature. So, I guess, is nature particularly important for you then?

CHERYL LOCKE: It is. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, very, that's, we have our farm and our circle is in the farm and I actually, I should show you pictures, it's beautiful. We, when we bought our farm, the first thing we did was plant a circle of trees. It was bare, bare dirt, it had been farmland. And we planted our circle of trees.

MIKE NICHOLS: [. . .] big circle. When I first heard the phrase, I was like...I didn't know.

CHERYL LOCKE: It's big. And, I don't know that, that land and nature, I'm very much an earth person. I just, I can't imagine being stuck inside all the time and...

DIANA BROWN: And that was something, like, before you encountered witchcraft...

CHERYL LOCKE: Growing up, yeah. And my husband and I had always had kind of dreams of owning land at some point [. . .], and then I got horses. We actually bought the land because I bought horses. And it was, it ended up, I had like three horses, and it was cheaper to make a land payment than it was to board them.

DIANA BROWN: I see. Yeah.

CHERYL LOCKE: And so after that, when...

MIKE NICHOLS: She got more horses.

CHERYL LOCKE: Well, yeah. But I actually, even though the horses were the primary reason we got the land, we've always, I can't even describe what it means to have those forty acres, you know, that, that piece of land that I take care of for now. I don't know, it's just, it's such a part of me that it's almost like having the, the whole witchcraft

thing and the, the cycles and the, you know, the holidays, the harvests, and, you know, all that, that was almost already a part of me. I think that's, I think that's why I was so drawn to it in the first place, because I grew up like, that was just me, and, and that's why after reading *Drawing Down the Moon*, I went and I said, I'm a witch. It, it, there's just such a connection to, to the earth for me, I cannot separate my, my religion, my self from earth, and cycles, and...So yeah, it's really important to me. Very, very, very.

DIANA BROWN: There's a line that I remember from, from this book, actually [referencing a book on the coffee table], where he's talking about he always had this issue when he was a kid, and he was like raised in the Episcopal church, and he always had this sense that like the church ended at the end of town, or something like that, the edge of the forest, like its concerns kind of just stopped there. So.

CHERYL LOCKE: I know when I was growing up I used to ask my mom why animals didn't have souls, and you know, just everything in the natural world was so important to me. And it was so important to me that it was something sacred. You know, that there was something sacred about everything, I think I've always been a pantheist, actually. I just didn't know it.

DIANA BROWN: Oh, I guess, are sort of like creativity, or you know, maybe art-making explicitly, but more generally creativity, is that sort of important in your practice?

CHERYL LOCKE: It is important because for, in my tradition we actually will write new rituals, we don't have to, but we don't, we have the same basic structure, but within that structure, we can change things. You know, we can change the body of the ritual and the things that we say, or the meditations that we do, we can change the calling of the quarters, we can, you know, change which god and goddess we use, and so creativity is pretty important, and then too, a lot of the times, we will actually do craft projects for the ritual, like at Halloween, we'll make masks, at, oh, gosh, what else do we do.

MIKE NICHOLS: [. . .]

CHERYL LOCKE: Candle [. . .], yeah. We make candles. We, we color eggs at Equinox, at Spring Equinox, and we will, and we have the maypole, so we'll do all the ribbons for the maypole at Beltane. So yeah, we do a lot of craft projects, which, you know, you don't have to be particularly creative, but that's part of magic for us. It's, like making those Easter eggs, we will do different things, like we'll put, we'll paint, you know, things that we want, you know, to manifest. We've done, well, and then the candles, we'll bless the candles, and we'll use them throughout the year. So, so these things are kind of, they help put us in the mindset of, of what we want to accomplish during the ritual, they aid us with some of the magic that we do during the ritual, so yeah, creativity, I would say it's, I mean, you know, we don't all have to be musicians and artists and stuff, but, but there is a certain amount of creativity whether you're good at it or not, I guess! You don't have to be good at it, you just kind of have to know what...We'll make flower wreaths at Beltane too, and, you know, corn dollies in the fall, and, so.

DIANA BROWN: And is magic, you were mentioning, is that usually a part of your ritual, is there usually some sort of...

CHERYL LOCKE: Every ritual is magic. But yeah, we will occasionally, I mean, we'll do extra magic during a ritual, depending, 'just depends. Sometimes we'll do healing, if somebody needs it. Sometimes we will just do, most of the time we just do magic surrounding the holiday, you know, what is it that this, this holiday can [00:42:18.17] do for us, what can it bring out in us, what, what can we do to help carry this, the idea of this holiday throughout the year. So there's always some form of magic involved, and it does change forms depending on my mood and [laughter] what needs done, and [laughter].

DIANA BROWN: Okay. Let's see. I guess, what role does sexuality play in your religious....

CHERYL LOCKE: Well, I do feel like being a nature religion, sexuality is, is very much inherent in the religion itself. In creation itself. I think there is nothing more sacred on earth than sex. There's nothing that brings you closer to God and Goddess than sex. The, I think that...being raised Catholic I had always heard, sex is sacred, and, and I think the Christians are right about that, it's just that they also tell you not to do it. [laughter] But that's, there's nothing that will get you closer to deity than, than sex, and you say not to do it! That doesn't make sense. So, yeah, it's almost inherent in the religion. I find it very sad that we're still, even a lot of the Pagans who...I mean, obviously, most of them have come out of Christianity, but they're so still influenced by our culture that sex is still a bad thing to them, and they still fall into some real negative stereotypes, and I see and hear that a lot around me, and it makes me kind of sad, because, do you really understand what religion you're practicing? [laughter] And that doesn't mean you have to be promiscuous, or, you know, you have to do things that make you uncomfortable or whatever, but I do think you need to understand the part that sexuality plays, and that, what you say and your behaviours may contradict some of that, you know, and so yeah, it's, it's very important and it does make me a little sad that, that it's not more acceptable to the people who practice this religion.

DIANA BROWN: In what ways do you see it not being, do you see people expressing that it's not okay?

CHERYL LOCKE: Well, like there was a festival once, and there was this guy chasing this gal around, and she was obviously not opposed to it, but I, I was hearing people say very negative things about him, because he was making sexual overtures toward her, and it's like—Wait! Why not? You know, how do people get together if you're not going to make some kind of sexual overture, you know? Or, or, you know, 'cause, some kind of come-on thing, I mean, he was just trying to get to know her and being playful and, they were young and, and, but it was just the idea that these guys were not, were saying that was somehow wrong. You know, and I think that's because we come from this very, very rigid culture that says, sex is not okay. And sex is supposed to be very,

or, or courtship is supposed to be very prim and proper, and, and follow certain guidelines, and, and it doesn't always, you know? And it's nobody else's business. They should just keep their nose out of it, if they don't like it, until the girl complains, in which case, maybe they get their nose in it! It was none of their business, and I just felt they were, I don't know, kind of not...

DIANA BROWN: Uptight.

CHERYL LOCKE: Yeah! You know, not letting nature take its course, I guess. You know, it's not like they weren't of age, so, you know, and, and I, I, I don't know, I, I think that one of the reasons that, that I felt so comfortable, even, because even before I was Wiccan, my husband and I were in an open relationship, and I had always felt that as being, as making us different, as making us odd, and, you know, not fit in with most of our friends and stuff, and when I, when I became Wiccan, my high priestess was in a triad, and I thought, oh, God, this is awesome, you know! Finally I've met people who think the same way I do! And, so it was really, really cool, but then, then I started seeing some of the uptightness too, and, which, you know, I mean, it, it's, in a way, I hate to say it's forgivable, but I don't know that it's unexpected, considering the society we come from. So. You know, my coven is a skylad optional coven. We don't do the orgy thing, or group sex thing, but I think there is strong magic in sex. I think any time you raise that kind of energy, and especially when you raise that, that kind of energy in, in a creative act, that's pretty strong magic.

DIANA BROWN: Well, I guess then, have you ever had any negative experiences because of your religious practices, or [. . .]?

CHERYL LOCKE: I have. I have, actually. I have lost friends because of it. I don't know whether they were afraid of me or what, but it's like, they find out I'm a witch, and all of a sudden they quit talking to me, but I've also found a lot of people that, that I thought might not talk to me anymore that were okay with it. You know, it's like, and for actually, even my mother, I came out to my mother before she died, and when I first told her, she was so upset. And I was trying to explain to her, and [. . .] showed her some of the books, and she was a very staunch Catholic, and she was just like, I, and I told her, I said, I don't even believe in Satan, Mom, I'm not, I don't worship Satan, I don't even believe in Satan. "Well, you may not believe in him, but, but, you just, you *are* Satan!" And I'm going, excuse me. I said, "Mother, think about what you just said. You, of all people, know me better than anybody else. Why would you call me Satan? You know, do you really think I'm that evil?" And she ended up having to live with us for about a year before she died, and, and I told her when she was getting ready to move in, I said, "You know, I'm not going to stop practicing because you're there," and I said, "There will be people over to the house, and we will be having,"—this is when we lived in the city still—I said, "we will be having rituals." And she understood that—I don't think she liked it, but, after a few rituals, she said, "Can I come to one?" And I said, "Yeah! You can come." So she did, and just a little before she died, I actually have a friend who's a priest that knows I'm Wiccan, and he's been a friend of the family ever since I was in

high school, and my mother loved him, and she wanted to see him, and so he came out to the house and he gave her last rites, and she was still, she wasn't ready to die yet, but she was getting, she was getting there, and so he went ahead and gave her last rites, and I, he told me later that they were talking a little bit about me being a witch, and he said that he, she had told him that she said, "I, I don't understand it, but it's okay." And I think that was one of the most validating moments I ever had, you know, one of the, the most understanding moments I ever had from my mother. [laughter] But so, so I've lost a few friends, but I think I've gained so much, you know, just, in the friends that I do have, and the understanding of the friends who, who aren't even Pagan, but who accept me anyway, so.

DIANA BROWN: And do you think, I don't know, in terms of issues, do you think, I don't know, aside from your mom, do you think things have changed over time, and, like, do fewer people have a bad reaction, or is it pretty much the same? In terms of...

CHERYL LOCKE: I think it's pretty much the same! [laughter] I think it's still seen, and especially for, for younger people who are trying to get into it, I think it's seen as something rebellious, which I hate, because a lot of them are in it because, you know, because it's different, and then they end up leaving and, you know, it ends up meaning really nothing to them. [00:53:32.10] But, but I, I think it's still pretty much scary to most Christian people. Although, I don't know, I think there's probably more who are, who at least understand what it's not, but they don't really understand what it is either. You know, the, even the ones who don't think we're Satanists, you know, we're hippie tree huggers, and, which is to a certain extent true, I suppose. But there's so much more than that!

DIANA BROWN: Yeah. In addition to that, however...

CHERYL LOCKE: Yeah. I have actually had people say, "Oh, that's just such an old hippie religion." And, no, no, not quite, you're kind of missing some things there.

DIANA BROWN: Anyway, what's wrong with that?

CHERYL LOCKE: Yeah.

DIANA BROWN: Well, I guess that's pretty much all the questions I have, but is there anything else you feel like you want to say, or, should be said?

CHERYL LOCKE: Pretty much if there's one thing I want people to understand is that we're nature worshippers, not Satan worshippers! [00:54:58.25] Yeah, and, and we are, I, I think we're a group of people that, we are a bit hedonistic at times, we like to have our fun, even our rituals are fun. My husband, on our, on his Facebook page, when my grandson was like nine months old, we had this big stockpot, and it was in the middle of the living room floor for some reason, and he decided he wanted to climb in the stockpot. And it was so cute, and so I undressed him, put him on the stove, gave him a carrot, and my husband's standing over him with the spoon. And I just think that's such an awesome picture.

MIKE NICHOLS: [. . .]

CHERYL LOCKE: It's hilarious. And so I think that, you know, I think we like, we, we're fun, we're honest, we are, I mean, ideally, you know, it's not that, that Paganism doesn't have its not Pagan-like people, just like Christians aren't always Christian-like. And unfortunately, as we've grown, I have seen more of that, which is really too bad, but I don't know, we're just very peaceful, I would really wish that, you know, people would understand us better, would have a, I guess a deeper understanding, I mean, you know, I think a lot of Christians really don't understand the whole nature thing, or the whole pantheistic thing, or what that really means, you know, that, to them pantheism is just, you know, God made everything, and it's not that. God *is* everything.

DIANA BROWN: Yeah, I didn't really like grok that until I'd been to a few rituals and then all of a sudden it sort of hit me when, I think, like the priestess was drawing down the moon or something, I was like whoah.

CHERYL LOCKE: And I think when you realize that, and probably one of the things that's most important to me, when you recognize that, that God is everything, you develop a respect for everything. You may not love everything, but you understand it has a place. And, and a right to exist.

DIANA BROWN: [. . .] I've heard that from one other person too, so that's interesting.

CHERYL LOCKE: Yeah. I think that, that pantheism draws such a total and complete reverence and respect and stewardship and, you know, it's like, yes, I deserve to be here, but so does everything else, and what am I going to make of my place in this universe, you know, what am I going to do that kind of delineates my place here.

DIANA BROWN: Can you say a little bit more about that?

CHERYL LOCKE: I guess it goes back to that I found my purpose. You know, now what am I gonna do with that? What am I going to do to make my space what, what I believe it should be. It's kind of like the "walk your talk," and to me, I guess that's what delineating my space is, is making sure that I live sacredly, that I exhibit those qualities that say that if somebody looks at me and knows I'm Wiccan, they know that this is okay, I'm still a good person, or maybe because I'm Wiccan, I'm a good person. Which, I think that's the other way around. But I think they're kind of connected too, you know? This, this whole idea of, not that I wasn't a good person before, but it, it's just enhanced everything. It's, it's just made it so that I want to, you know, I want to have, I don't know how to, how to express it, this light that says she's Wiccan, and, you know, this is a good thing. [01:00:27.20]

DIANA BROWN: I have definitely found that in the last year of my sort of really starting to get involved with it, that it has sort of, like, inculcated certain things in me, or something, [. . .], like there are certain things that I just can't do, like little things, like eating, which, like, like eating meat from fast food places. [. . .] all of a sudden it's not

even like I'm tempted to do it, you know, just, I just can't do it anymore. Just little things like that.

CHERYL LOCKE: Right. I told you my husband's a hunter, and he always does a ritual before he hunts, and a ritual after. After he, like if he kills a deer or something, he does a ritual afterwards too, and that is, we, we really like that, when we don't have to buy meat at the store, you know, a lot of, there are quite a few vegetarian Wiccans, and I'm not one of them. [. . .] But, but I don't like slaughterhouses, I like knowing that my meat was killed humanely.

[. . .]

DIANA BROWN: Well, this was wonderful. Thank you!

CHERYL LOCKE: Good! You're welcome. I Hope it was helpful.

DIANA BROWN: It was, it was really great.

[01:01:53]

[End of recording]