

## Aldous Storm Calmer Oral History

Renee 0:01

Alright, for the record, please state your name and the name of your coven, and where it's located.

Aldous 0:07

Okay, my name is Aldous, and I am Arch Priest of the Ancient Path Coven, headquartered in Kansas, but we are located across the country.

Renee: 0:21

How do you identify your religion? Are you Wiccan? What's the path?

Aldous: 0:27

Well, we follow the old European religion, the native European religions. All of those religions stem from the Proto Indo European people. It's technically a language, but it's the best term we can think of to identify them with. Wicca is the closest religion that people can identify with us. So we tend to roll with this because, even though it's not wrong, it's not necessarily right either, but it's kind of, it's okay enough.

[Long pause while we wait on the transcription to catch up]

Renee 1:15

Alright, so how would you describe your general beliefs? What are the defining characteristics of the Proto Indo European religion?

Aldous 1:23

So we are a polytheistic religion. We have lots and lots of gods and goddesses. And we also have an ancestor worship characteristic. So we believe there's two primordial deities, the Sky Father Dyeus and the Earth Mother Deghom, both of which were Proto Indo European deities. Every other god and goddess stems from them. And what kind of sets us apart from other polytheistic religions is that the, so we might pray to the Sky Father and the Earth Mother, but we don't necessarily believe that they have a direct interest in us individually, more so with the whole of what's called the xartus spelled x a r t u s if you want to look that up. However, that essentially means the universe as a whole. So like the Norse called it Yggdrasil, the world tree. We call it the xartus. Essentially, Dyeus and Deghom are concerned with, the way the xartus turns; not necessarily that Aldous might need money, or need to be healed of something, right.

Aldous 2:32

Then there are multiple gods and goddesses below them. Tons, too many to list in the time we have I'm sure. Below them, we have any, well any human spirit is typically labeled a spirit, right. But any non-human spirit is called a faerie in our religion. There are certain land spirits, which is, again, the Norse, which is one of the Proto Indo European religions, they call them land biter, or

land whites, which means specific spirits to the land. They will care about the function they're over. Like the undines will care that water is treated correctly, right. But we can still pray to them for certain things; for protection while we are in the water say. But the people who care the most about us individually would be the ancestor spirits. So we pray to them the most. Most people do have a patron and matron deity from those lists of lots and lots of deities. And those are the ones, the two usually, that would care the most about you individually as well. So for instance, if someone follows the Hellenistic path of the Proto Indo European religions, Zeus was the name for Dyeus the head of all that direction. Zeus may not care that you stub your toe, for instance. But if Apollo, the God of healing is your patron deity he would. So you would pray to him, if that makes sense.

Renee:

Yes.

Aldous:

So that's what kind of sets us apart. Very intricate.

Renee 4:07

And previous to this, what other churches, covens or other religious organizations have you participated in?

Aldous 4:15

I've been a part of at least three other covens, if not more. But I'm part of a family tradition. So this religion comes from my mother's side of the family. So I got it from her. And then her line, there... we came from a set of Romani that were in Eastern Europe, that moved here fleeing religious persecution. So everything was handed down through that line. I guess if that answers your question.

Renee: 4:47

Yes. And how long have you been involved with Ancient Path Coven?

[interrupted by the waiter that came to take our order]

Aldous: 5:00

Now you got that in your interview. What did you say, sorry?

Renee: 5:08

How long have you been a member of Ancient Path Coven?

Aldous 5:11

Since we formed. I was one of the forming members. It was just me and some family members, and we decided we wanted to open up, and let others worship with us. But we wanted a set of rules that can help us you know, control whether you know, someone was acting

inappropriately, what can we do about it? Right? So we kind of formalized then, made our bylaws, and put ourselves in motion. I think that was in 2017.

Renee 5:39

How long was the process from deciding to start bylaws to forming an official coven?

Aldous 5:45

So starting the official bylaws?

Renee:

Yeah.

Aldous:

It was about the same time. We started the bylaws at the same time that we kind of started, you know, putting our coven on Witchvox and that kind of thing.

Renee: 5:57

And is your family involved in your coven still?

Aldous: 6:00

Yes. Yes, very much so.

Renee: 6:04

Growing up, how aware were you of other faith traditions?

Aldous: 6:09

Quite aware, actually. So I had a short stint of Christianity in my life, because my mom got with a guy who was you know my stepdad at the time. And he told me that I would go to hell if I kept practicing this witchcraft. And so I got scared, as children are want to do. And I left this religion and became a Christian. So much so that I was actually a preacher for a while, not a long time, about six months. And the more I studied, the more I realized, you know, my faith, my old faith was, was more what I wanted; what I believe to be true.

Renee:

Do you have to go to seminary to be a preacher? How does that work?

Aldous 6:51

No, no. Certain Christian branches you did. So like, if you want to be Catholic priests, you had to go through a huge slew of education and certifications, and you know, talking with others, it was a big deal. But in the nondenominational branch I was a part of, all you had to do was raise your hand and have the group that called themselves the elders point to you and say, "okay, you're a preacher now."

Renee 7:12

And did you have any special training when you became the head priest of Ancient Path?

Aldous:

No, actually

Renee:

Life experience?

Aldous:

Yeah. No training at all. Just thrown right in.

Renee: 7:24

What other experiences, books, or personal contacts influenced you to pursue this particular path?

Aldous: 7:35

To pursue this path, would be my family. But to learn about this path, I have read all kinds of books. I have tried to read books that claim to be as old as the 12th century. But you know, who knows if they're actually that old. Or if they haven't been translated and re-translated time and time again. A lot of them written in Welsh, some of them in old Germanic languages that had to be translated. So... but a lot of those books you can get, you can get a surprising number of them for free online. In fact, most of them are difficult to buy, but for whatever reason...

Renee:

No copyright at that time.

Aldous: 8:14

Exactly. I guess the oldest books would have been Tacitus's *Germania*. You know, a few of those from that era.

Renee 8:20

Okay. What can you tell me about the early days of the organization? And what was it like starting out?

Aldous: 8:27

It was much simpler. We, we just posted a thing on Witchvox and were like "oh hey we're a coven now," formed our bylaws, and just kept doing what we'd always been doing together. And eventually, we started getting emails from people saying, "Hey, I'm interested." And then as we grew, it become administratively much more difficult.

Renee: 8:47

Why are people attracted to this religious body?

Aldous: 8:52

I think it's because we are only interested in the spiritual growth of ourselves and our members. So we don't charge for anything we do. And that's not just for coven members. So for instance, if someone has, needs a service that we can provide as ordained people, right, so like, a hand fasting or wedding ceremony, right. Or if they need someone to officiate a requiem, which would be a funeral, or to do a home cleansing, or blessing, right, or a Wiccaning, some Wiccans will call it, where you name, the child. So a naming ceremony. We'll do all those for anybody free, we don't charge anyone. So I think last year, I did more than 10 weddings. And I didn't make a dime from it, you know. So I think that's what draws people in, is we're not in it for the money but for helping, truly helping.

Renee: 9:39

Do you enjoy doing those kinds of things?

Aldous: 9:41

Absolutely. Very much so.

Renee:

Do you have a favorite service that you guys perform?

Aldous: 9:50

I don't know if I have a favorite. I like them all. So our normal monthly Full Moon ritual is the one we do over and over and over again. But it's a little different each time. So I mean the same basic elements are there. The same basic prayers are said. Some of the same songs are sung. Some of the same motions are taken. But you know, each one has its own flavor.

Renee 10:18

And so you meet for the full moons. Do you meet other times? Do you celebrate the Sabbats?

Aldous: 10:24

Yep. We have the eight holidays. The fun thing is, though, because we follow a Proto Indo European path, which means every branch of that, so the Germanic, the Celtic, Slavic, Baltic, Greek, Roman, I mean, Hindu even is one of the PIE. Any of those, we'll follow all of that, because we believe it all came from the same source, whether or not we still have the records of the old ways today from that particular path. I mean, it was all there. So of the eight holidays, four of them are Celtic, four of them are Germanic. And that's evident their names like Samhain, Lughnasa, Imbolc. Those are all pronounced different than they're spelt. Those are the Celtic ones. Whereas the Germanic ones like Litha, as you know, those are, those are

Renee:

Easier to say.

Aldous:

Easier to say. Those are the Germanic holidays. But we do all eight of them because we believe they came from the same root.

Renee: 11:18

And how often do you have social gatherings?

Aldous: 11:21

Oh, we gather... Okay. I forgot to answer that. I apologize.

Renee:

Oh, no.

Aldous:

So we meet the eight holidays of the year, we meet each month for the esbat. We meet each month for a social event. We meet every Tuesday for the students; we teach classes for them. And we don't charge anything for those. You don't have to be an official member, you can just sit and learn if you want, that's fine. What else do we meet for? Then we just meet together for other things like special interest groups. So there might be a group of people that are interested in simply the Asatru path of the Proto Indo European religions, right. They might want to know the Norse religion, and so they meet to discuss those individually.

[interrupted by the waiter]

Renee: 0:01

All right. Do you perform any, like more traditional community service or outreach stuff? Other than (long pause because a phone went off) aforementioned things?

Aldous: 0:17

Well, we haven't as of yet. We've only been in formation since 2017, so like a year and a half this, almost two years probably. But that is, we have thought of some of that stuff, right, like doing Habitat for Humanity, volunteering, or doing a clothing drive, or collecting funds to give food to put out, or Christmas drives that kind of thing. And we haven't actually done that as of yet. But it is in the works.

Renee: 0:43

And can you talk more about your classes and educational programs and how important they are to the overall practice?

Aldous: 0:52

Absolutely. So we have a year and a day training program that everyone has to go through when they first join. Some people decide to start that year and a day program and then join halfway through, or join at the end. And that's fine. It's not that you have to join, and then wait a

year and a day. It's that we want you to go through this training first. Because we want to see that it's something that you're actually interested in. It's not a Hollywood thing you're going after, you don't want to be shooting fireballs out of your fingertips, right? And also, because we want to make sure that other people in the coven are protected because we do have to be secret about our faith. Now nobody wants to lose their job, because they're not a Christian. So technically, most people in that year and a day are not allowed to go to a full coven meeting. There's one for them. And they do essentially the same things. They just don't see many of the other members. Usually. And that's not even for the full year in a day, that's probably the first couple of months until we realized, you know, okay, this is a good person, they're not in this to try to hurt anybody, they can come.

Renee: 1:55

Do you get a lot of young people? There's a trend within Wicca of people being like, "I want to spite my parents and do something different."

Aldous: 2:03

Well, we've had a few people who were young. We, don't allow anyone under the age of 16 to join the coven without a signed parental, okay. If they're under 16, they have to have to sign parental consent letter, and their parent has to be with them at every event they attend. If they are 16 to 18, 16 to 17 364 days, right? They can have that parental permission slip and be there without their parents, but they have to have that slip saying that it's okay. So yeah, we've had a few young people, but we've had some that say my parents won't sign the slip. "Well, I'm sorry, you can't be in then. You know, when you're older." Because the last thing we need is some parents to say "you're teaching our kids the devil." and we get in trouble. We don't want that. Even though we're not doing anything illegal or harmful, you know, it's just like if they went to a church, they could go there, but they can't come to our church because we're not Christian.

Renee: 2:58

Makes sense.

Aldous 3:00

Does it though?

Renee: 3:06

Well no. People are still judgmental.

Aldous: 3:09

Yes. very much so.

Renee: 3:13

Have you faced a lot of discrimination? Is there like strong feeling of having to hide your faith?

Aldous: 3:19

Absolutely. So I cannot talk about my faith at work. I do not talk about my faith with strangers typically. Usually, if I am around my home town, or anywhere near my place of business, I do not wear my pentacle out. I wear it, even though its a symbol of protection, I'm supposed to wear it all the time, I wear it under my shirt. At one of my previous jobs, everyone in senior leadership was so Christian, that one employee was suspected of having done something wrong, even though there were group leaders showing that employee did nothing wrong. But when it was suspected, the leadership told that employee, we want to pray for you. Right? And so in that company, I did not want to be fired because I wasn't a Christian. And so they would invite me to Bible studies and things and I would tell them, "Oh, I appreciate it. But you know, I'm I'm busy that day, or I can't," you know, whatever. But I shouldn't have to do that.

Renee: 4:22

What are your daily experiences with the religion? Like do you practice daily? Or is it mostly just when you gather for spells and rituals?

Aldous: 4:33

Nope it's everyday. Everyday, I pray at sunrise. So I'm up 365 days a year to greet the sun. I pray throughout the day, obviously thats not the only time. But I will daily do things like read tarot cards, read my pendulum, practicing casting runes, that's new for me. I haven't done that one very long yet, but practicing that one. Collecting herbs, tending my garden, growing the herbs I'm trying to grow right? Studying, I read all kinds of books about the old faith, a lot of which are written by Christians over time. So it's, you know, as we read with a grain of salt. But every day I'm doing something.

Renee: 5:21

Has your behavior changed based on the group's ideals? I mean, they're kind of your ideals. You started it, but...?

Aldous: 5:33

No the have'nt, they're the same.

Renee: 5:40

What kind of practices are involved with being a member of the group? Any rituals or ceremonies you want to talk about?

Aldous: 5:49

Sure. So our wedding rituals is called a handfasting. There's some idea out there, that handfasting was just, like a trial marriage, like a betrothal, and that it wasn't really a wedding. Well, it was. I mean, that's, that's what it was. That's what it was. That's what it is to us. So when we say handfasting, we mean legal weddings. That's the whole ceremony for us. There's a ritual for Requiem, when someone passes away. We try to help guide their spirit to the other side. We have whole rituals for our normal monthly meetings esbts we call them. Each sabbat has its own, each of the eight holidays has its own rituals associated with it. We have rituals for naming

someone, we have rituals for if there's a storm, how we can use that storm to cleanse around us, right? We do certain rituals on rivers and lakes periodically just to make sure they're taken care of. We leave offerings, almost daily, we leave some kind of offering for something. You know, we're constantly cooking food and leaving it out, or collecting stones and leaving them in certain patterns, or etching runes onto things to protect them. I mean, we do rituals all the time.

Renee: 7:20

What kind of art forms are present? Any visual symbols, music, that are used in rituals or other activities?

Aldous: 7:28

We have written a few songs. We have... I wrote a book I guess if you can consider that artistic in any way. We have, everyone in the coven does something that they provide to the other coven members for free. Even if that's just I want to do a tarot reading for someone. But some people are seamstresses or seamsters, either way they sew things. They will make robes, and sashes and cords for our uniforms. And some people will make altars out of wood or stone. Some people make beautiful carvings or paintings and can give those out. We have all manner of things that we do. We have a tattoo artist. Obviously they have to practice in certain conditions and in their shop and all that stuff. You know, they don't break the law, but we have one.

Renee: 8:16

How do members of the group interact with other members of the general public?

Aldous: 8:21

Just like anybody else does, except most of us hide our faith. So people don't know who we are.

Renee: 8:28

Do you have interactions with other religious organizations?

Aldous: 8:34

Yep. In Topeka, there's a group called the Topeka Interfaith Organization. There's representatives from to all kinds of religions, Paganism, Buddhism, Taoism, Christianity, and they meet two times a year to discuss being accepting of other faiths, and so we'll work with them. I regularly meet with Christians who try to prove me wrong, you know, some of my very close friends who know what I believe. I had one try to logic me through a conversation. And at the end of the conversations said "quit trying to make me a Pagan". I said "I'm not. You started it." So I think we have those conversations, those interactions frequently.

Renee: 9:17

Are there issues within the coven involving conflict, or just personal interactions? And how are things resolved?

Aldous: 9:27

So that's all written in our bylaws. Essentially, we try to solve things at the lowest level. So if I have a problem with you I would address it with you, talk to you first. But if I feel like I just can't, then I would bring it up to a priest or priestess or the high priest or priestess of my individual coven. If it has to go beyond that, if it goes to what we call the council of elders, then essentially that each younger coven has its own council of elders, which would be both priests and priestess or, you know, whatever mix they have, there's two of those, and then the one high priest or high priestess. And so those three people make up the Council of Elders for each younger coven, as well as the elder coven as the same. But the Council of Elders at large, is all of those for every coven. So if it's a big problem, which it's never been before, but we're prepared, if it ever happens, then it will be addressed by a vote of the elder coven at large, or the Council of Elders at large excuse me.

Renee: 10:22

But you've never had to, like remove a member?

Aldous: 10:24

No, not really. We have had a few spats, which resulted in people leaving, but never like, anything crazy.

Renee: 10:35

How's the group governed? Do the elder counselors like, council members, make decisions? Or do you have committees?.

Aldous: 10:46

That's the committee. Every, every month or every quarter, excuse me, the Council of Elders meets. When they do meet, the members of the covenant are allowed to attend, they can show up, but they don't get to vote. So for voting on, we have these things called orders. And those orders are just basically other awards or interest groups. So we're thinking about either forming a new order or inducting someone into an order, that'll be decided by, if it's an award by the Council of Elders, if it's an interest group, then by whoever runs that order, right? I know that's kind of weird, but we get more into that later if you'd like. But essentially, we would talk about it, and other coven members can give their opinion. They can they can speak, but ultimately they can't vote. Decisions will be made by the Council.

Renee: 11:34

Can you describe orders just a little bit more?

Aldous: 11:37

Sure. So the word by wagross is proto indo European for hammer. So we have one order called the Order of the Wagros, which essentially means Order of the Hammer, right. And that's the Norse order. So currently, the head of that order has done all kinds of stuff to further the Asatru

religion in the United States. He has done immense study and taught classes, and has gone far above and beyond what you would expect any of anybody. And so that person was inducted into that order. So that would be an interest group. And he is free to induct other members as he so chooses. We have another order called the Order of the Horn and Cauldron. So the coven's matron and patron deities are Paxuson or Cernunnus, you'll hear him called some time. That's just the title, it means horned one. And then the patron Goddess is Cerridwen. So their symbols are the antlers and the cauldron. So Order of the Horn and Cauldron means that you have shown exemplary service to the coven itself. That one we would discuss at the Council of Elders meetings, but Order of the Wagros, the person in charge of that order would decide who to induct.

Renee: 12:55

Do people feel that the set rituals somehow trample on their individual path?

Aldous 13:04

No, because everybody has their own flavor, right. And we allow people to be individualistic, as much as possible. So we have one member who follows a Greek path, right Hellenistic religion, and she has all kinds of Greek symbols on her robe and hanging off her belt. And when she does, the when she does the rituals Cerunnus and Cerridwen are the goddess and god, but we recognize... are the major, patron goddess and god of our coven. Obviously, there's plenty more. But we recognize that that's not their only name, they go by other names too. So the person who follows Greek calls them Pan and Hekate, which are their names there. And so it really just kind of depends on who's leading the ritual as to the flavor of the ritual, if that makes sense.

Renee: 13:57

Yes. And is it always the priests and priestesses who lead the rituals? How is that determined?

Aldous: 14:02

Yes, so we have degrees, and we have offices. So degrees were not around like, you know, millennia ago, but they help with people today. A lot of the stuff we do wasn't around then, but it's to kind of help people stay engaged with the coven. So after a year and a day, you're you are brought into the coven. You're initiated, and you are given your first degree. A year and a day after that, you're eligible to take a verbal exam, and you get your second degree. A year and a day after that, you're eligible to take another exam and get your third degree. And you can put little patches on your sleeve and stuff that signify that. Some people do, some people don't, just kind of depends. If... That essentially shows who are kind of the advanced practitioners. So if someone comes in and they're new, they can look around and see who has three stripes on their arm. That means that person has been here forever, and if I have a question I can ask them. Especially if I see, if I want to practice Asatru the Norse religion, and I see someone who has a Thor's hammer patch on their sleeve as well as three stripes on their arm. That tells me they're a third degree who is in the Order of the Wagros. That means they probably know a whole lot about Asatru and I can ask them questions. So that's degrees. So rank is, that's rank

office of priests, priestess high priest, high priestess. Office is responsibilities. So they are the people who are responsible for performing the ritual or coordinating all the rituals and all of the socials, and if somebody needs a house cleansing, who is going to do it, who's free. They're the people that's calling everybody. If someone has a wedding, they're the people trying to make that happen and getting it set up. The high priest or high priestess typically lead the ritual, unless they're not present at that meeting and then the priest or priestess will. But if... so, when they first show up, and they have all the equipment, just sitting in a box on the ground, the two priests or two priestesses, the priest and priestess, whatever they are. You know the lower ranking. They will set everything up, get out the altar cloth out, put the candles on, and the bell and the cauldron you know get all that stuff set, cause that's their job. So when everyone else shows up, it's just ready, they can worship.

[long pause while we wait for it to catch up]

Aldous: 16:20

Sorry for being long winded,

Renee: 16:21

That's okay.

[pause]

Renee: 16:37

Does food figure into your religious practice?

Aldous: 16:40

Yes. So we don't... We believe that plants have a spirit and are just just as alive as animals are. So we're not vegans or vegetarians. Because if we're going to say we can't take the life of an animal because it's sacred, it's just as sacred to take the life of the corn, right? So the life of the lentil is no more important or no less important than the life of the lamb. So we have... Every time we have ritual, of you know, those who can, will go out to dinner afterwards, right. We'll all go out and eat. We will hold feasts at the eight sabbat. And we'll also hold feasts, just from time to time for fun, because it's you know, it's cool. Because that's the time we come together. That's the time we sit and we enjoy each other's company. Every single ritual, we do a ceremony called cakes and ale. And that's a ceremony where we offer food to the gods and we partake of it ourselves. So we're eating with them. We're offering something and dining with them. And we do that because there's an old Proto Indo European word called ghosti. It's where we get guest. Essentially, it means like, it's almost like this for that. So like, essentially, we, we eat with them, we offer them our food, we make them guests in our circle with us, obviously guests of honor. They're not just you know, there. They're the reason we're there. But we give them these things, in hopes that they will answer our prayers.

Renee: 18:09

Oh, I remembered my question. If somebody wanted to join the coven, who already had a lot of

experience or had degrees from some other coven, would they still start at first degree level again? How does that work?

Aldous: 18:22

No we honor those. We will ask them questions to make sure that they understand things in the same light, at least that we understand them. But most of the time, it's at least close enough that they're fine. The... So the questions will be things like... you remember earlier I mentioned Tacitus's *Germania*. I won't ask things like, "what was his book about?" Right? I won't ask things like that. But I will say "who is your god and goddess. What does a cauldron mean to you? What's your favorite magical tool? What spells do you like to do?" I might ask things like that just to see if we're on the same page. And if we are then you don't need your year and a day, you've already had it.

Renee: 19:07

Okay. And does the group own any real estate or buildings or vehicles?

Aldous: 19:13

I wish, but no we don't. The elder coven does have a spot that we worship at every time. But that's just in someone's yard. Essentially, we have an altar setup that's permanent. And we're all family, right? So it's not like anything crazy. We all go to that family member's house and we worship around that altar in their backyard and call it a day. Everyone in their individual younger covens, has to kind of work that out for themselves. Most the time, what happens is they'll either meet in a public location like a park or they will meet in each other's homes. But for instance, the Topeka younger coven, it was January we had snow and we were meeting in the park outside after dark. Because we don't have anywhere else to go.

Renee:

Right. That's hard.

Aldous:

Because we don't collect money so we can't have a building.

Renee: 20:04

Is it okay to practice your religion indoors? Some Wiccans don't like that.

Aldous: 20:07

Yeah, we do. We do from time to time. So for instance, in the elder coven, we have people who are older, and they can't be outside in the heat or the cold. So like, if it's August or January, we will be inside for their sake, because we're not going to compromise, compromise anyone's safety. We believe the gods are just as much inside as they are out.

Renee: 20:32

What are the economic arrangements of the group? How is money raised? You don't really

have any...

Aldous: 20:37

Yep, we don't. Money is not raised. Sometimes people will insist on donating. So I did one house cleansing. And one person kept trying to give me money I kept telling them "no you don't have to give me anything. We don't want it, keep it." And they kept saying "no, please take it, please take it." And so we did. And we just put that into the coven, right. So we put it into a little coffee can essentially and if somebody needs tarot cards, because they don't have any, we'll use that to buy it. So right now it has like less than \$1 in it. Essentially nothing. I don't think it's ever had more than \$20.

Renee: 21:15

How many members are currently involved?

Aldous: 21:19

We have about 50, almost. So all over the US and in our various covens.

Renee: 21:25

And how many covens are there? Do you know?

Aldous: 21:27

I have to count them every time. So we have Holton, we have Topeka, we have Kansas City. We have Illinois, Pennsylvania, New Mexico. And there's one getting ready to be formed in Leonardville, Kansas. And so that would be seven total. But that one's not quite there yet. So six and a half.

Renee: 21:47

Is there an ideal size for a coven?

Aldous: 21:50

Well, our bylaws state 13. And that is... So there was this book, written by a lady a while ago, she is dead now, but it was called the God of the Witches by Margaret Thatcher [he remembered later it is in fact Margaret Murray], I believe is her name. The book is utter crap. I mean, it's just, she, it's I don't know if she just made it up, or she'd like smoke a bunch of crack and tried to write a book. I don't know. But it was just like, not accurate at all. But one of the things she wrote in that book was that witches always meet in covens of 13. And so it's very common for covens today. Gerald Gardner, the guy who invented Wicca as it is today, the New Age version, kind of ran with it and said they had to be 13. And so a lot of covens said you have 13. We have 13 partly because it's popular and also because we have three offices in each coven. So the other 10 members, I mean it kind of made sense. And administratively, it's a little more difficult to run when it gets higher than that. So in our bylaws, we have a rule where if a coven hits 13, once it would go above that, one of the priests or priestesses breaks off to form a new younger coven. And that new younger coven still reports back to the elder coven, like a hub and spoke model.

So, you know, it's not like they report to the previous younger coven, who reports to another younger coven, who reports to a, you know, they all just kind of feed back to the other.

Renee: 23:08

And but it's okay to have less than 13.

Aldous: 23:11

Yeah, we have some, we have some that are two. Yeah, we have one of them that is two and one of them that is four I think. They had five, but one just moved away, so...

Renee: 23:23

How are new members recruited?

Aldous: 23:27

They're not. People just show up. We have. We have a website, well we don't have a website, there is a website called Witchvox.com. And it lists a ton of covens. So covens will register on it. It's free. You just put your name out there and call it a day. We have a listing on there. But that's it. And I get emails all the time. Like, I get probably 3,4, 5 a month, I'll get emails from people.

Renee: 23:51

I think three of the ones from Witchvox go to you.

Aldous: 23:54

Yes.

Renee:

A bunch of different names, but they're like, the main contact is this person. And then they're like you sent an email to Aldous.

Aldous: 24:04

Yep, that's me.

Renee: 24:08

So basically, if people are interested, they just join and start the year and a day. Is there like a formal, you have to wait until there's like a group of them to start a class together?

Aldous: 24:17

No, they can do it right then and there. We'll, as soon as they express interest, will assign them a teacher who's close to them. If there are none close to them, and we try to do it virtually almost. So for instance, the coven in Leonardville, that's some time away from us here, right? That's, it's a bit of a distance. So it would be hard for them to drive up and meet with me every week. So instead, they come up every month for the esbat and every... eight times a year for the Sabbath. But every week, we have a Skype class. And so we all get on, it looks like a you

know scene from The Brady Bunch with all the cameras everywhere, and we just do our class.

Renee: 24:55

Do you have any behavior codes or prohibitions?

Aldous: 25:00

Well, yes. So prohibitions on things like food or alcohol, no, we can eat and drink what you want. We do think it's important to follow the law. So we stay away from drugs and you know, that kind of thing. Behavior codes, excuse me. We don't allow things like harassment or murder or thievery, right? It's like, all of those, anything that you would consider wrong today, we consider wrong and it's not allowed. But there's nothing like you have to wear purple on Tuesdays, or anything like that. Just don't stab people, and you'll probably be fine.

Renee: 25:43

All right. Are there norms and expectations for sexual behavior?

Aldous: 25:47

Not really. I mean, no. None that I can think... I can't think of any because we allow anyone of any sexual orientation, creed. Obviously, there's things like, we would never allow any illegal sex act. So like bestiality, or sex with children, or anything like that, we would report that to the police immediately. But anything else is, if it's legal, we don't care. You do what you gotta do.

Renee: 26:15

And are there rules regarding matters of dress or style?

Aldous: 26:20

Well, kind of. Not really. I mean, you wear whatever you want. But at the coven, we do have a coven uniform, at the coven meetings. So, historically, if you look at the Celtic religion, the druids wore robes, and we have writings from people, I believe Pliny the Elder wrote about it, and a few other people. In Germany, there are I think, three statues next to each other of Druids. Which would be, it's kind of, people wonder why there are statues of Druids in Germany, right, instead of the Celtic lands. What they don't understand is, they all come from the same breath. So it would make sense, right. But those statues show tall, bald, bearded men in robes, so we know that they wore the robes. And one person that I read, I read a few books that talk about the color of the robes they wore, and you know how they look. If you read a book on Catholic history, you can see that the Catholic monk robe wore the druid robes, they adopted them so that they would look like religious people, and it would be more easy for people to transfer over to Catholicism at the time. And so we do wear robes. And they are... we wear black robes because that signifies the secrecy that we have to still hide our faith and all that. It has a cord around it and the cord is the color of your birth element. So if your fire it's red, water blue, earth green, air yellow. If you're a priest or priestess, you get a sash. If you're a high priest or priestess, you get a couple of things added to the sash. But that's pretty much it. The only real dress code is your uniform. And not everybody wears that. So nobody cries or gets kicked out.

Renee: 27:58

Are there are penalties for violating rules or taboos?

Aldous: 28:03

Well, unless it's a law no. If it's a law, we have in our bylaws that will contact the police immediately if someone breaks the law. But beyond that, no, I mean, there's not any rules to break that aren't also laws, so everyone should be fine.

Renee: 28:19

And what are the people like? Are there particularly unforgettable characters, or interesting things about people that make up your coven?

Aldous: 28:29

Well, we have some people who are just normal everyday people. And we have a couple of very, very eccentric people. And we have I mean, it's just it's your standard mix. Like you walk into a room, walk into Walmart and see, anywhere or walk into you know, whatever restaurant and see people around. anyone in there could be a coven member.

Renee: 28:57

All right. Have you ever thought about leaving the group?

Aldous:

Nope

Renee: 29:02

Is there anything you wish you could change?

Unknown 29:05

I wish I could change...

Renees: 29:07

In like, how it runs or....

Aldous:

Well, not the group itself, but I wish we didn't have to be so secretive. That's the only thing I wish I could change. Is that the people who are in my coven, who looked to me for leadership and guidance didn't have to worry about losing their jobs if someone found out what God they worship. For instance, I got an email from my ex wife recently, who told me she did not want our child participating in any kind of my religious activities at all whatsoever. And that she wanted our child raised Christian, even though I have custody of her, and so it's not her decision. And I've never been closed minded at all, if our child wants to be Christian, that's fine. I'll take her to the people who can teach her that. But if she wants to be my religion, then she can be, I won't

stop her from that either. If she wants to be something else, if she wants to be a Buddhist or a Taoist then go for it. You know, whatever makes you happy, whatever you believe to be true, because when that day comes, and she and she does eventually pass away and stands before the Creator, she won't be able to say "well, I did that because my dad told me to," you know, it'll be what religion did you choose?

Renee: 30:14

How do you see the future of the group? Are you continuing to grow and change and modernize?

Aldous: 30:21

We are growing all the time. It's ridiculous the amount that we're just exploding in growth. And you know, coven members will be in and they'll love it and think it's great. And then they'll move away and start another coven somewhere else. It's crazy how quick it's growing. So yeah, we're going to keep growing as much as we can. And will still do it for as free as possible.

Renee: 30:43

And for you what has been the best and worst things about being involved with the coven so far?

Aldous: 30:49

Worst things would be trying to find a place for everyone to worship. Because that falls to me, right? That's that's my, my jobs, trying to establish a coven and making sure they have somewhere to go. And especially when no one wants them, you know. There have been a couple churches, who have offered up their basements. And so you know, they'll say, "well you guys can come, we got like a youth room in the basement. You guys can use that." And so that's awesome. That's really helpful. Because we don't mind, we don't believe we're going to step in there and burst into flames. We believe the Christian religion is just as valid as our own, and we would never judge them for their religion, just like they shouldn't judge us for ours. The best thing is, the people that are in it. They're fantastic and helpful and wonderful people. We're all trying to learn this old religion that was all but destroyed.

Renee: 31:43

Anything else you feel like sharing, any anecdotes or things we missed?

Aldous: 31:52

We talked about a bunch of stuff. But if you got any other questions, I'll address whatever you want. I don't care.

Renee: 32:04

We're probably good.

Aldous: 32:05

All right.

## Follow Up Questions

What do you feel is the advantage of being a member of a coven vs. a solitary practitioner?

Having that group of people who will help you follow your path and keep your fire lit.

Prior to founding Ancient Path, did you and your family consider yourselves to be a coven, or a group of solitary practitioners? Yes, we recognized that we were a coven but we rarely acknowledged it.

Do you create new spells and rituals or do you have a traditional script you always use? A little of both. Once the methodology for spells is known, they can be created. But old is gold.

What is the relationship between PIE religions and indigenous beliefs of African and Asiatic communities? That's harder for me to answer. There are obvious influences between the peoples but they are largely unique, even though they are so similar.

Do you believe in and seek assistance from other supernatural beings, dragons, fairies, Angels? Angels are inherently Abrahamic. We do not worship them. But yes, we do believe in and seek assistance from gods, spirits, faeries, and our ancestors.

Do you embrace the label Witch. How do you see the relationship of your beliefs with witchcraft/magick? We do. Witch comes from the two old English words Wicca (pronounced witch-uh) which meant "male sorcerer" and Wicce (pronounced witch-aye) which meant "female sorcerer). Because both words formed into this one, we do not see it as gender exclusive but as a word that describes anyone who practices magick.

Not all who follow this path practice magick and not all who practice magick follow this path. The priesthood of the proto-indo-european people typically practiced magick, which tells me the witches were the priesthood of the old faith.

What are your beliefs about the afterlife? So first I have to start off with a small fact that will be necessary to know later. Each area of earth is sectioned into territories that are watched over by a type of spirit called an ankou (typically a graveyard or other burial site is the center of that territory). When we die, we are guided by an ankou to the local graveyard. An ankou is the last person to die in the territory of a graveyard in the previous year. The ankou guides all of the dead to the graveyard where they meet Cernunnos. Cernunnos guides them to the afterlife which is across a great river or sea (much like the river Styx, which is a PIE belief). Once we are on the other side in a place we call the Summerlands we can choose to stay or move about. Most

people eventually reincarnate and live a new life. This cycle happens repeatedly forever. Everything dies, and everything is reborn. This is true for animals, plants, the earth, and even the universe. They've all been through multiple lives.

Is the Celtic path the same as the Druidic? Yes it is! I try not to call it a druidic path because druid was an office / rank as opposed to the name of the faith itself.

Where did the idea of a year and a day come from? Cerridwen (the goddess of magick) had her servants stir a cauldron to brew a potion of knowledge. The cauldron had to be stirred for a year and a day, so the anti-type to that is that we study for a year and a day to gain the knowledge necessary to build our foundation.