

Renee: 0:01

This is Renee Cyr doing an interview with Camille on July 11 2019, discussing Paganism in Lawrence. How do you define your religion and spiritual path?

Camille: 0:19

To define my religion would be, the umbrella term is Paganism. But that means anything that's out of Judaism, or Christianity, or Catholicism. Technically I would be classified as a Wiccan. I'm very nature based, but I also incorporate a specific goddess that I like to make offerings to her. She makes me feel protected and safe. And I think everybody deep down inside, spiritually humans need to believe in something higher than themselves. Not just for accountability of what happens to them in life, but the idea that we're just here alone on this big planet, it's kind of sad. I think people are naturally drawn to religious idols. Mine would be Hekate.

Renee: 1:03

How long have you practiced Paganism?

Camille: 1:06

Since 2002. I discovered it when I was going to high school. When I was younger, I was forced to go to Catholic school. My family is Romani Gypsy, and Italians on my mom's side. So they're very much about adopting a major religion to kind of help us blend in more. And my grandmother and my mother actually really did take it to heart. It wasn't just like, a chameleon tactic to blend in. Going to Catholic school I realized that it just didn't feel right. Like I would leave church feeling worse than when I went in. And I kept thinking to myself, when I was smaller, religion shouldn't feel like this. You should feel better when you're done doing a church session, or a ritual, or healing, or a group thing that you do. And I just never felt that with Catholicism. I always felt like I was being judged. And it's very cold, and you feel isolated, even though you were amongst hundreds of people in your church, everybody secretly was judging each other. I wanted to find a faith that felt more free.

Camille: 2:11

So when I found Paganism, I realized that you can be free. And you can worship in any way that you feel. You don't have to be in a church and stuffy windows, you know, surrounded by, I mean, obvious Pagan symbols and Masonic symbols. And those are really prevalent in the Catholic Church. And it's because they kind of did a network and a mishmash and created their own little religious quilt that suited them for their times. But it never changed, as the times went on, for the people. Paganism does. It's very much alive, it evolves, and moves, and transitions. And what works for one person may not work for another person, but the core belief of Paganism is the acceptance of self. So if I want to worship, I can just stand out side in my garden barefoot and feel the earth beneath my feet, and take care of my plants. To me, that could be worshipping. It could be going out to the ocean for another Pagan and picking up litter to help here. I mean, really, it's all about helping other people, feeling that connection, and knowing that you're actually not isolated. You're not alone on this tiny little rock. You are connected because without the earth, we wouldn't be here. And so there's like a big sense of

comfort and knowing that when I see it snowing, or when I see the seasons change, or if I'm gardening, I help a bird that needs, you know, that's in a dire situation like it's broken its wing. Giving back to creatures and then giving that to other people, I believe that's truly what Paganism is about.

Renee: 3:50

Was there a particular book or personal contact that influenced you to begin your craft down Paganism?

Camille: 4:00

I would say there's a very big experience, a catalyst for me casting Catholicism aside and transitioning. And that moment was when my father died when I was nine. He committed suicide. And I was praying for him in church, and a priest actually stopped and asked me what I was praying for. And I told him, you know, "I'm praying for my dad." And he goes "Well is he sick?" I said, "No, he died." He goes "I'm sorry, child, you know, how did he die?" "Basically he killed himself." And he goes, "Well, no amount of prayers is ever going to help. If you take a human life, even your own, you're condemned to hell." He goes, "Did he repent?" And I said "He wasn't Catholic", and he goes, "Than maybe you should pray for other things that are more likely to happen." It was like wish in one hand and shame in the other one. I was like, "Who are you to tell me this, I'm just a child." And so I left the church. And I went to where I always felt comfortable as a child. And that was the library. And I found the section on religion and theology. And I was reading about the Egyptian gods, and I was reading about the Romans and how they conquered and conquered everything under the sun, aside from Spain. And I was looking at all these different forms of religion. I read about Taoism and I read about Buddhism. And I was like, "what's the difference between Islam and Muslims, like is one a person is one a religion." I was starting to ask all these questions at like nine and ten. And the more I read, the more fascinated I became. And I kept thinking "hmm these have so many rules." And I wasn't born into Judaism, unless someone marries me, I really can't convert. And even then women only learn so much. And I don't think I would qualify to be a Buddhist. So it was like a self mission, first I had to decide who am I, and what did I want to be? Then what can these religions give me that I can give back. I wanted a reciprocating relationship. And so I would go with my friends to like different churches, one was a Presbyterian one was a Baptist. And one came from a very loud belief system. Which I went to a funeral, it didn't feel like a funeral, people were like singing and dancing, and they looked happy. And that was a second catalyst for me. It's like, even though there's this terrible situation, they're not mourning. They're not suffering. They're celebrating this person's life. And it was like, that's what I want. I want a belief thats like that. But what was it? Where was it? And I found Paganism.

Camille: 6:41

And the more I read about it, the more I remember that before my grandmother had converted, my family only wore the Catholic emblem as a sign of protection. And that's when I was like "What did they believe before they became chameleons." And that's when I really dove into it. I found a trunk of my grandmother's belongings. And it turns out, she was still wearing the badge

but her daughter, my mother, had taken it more seriously than she had. But I found Pagan relics, a mortar and pestle, I found dried herbs and little vials. I found pretty much every magazine edition of Man, Myth, and Magic. I found books on candle burning. And I called my aunt Debbie, she was my father's sister. And I was telling her "Hey, this is what I found in my mother's thing, like, what do you think?" Because my father's side was really interesting. My grandfather is a Freemason, and I actually joined the daughters of the Eastern Star recently. So I'm the female sect of what Freemasonry is. And my grandmother on my dad's side was Mormon. So there's really, really conflicting religious beliefs. So one side I had a mason, the other side I had a Mormon, another side I had a Catholic, and then I found out that we were like pseudo Catholic. And it's like, it was even more confusing. And then it made me realize one really interesting thought. If you look at religion, can you imagine that you're holding a giant diamond in your hands, and it's perfectly carved. If you turn the diamond one way, there's Buddhism, another way, there's a Catholic. If you turn it this way, there's an Odinit, which is a form of Paganism. If you turn it to the right, it's Gardnerian, which is another form of Paganism. So all religions are different facets of the same diamond, if you really look at it. A lot of them have the same core beliefs, a lot of them even have very similar stories. They just change the time and the place so that it adapts to the people of that area. And so when I really started thinking about this, really truly no religion is wrong or right, because we're all different facets of the same diamond. The diamond is hope, it's love, it's how can we help one another? How can we help ourselves? What's the real meaning of existence in this life. And so if you think about it, we're all just different parts of one diamond. And it's really beautiful thought for me. And I was like, "So what side is my diamond." And paganism has always felt right. It feels free, when I run barefoot through the field. If I'm in the forest under a full moon and I'm doing ritual with a group, that's fantastic. I feel free with Paganism, and I think that's what really draws me.

Renee: 9:51

Are you currently a member of a coven or a group.

Camille: 9:57

So I'm actually solitaire, I do my own thing for the most part. But I have an open invitation to about three or four different covens. So if I feel like socializing, I'll contact the group in Topeka, and I always have an open invite there. If I feel like going out to the Web of Oz I just contact Melas or Turtle, they're more traditional, they go by more Pagan names than their actual names. And that's another topic for another day. I know that I can shadow Kerry's group if I wanted to. If I really needed to, I can reach out to Kacey, make amends, and then go out there as well. Or I can just go out to Gaea and do one of the group rituals that's available, and then meet people from all different walks of life. And if I want to find another group, I just go to a metaphysical shop, or the Mind, Body Spirit Fair. That's how you meet people. In order to find them, you have to go to what they like. So if you know there's a shop that sells lots of pretty rocks, they're probably there. Or if there's a cat adoption, or anything to do with humanitarian purposes, you'll almost always find Pagans there.

Renee: 11:11

Growing up, how aware were you of other faith traditions? So you we're researching religions? Do you feel like you had pretty good sense.

Camille: 11:23

Oh I was very aware. One grandmother was Mormon another grandmother was Catholic. My grandfather on my mom's side was actually a Presbyterian growing up. So they all kind of shared different parts of their beliefs. My grandfather who was a Freemason, obviously, he didn't tell me a whole lot about it. He just told me that when I became of age, I wanted to join there was an avenue for women. But due to the mason kind of private and the secrecy stuff behind it, it's really not a lot of secrecy, it's just a lot of rituals. And they feel that if they share what they are with everybody, then everybody knows and it's not special. They want you to go in and earn it and have that dedication to learning all the things that they have. And I had a lot of respect and report for that.

Renee: 12:13

And do you feel like that's a good compliment to your Wiccan and Paganism practices?

Camille: 12:20

I think Paganism is more open to occult type things. I think they're more open to forms of divination, scrying. I think they're more open to the idea of having a spiritual connection with specific animals like totems. There's a lot of when your beliefs that translate over from Native American religion into Paganism. But like I said, Paganism is just an umbrella term. So there are some that worship Egyptian deities, and there are others that worship Greek and Roman gods. It's just like Burger King, have it your way.

Renee: 13:02

What would you say, are the defining characteristics of your particular practice?

Camille: 13:08

Everybody knows what the golden rule is, Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. And Paganism, you have a term called rule of three. And the rule is three is whatever intention you put out there, you get back three times. So if you're inherently a good person, and you try to help others, then perhaps when you need help the most, maybe fate will smile a little kinder than the others, and help you out. Let's say that you have a coworker that you don't like, and your co workers kind of an asshole, right? And you're like... Every day you go into work, and you're like, "Oh I hope he's gone. Oh I hope he leaves." If you go in there that negativity every day, and there's no intentions, and one day he does get fired. I'm not saying that you have the capability, or the power to get him fired. But you put in that energy, that negativity towards another person or another creature. And because you focus so much on that, maybe after, you know, Timmy gets fired, your car breaks down. Or maybe you're laid off. Or your boyfriend or girlfriend breaks up with you. I'm not saying that that's the catalyst, or that's what caused those events to happen. But you get what you put out there. So if you put out negativity, and you're always negative, you're going to draw negative things to yourself. So you're kind of living

breathing magnet. You get what you put into the universe, or your local community. So when I see people walk by homeless people, and they shrug and they glare at them, it's like who are you to judge them. Maybe all they need is just someone to give them a hand up instead of a handout. And so when I see things like racism and bigotry in the world, it just makes me sad, because I just think that a person behind the angry post behind the blogs, which focuses so much and negativity, makes me wonder what's their life like on a daily? Because you get what you put out. So I think the rule of three is a really big core belief for me.

Renee: 15:13

And so you mentioned that you tend to worship Hekate, are there other gods and goddesses that you incorporate in your worship?

Camille: 15:25

No. There are other ones that are interested in just to like, I like researching occult stuff, but Hekate seems to be my goddess of choice. She's the goddess of crossroads, she's known as the three faced goddess, which means the past, present, and the future, or mother, maiden, crone. She's the three parts of a person's life, you know, very young and we're children, when we become mothers, and then we age. And I like the fact that she incorporates all those things. She's also the goddess of Witchcraft and Paganism and occultism, or whatever it is you want to call it. And she's also the goddess of the crossroads. And I believe that we go through a series of crossroads in our life. If you look up her mythology, she took in a dog and a cat, and I believe they call it an Ermine. And those are other goddesses that had been punished or cast aside. Instead of letting them wander through the woods, for whatever it was that happened to them, she actually took them in. So she's actually the gatherer of lost souls. And I think everybody's a little lost in this life. And she's also the one that helps transition from life to death. And so she's there in all aspects and all parts of your life. Is she one that I'd mess with, no. She's a little grumpy, she's got some dungeon things going on. But who doesn't? She kind of teaches you how to embrace it. But what I do appreciate about her, what's a little different than some gods and goddesses that people worship, is Hekate gives you the right to defend yourself. And I know that may contradict the rule of three, but hear me out. So a lot of goddesses and gods, like it's a fluffy bunny religion. This person is Goddess of the rainbow and everything is always happy. And there's love and light, and there's baby bunnies and shit everywhere. And it's like, that's not the reality of life. So when gods and goddesses are super fluffy bunny and stuff like that, it doesn't appeal to me. And so Hekate allows you to defend yourself. If someone is verbally attacking you, or you're attacking yourself. I mean, sometimes our worst enemies are ourselves, and she allows you to defend yourself. I'm not saying go out and attack people. But it's a little different than some of the other things that people worship in Paganism. A lot of them are like, turn the cheek or, you know, look the other way or just go by the rule of three only. And to me, that's not the reality of life. So Hekate is very appealing to me.

Renee: 17:55

And do you believe in and seek assistance from other supernatural beings?

Camille: 18:05

Gaea is a big one, of course. But I think the most Pagans worship Gaea, because of the nature aspect. I also kind of acknowledge that there is like the keeper of the day, there is a keeper of the night. I believe in a lot of supernatural experience, like we're all made up of energy. So when we pass away, who's to say that you don't get lost, or you don't get stuck, and you didn't make it to Summerland, you know, you felt that there was something on this realm that was incomplete. Or you were taken so quickly that you didn't realize that you're gone. And so I believe that there are a lot of things in this world that we maybe don't understand. I think a lot of things that are based on mythology have a certain amount of truth to it. You know, it's kind of like that telephone game. One rumor starts out one way and then it gets convoluted and changes, the Bible. And Pagan myths and urban myths and beliefs. So, right now, I mostly just focused on Hekate.

Renee: 19:10

And what are your beliefs about the afterlife?

Camille: 19:12

So, a lot of Pagans believe in a Summerland. And I like to believe in that concept too, it's the Pagan version of heaven. You know, you go there, and it's always your favorite season and you're surrounded by maybe your old pets and your old friends and people that you encounter in this lifetime, or maybe in another lifetime, who's to say. But I personally, I like the concept of a Summerland, but I believe that we make our own heaven or hell, our own Summerland or own Hades. If you hold on to regret and disdain and anger your whole life and you just dwell on all the negative things that happen to you, how can you really grow as a spirit and move on. So maybe to one person, Hades is going to that same office job they had when they were 45, that they hated every day. Maybe that's their personal Hades. Maybe someone's version of Summerland, you know, they moved on and they didn't have regrets and they weren't angry about things or sad. Maybe their Summerland is watering in the garden on a June morning in which they just felt completely happy. So I personally think we make our own.

Renee: 20:26

And do you believe in reincarnation?

Camille: 20:28

I do believe in reincarnation. And I think that a lot of people think, "Oh, well, it's the body with the Spirit." And I think the reverse. I think we're spirits with bodies. And I think in order to grow into evolve, and to become better spirits, to be more connected to people on earth, I think that we have to go through a series of lifetimes and a series of lessons. And if you didn't learn the lesson the first time, you know, maybe you come back and you do it again. But it's not a form of punishment. It's a form of how can we progress, how can we move on to the next step? And that same concept can be applied to anything, like science or politics or economics you know? How can we work this revolve to move on to the next level, and maybe leave our spirit better than the way that we found it the first time. Or leave the earth better than we found it.

Renee: 21:20

And do you embrace the label Witch? How do you see your religion with ideas of Witchcraft and magick?

Camille: 21:33

When I say things like "I'm Wiccan," other Pagans are out there like "Oh, it's like a fluffy bunny. She's all hippie and stuff. Maybe she doesn't shave or wears ----- When I say, "I'm a witch," Witch has such a negative connotation to it still, even to this day, that if you say you people are like, "Ohhhh." So if you say Pagan, if someone is well educated, which let's roll the dice these days, they'll understand that that means anything outside of Christianity, Catholicism, and Judaism. It was outside of the three core beliefs that originated on one side of the world where you have Islamic too and everything to where the jinn come from and things like that. If I say "I'm Pagan", people seem to accept that pretty well. I do not like the term Warlock, because that actually translates to oath breaker. It's very slanderous, and shitty for people to say. So when you see people posting on the internet, they're like I'm a Warlock, it's like, no, you're full of shit. And you're some creepy little guy that you know, plays D&D in his mom's basement. You're probably 35 years old. And you've been reading one too many little occult books in the basement, you need to come up for some air, you need some real Pagan knowledge. When you see terms like that, it's a big red flag. There's something not right with that person. If everybody and their mom is running around, claiming to be a priestess or high priest, it's all bullshit. Unless you're actually in charge of a coven, and you're actively teaching and inspiring others in your group. You can't just call yourself a high priestess or high priest. And really the High Priest is only there to assist the high priestess, it's almost like a matriarchal system in a way. So there are many key terms and red flags in this community that maybe people aren't aware of. So also the term Witch can be applied to if someone's a Voodoo priestess they can also use the term Witch, or Satanist, or loose variants, because there is a difference between those two. A lot of people don't know that either for some reason. And they can call themselves witches as well. And so Witch has become a term that's got negative connotations to it. Because people don't understand basic Witchcraft. They don't understand Voodoo, they don't understand Satanism, they don't understand Rosecarians. And we're not the same. We're our own little spider webs, you know, each corner, Witch just has a negative bitter taste to it still, even to this day, which is insane. So I prefer Pagan.

Renee: 24:18

How active would you say you are in terms of your religious practice?

Camille: 24:23

I practice every day. And it doesn't have to be anything big. It can just be me watering the garden or giving \$1 to a homeless person, it can be me simply closing my eyes enjoying the breeze and smelling when the lavender and the lilac bloom in the spring. It can be anything as long as its nature and it has good intentions. I think that's the most important aspect, is the intention. I've recently written a novel, I'm trying to get it published. Right now, I'm a nobody in

the writer's world, so I don't exist. And so I've written a series of four short stories in lieu of a novel, try to get one of those short stories published, because my ultimate goal is to get that novel published. And it's about 16th century Germany during the burning times. It's a Romani woman who was a midwife and a healer in her village, and she's accused of witchcraft. And she had taken in wayward children that had been abandoned in the woods, because that's what they did back then. Not everybody had a cliff like Sparta, just kick the baby over the cliff. Sometimes you just left it in the woods, hope that a fox eats it or something. But she collects these children that are left in the woods by her home. And people purposely leave them there knowing that she'll take them in. And so when she's accused of witchcraft, out of four of her children two of them are caught with her. I go through the process of how was someone accused of witchcraft, why were they accused, and then how did they get from being accused to being arrested? How were they transported? And then when they got to where they were being held, what were the conditions really like? I wanted to do it from a first person point of view. So they go through the interrogation, and they torture and they beat her. They go through the mock trial, which was always just kind of bullshit, because it was already bias. They already knew what they were going to do to these women. Didn't matter what she said or didn't say she was still a witch in their eyes. And it could have been based off of something as petty as she was a single woman after her husband passed away, and she refused to remarry, but wanted to keep her lands. And say the neighbor wanted her property and said, "Hey, I'll buy it from you." And she said, "No, this is all I've got." Well, damn, she's a witch because she has something I want. And screw her because she's just a woman. Because that was the mentality back in the day. With the recent abortion things I wish I could say the mentalities changed towards women, it still hasn't. We have the right to vote, but we're not really heard. But that's another topic. So the woman is accused, they arrest her, they take her and they torture her. And then they burn her at the stake, with two of her children. And at the very end, I split the point of view. You see the point of view from her at the stake. I described the way that she feels and the things that she's seen. And she's getting little flashbacks, because she's kind of coming in and out from, you know, the pain she went through. And then the other point of view is the children that were able to escape. They're watching this. And people say, "Well, why would you write something so horrific," and I said "Because it's part of history. And that's what really happens."

Camille:

And unfortunately, people are kind of whitewashing history now a days. One of the children that I taught last year, at a different district that I won't name, showed me the history books that they were reading. And the history book read, "The Native Americans willingly relocated to assist the pilgrims, in expanding their territory." And I read this, and I said, "Willingly?" They said they willingly relocated. I was like, well that's a bunch of bullshit. Because what about the Trail of Tears? What about all the times that people rounded them up and separated them from their families? And so to say, whitewash them, and forbid them to speak in their own language and gave them names? I mean, history has a habitual practice of excluding certain people at specific times. You think that as an evolved human race that we would have learned from this now, but obviously we haven't. When you see children right now that are crossing the borders, seeking sanctuary, that are being thrown into cages. Innocent children. So we still haven't learned. We're

supposed to be so evolved, but yet, we're doing the same thing continuously. So by me writing this book, that's just one chapter of what humans have done to each other. I mean, there were entire villages in Germany, that had no women, because they were all burned at the stake. And they would burn the one healer they had in the village and then all sudden, everybody's got small pox or influenza. Or Jeremiah or Jebidiah or whatever religious name you want to throw on it, has a broken leg. And oh God, it's gangrenous. "What do we do?" "Well, shit, you burned the healer? What do you think you did?" So that's the whole purpose of writing them.

Renee: 29:13

Do you consider your beliefs to be more of a religion or a spiritual practice?

Camille: 29:21

I'd say the religious aspect. By saying religion it identifies the set core beliefs and set core rules. There are rules that I operate by. Like, when I set up my altar, and you know, I have a specific place where I have to put earth, where I have to put fire and where I have to put water. When that can be like, a little vial of water or feather. So the religious aspect of it, I do follow that, but not like to a T. It doesn't have to be specific. So for me, I'd say the religious aspect is about 30% of it. And then the rest of it is spiritual. Because it's how I feel. What do I want to do? What do I need?

Renee: 30:04

Do you think that mentality makes it harder to get the government to recognize Paganism as a religion?

Camille: 30:13

Well, it is recognized, I mean, people that are in the military, they can have a pentacle or a pentagram. And there's a big difference between the two, people still don't know that either. They can have that applied to their dog tag. And then what does that mean? It means that hopefully, when they ship that poor soldier's body, man or woman, or trans, because trans people have a right to be in the military too damn it. I don't care what gender they are, if they want to defend this crooked ass country, then they should have the right to. And then they should be taken care of when they're done defending the country. Unlike what we do to our fucking vets. Go fight a war and blow away innocent people and babies, but when you get back, if you need to talk about it, no, we're not giving you therapy. We're just going to medicate you until you're just a zombie. Screw that. So. But we should be recognized. But we're very much like stray cats, we are kind of everywhere. And because it's not super supported, it's not like we have a Pagan Community Center. Although, I would love to head that up. That would be fantastic. It's not like we have a place where other Pagan groups can come and meet and participate in one big ritual. You know, we have Gaea, but you can only do that seasonally because it's outdoors. You know, what if we wanted to have a ritual with 1,000 Pagans, where would we do that?

Camille: 31:34

You know, they have all these creepy mega churches, but we don't have that capability. One because we're not that supported by the government still. I'm not saying that we have anything to do with them, but Luciferians and Satanists, when somebody put the Ten Commandments up in a city? I remember reading that. And so they had a statue of Baphomet erected. And I'm like, "Yes. Yes". I support that because that means that if they have that much of a voice, we should have a voice. And I think right next to Baphomet, there should be a statue of Hekate. But I think if we were recognized and supported, I think we could do these things. But then the other part of the equation is getting people to come out and say "yes, I'm a Pagan." Using that umbrella term whatever form Dianic or Odinism or Gardnerian or whatever form they are Wiccan. Getting people to come out and say, "Yes, I am," in the open. So many people that I know in the community, they don't wear their pentagram, or their pentacle, like I'm wearing right now. You know, they're still unsure of how people will perceive them. They're still unsure if they will be discriminated against. I actually had a boss that at a previous job, I was ran out of my job because she was a devout Christian, like one of those really creepy, strict Christian, that are like, no gays, no blah, blah, blah, you know, a very cut and dry Christian I should say. And when she found out I was Pagan, there was one child that we had at the facility that was very mentally ill. And she believed that she was being attacked by demons. Okay, she was a schizophrenic, a very young schizophrenic.

Camille: 33:24

And the co workers there, had watched Supernatural. OK, I wasn't even in the state when this happened, by the way, like, I was visiting my ex boyfriend in New York when this went down. And so because these two co-workers, had watched Supernatural, they lined all the doorways and the windows with salt, telling the little girl that nothing could cross the threshold, you know, she would be protected. It was a way to pacify a child, she was like ten, which is really sad. And so when I got back into town, I wasn't even in the state when this went down. I had no connection or communication with these people. When I got back the next day, I wasn't even done serving breakfast to these children. And this woman came in and started ripping me a new one. The children weren't even out of the room yet, they were in the process of leaving. And it scared them because these were very vulnerable children. And she started saying "You need to keep your damn Pagan beliefs to yourself. I don't care what hoodoo Voodoo bullshit you do behind closed doors. I've got people putting salt on Windows and doorways. And I don't need that shit." Then she goes, "Just keep your Pagan beliefs to yourself." And this woman was so enraged. It was just pure blind hatred. Her vein was popping on her from her forehead. She was bright red. She was like, salivating. I've never seen anybody get so mad that they salivated, it looked like a feral dog..

Camille: 34:57

And I stood there because I had no idea what the hell she was talking about. It just got off the plane. My plane landed late, I had a red eye flight. And I was there, five in the morning to make breakfast for these kids. Finally, I found out through another co-worker what had happened. I said "How are you going to hold me accountable for the actions of others? I wasn't even in the state. I didn't communicate with them and say, 'Oh yeah, line the hallways with salt. Oh yeah,

burn some sage while you're at it.” I would have told them to at least bless the walls with some water bitches. But it's the fact that there is still that blind hatred, that blind ignorance that lack of understanding. And people sometimes they mask their anger and their hatred with fear. Because people fear what they don't understand. They fear what they don't know. And I think that is one of the driving forces for our society, even here in the United States, it's fear. Oh, he's a different skin tone, she's a different gender, oh they identify as a different gender than what they were born. Who gives a shit. Are you in the bedroom, when they're doing what they do? Are you watching and critiquing? No. Are you their motivational coach, no. So what do you care about what they do behind closed doors? If I met a Luciferian on the street, I would embrace them and say, “Hey, let's sit down. What you do? I'll tell you what I do.” I wish people were more open minded. And so because of that, that stigma that fear, I don't know, if in the next ten years, Pagans will ever have an open public facility where they can openly worship with each other. And without that fear. Will be vandalized, yeah. There are synagogues that are still being vandalized by people. Just happened in Mississippi the other day. We're starting to see more stores, I'm sure they have all kinds of vandalism of their property. So it would have to be a government sanctioned and protected facility. I would expect the same treatment as the other churches get, like we better be tax exempt and all that good crap. Because it's bullshit, I'm not paying taxes if the Presbyterians or the herd of Lutherans down the street aren't paying taxes either.

Camille: 37:05

So it would be a huge push for the Pagan community if something happened. Because if you can make it happen in one city, it will be a chain effect, there will be a chain reaction. It'll show others that it can happen. And if I could participate, or donate, or do anything that I can to support something like that actually occurring, I would be very proud and very happy to do so. Because then that means one day when I have children, or grandchildren, someone goes through my trunk of things after I passed away, “Oh look what grandma did”. That might be nice. I want to know that my children and my grandchildren have that right to openly worship and that we're not hiding out in a nudist colony outside the city limits. Were you still hear farmers shoot off guns just to scare us. You know, I'd like to know that my kids can wear the pentacle or the pentagram of their choice openly. And no one will even think a second thing of it. That would be a beautiful dream. And sometimes that's all it is. Martin Luther King had a dream that happened. I think this could too.

Renee: 38:24

Do you create new spells and rituals as part of your practice? Or do you tend to stick to a traditional script?

Camille: 38:32

That's a good one. So I think the best way to learn anything, is to review the history or review the classics. You can't write a great sailors novel if you don't read the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* first, you can't write a good horror movie, unless you've read Edgar Allan Poe. You know, learn from the people who were there before you and then build on it. And you can personalize it and make

it your own, as long as it has that kind of set core values. For example, whenever my friends have a new baby, I always make them a poppet. It's a doll that's filled with healing herbs and crystals. But I always fill my puppets with Rose Quartz for love, Amethyst, for love and acceptance and understanding. I fill it with little sachets of lavender to soothe the baby. And I know it's expensive, but I'll even throw in a vanilla bean inside because the vanilla bean it represents comfort, it represents nurturing, it soothes and eases. And then I do a little sashay of oatmeal so that they aren't itchy, and they sleep at night and they are content. And you'll always feel like your belly is full. It's a sense of comfort. And so I'll make these babies new poppets every time they're born, it doesn't matter their gender, because I don't make them color coded. You know, I'm not gonna make a blue poppet for a boy a green poppet for a girl, because I'm not going to push those gender stereotypes. So all my poppets are yellow, like the sun or like sunflowers for our state. And that's a gender neutral color, and it represents happiness. Yellow has a very positive connotation. And babies see bright colors first. And so I know that maybe one of the first things they'll see is that little poppet smiling at them. It makes me happy knowing that they have that.

Camille: 40:28

But if someone is having an issue with a coworker, they come to me, and I'll tell them tack a mirror under your desk, because everything that person casts out, you will be reflected back to them. If someone is feeling very sick, I'll crack an egg under their bed. You let the egg sit for a day and it absorbs all that negativity. And then you take it out in the yard and you bury it. If someone comes up to me and says, "Oh, I have a wart," we'll take a potato and will rub it on the wart, and then we'll go bury it out in the yard. Hopefully that wart is absorbed into the potato. And that person, is a new carrier. And I'm sure that there are chemical reactions and explanations for all these things. Because what is magick but a question or a problem we have to solve. Biochemistry was once considered to be magic. Now we understand that astronomy and astrology came from each other. I mean, they were considered forms of magic. They were divination, you looked at the stars, and you learned the meaning behind them. Alchemy was considered a form of magic, it's still considered a form of magic. But how do you take full powders and purify them and make them into pure gold? How do you melt that down? Oh, you have to add another elemental process to melt that down. What is cooking, but magick. And that's what I do, I'm a chef. And so by putting positive intention into everything that I make, it makes people feel warm and welcomed. It's the literal essence of hospitality.

Camille: 41:58

And I think that's what Paganism should be about. It's what it is about, for most people, hospitality. And the definition of hospitality is welcoming a stranger into your home, giving them sanctuary, giving them food, making them feel safe, and maybe helping them with a problem that maybe they didn't know they had. Or maybe they had, but they didn't think anyone can help them with. So those are some of the core aspects of my everyday life.

Renee: 42:32

Does food figure into your religious life?

Camille: 42:36

Religious and personal, and professional. I've been a professional chef since 2006. I've been all around the world. I've been to Antarctica, Hawaii, Alaska. I worked for a traveling circus on the East Coast for two years. And I cooked for their staff and their performers. And I lived in a tiny little 10 by 10 camper that fit on the back of a regular truck bed. I used a porta-potty for two years. Never underestimate the beauty of a flushing toilet. I may be Pagan, but that doesn't mean we're all out crapping in the woods, and we're happy about it. Sometimes you gotta do what you gotta do. But that's not the core belief there. Food is magic. I mean, think about your favorite food dish that you had when you were a child. It could be something as simple as Velveeta mac and cheese, which none of it's real. It's all processed crap. But it's the feeling that you get from eating that bowl of mac that grandma made. Or maybe your Aunt Terry made a special type of like trail mix cookie and you eat that and you feel comforted. That's what it should be about. That's what food should be. That's what marriage should be about. How do you give someone that feeling of comfort and happiness? How do you make sure that they're full or are getting the nutrients that they need. I mean, every spice for example, in culinary and in Paganism, it has a magical purpose, and it has a medicinal purpose. So you eat cinnamon, that's supposed to attract love and passion and make you happy. But on the medicinal side of it, it lowers your blood pressure, and it helps with heart issues. So you have to learn both sides of the coin. If you're going to become a Kitchen Witch, you need to know what each herb and seasoning does, on a magical level and on a medicinal one. I would love to open up a food truck that says Healing Foods. And it would be dishes made from items that incorporate both. So it would say parsley- good for bad breath, good for luck.

Renee: 44:49

What do you think is the pros and cons of being a solitary practitioner versus being a member of a coven?

Camille: 44:57

Well the con is I'm lazy. And the pro is I'm lazy. So it's up to me if I want to come out and socialize or not. Right now I'm very busy. I just acquired a new position, and so I'm trying to learn the ins and outs. And I'm also trying to get a part time job to supplement the remaining income that I still need. And so right now I'm doing that. And I'm having a procedure done, and the car broke down, I have to go get another car. So I have all these little elements in it. And so by being part of a coven at this time in my life, I would be expected to show up. Everybody has a part, everybody participates, everybody brings an item for a potluck afterwards. What we call Cakes and Ale, Catholics call Holy Eucharist and wine, because they stole it from us. But right now, it's a definite pro because I just can't make it. And in order to be there, you really need to be there. So if you're feeling bad or you've got personal problems, don't step in a circle. It's like going into someone's home. And they have all white tile floor and it's clean and it's pristine. And you come in covered in mud. And you track mud all into their house. It's very personal.

Camille:

So if you're not feeling great, ask for healing ritual, but don't step into circle. Because when you step in a circle, you bring all your shit with you. So it's kind of like that old expression, "check your baggage at the door." Right now I've got too much baggage to step in a circle with other people, it's not fair. So until I sort out my stuff, then I won't participate. So there are pros and cons. I say a big con is sometimes you feel lonely. It's just me at my altar. My boyfriend's not the same practice as me. And sometimes it's just me reading my little books. I found activities that we can do together that makes him feel incorporated, like we do a lot of gardening. And we go to a lot of greenhouses, we go on nature walks. You know, that's not just a bonding activity, because we're partners, but it's also a religious bonding for me, and it's something that he enjoys. So he may not know that I'm recalling stuff in my mind, or I'm making an offering to Hekate when I leave a handful of coins at a tree. It doesn't have to be obvious. So those are some of the pros and cons of being by yourself. But I'd say the most wonderful part about being in a coven with other people is there's this crazy sense of silence falls around you right after the circle has been cast and everybody's there. And it's with open love and open trust open heart and open mind. So you're willingly going into the circle with other people and you're exchanging energies, and you're with your winding and weaving them together like a tapestry. At the end of the ritual, if you envision what we made as a tapestry, then put it up in your heart, like on your wall, and know that you have that tapestry. And sometimes if I'm feeling really bad about I don't have time to be with others, I'll mentally go over those tapestries. So you kind of remember that Samhain we did, we went on that soul search, and we went through the woods, and we had different activities that we did.

Camille: 48:16

Oh, I remember Ostara with some people when we made little balls, and we threw them into the fire to like burn away things that had bothered us from the previous year. Oh, I remember when we did Yule, and everybody did the secret stag exchange. So I highly encourage people to step in and interact with each other. But if you're not in a good space, or you don't have the time, don't beat yourself up about it. It's like I tell Christian and Catholic friends, you don't have to go to church every Sunday to be a good follower of Jesus and pray for your belief. You just have to carry it in your heart, and try to do at least one small good deed every day. It's the little things that change the world. It's not the big things. Sometimes bigger approaches are more catastrophic than doing simple kindnesses.

Renee: 49:09

What have been the best and worst things about being involved with the local Pagan community?

Camille: 49:17

I think like any other group of, you know, a mass group of people, there's always that certain level of drama. You know, he said she said. There's Witch Wars and "so and so hurt my feelings. I'm going to put their picture in a jar with broken glass and shake it up and throw it into the river because they hurt me." Get over it. You're like taking Harry Potter and mixing it with Jerry Springer, like that's bullshit. That's not what we're supposed to be doing. So that's one

issue. There's always somebody's egos bigger than another person. But you're going to find that in any group. A small selection of human beings, you're going to get that. You're going to get very specific patterns of behavior, regardless of what religious or spiritual path that person follows. One common misconception that I personally really disdain, I don't use the term hate because hate is too powerful, you shouldn't hate anything in this world or in your lifetime. You can dislike things. So disdain is probably the strongest feeling I can muster And that is people misconstruing that Pagans are openly promiscuous. And it's like, okay. People are like, "Oh, well all Pagans are polyamorous", which means we have multiple partners. It's like, well, maybe there are more Pagans who have that lifestyle choice, because that is a lifestyle choice. That has nothing to do with their religion, or spiritual path. Maybe they're just more open about it, because our system is a lot more accepting.

Camille: 50:52

But there's a common misconception that society has that we're all out having orgies in the woods. And it's like, I'm sorry, but I know I don't like getting in on in the leaves, and I don't like ticks, and I'm pretty sure you don't either. So regardless of your religion, I think most people have standards. I like a bed with pillows, to be comfy, indoors and with air conditioning. So that is one thing I really disdain is like when I tell people I'm Pagan and their like "Oh, so you have orgies?" I'm like "No." I've never witnessed one. You're more likely to have had one than me, probably, because that's a lifestyle choice. So look at swingers, for example. There's a lot of Buddhist swingers Jewish swingers Catholics swingers, Christian swingers. But we don't have that connotation that all Christians are swingers, or all Christians are polyamorous. And I think because of the fact that we're so accepting, and we're just so open about everything. Because I get to meet one that's like, super closeted, we might be at our jobs. Which is because we don't want to lose our job. We gotta pay rent to rent too. We can't magically whip up a spell and have the money. Okay. If we did, none of us would be working. Alright, just throwing that out there.

Camille: 52:04

So, I think because we're more accepting, and we're more open, that we have that connotation. And I've come across a lot of people that are attempting to join Paganism. And you know, the different branches of it. Because they think, "Oh, it's a fuck-fest." It's like, No, actually, that's, not what this is. That is a lifestyle choice. You want to dress up like a bear and go to a hotel and get it on furry-style, that's a lifestyle choice. But you might happen to be Christian to. That doesn't mean all Christians like dressing up as gerbils and getting it on. Same with Paganism. I wish people understood this. So when new people come in, they have that. Or, "I want to be a high priestess," or "I want to be a warlock." And you're like, okay, you're already finished at the beginning. That's cool. Why do you want to be? Once again, it comes back to that core central belief, intent. "Oh, I want to be a high priestess because I want people to respect me or I want that guy at work to finally notice me." It's like, "No, that's manipulating someone else's free will, which is a big no no. You're not allowed to do that. Nor could you do that you don't have that capability." So when people come in, either with ill intentions, or they want to get rich quick, or they want people to worship them, which is something I've seen, I call it the goddess complex or the god complex. And that can be found in all religions. It's most commonly found politics. I

mean, look at our shitty president, who wants to be a tiny god with itty-bitty hands on his Lego ball. You find people coming in that want to assert power and dominance over others. So these are things I really don't like about common misconceptions about who we are and what we do. So whatever your sexual preferences are, or what you like to do behind closed doors, lifestyle choice, not religion, not spiritual. Don't assert your dominance or ill intent on others, it just comes back to you in the end. So I'd say those are the things that I really dislike about our beliefs this time.

Renee: 54:22

What about the positives?

Camille: 54:24

First off, me naked at rituals. Nobody cares. Some people do. Optional. I like the freedom, I like the freedom of choice. What I really appreciate, more than any other aspect, is the diversity. There are old Pagans, young Pagans, new Pagans, experienced Pagans, black Pagans, brown Pagans, I haven't met one, and I don't think Trump is Pagan, so I can't say orange Pagan. But there might be one with the bad spray tan, we don't know. It's just, they're all different types of Pagans. And what I love about going out to Gaia, they had like a Laid Back Labor Day and Memorial Day weekend, I wouldn't go to Laid Back, don't take your kids to Laid Back, there's some weird stuff that goes on out there. But Memorial Day weekend, when I was in the showers, it's a co-ed shower. So there are men, and women, and trans, and all kinds of people in there. But one thing I noticed is there were little kids running around. And at first, like the societal part of me was like, "Oh, my God." But then I was like, "Oh, how trusting is this community that you can just let a kid run around naked, and nobody cares." And that's because we feel safe in our community. Also, they do background checks at Gaea, so everybody's safe, like you've been checked out before. But it's knowing that they had that ability to be so free. And there was like a little circle tent in which they were making little dandelion crowns with the kids. And people were just walking around them, some with togas, some not clothed, some with clothes. It didn't matter. It was the fact that it was just that sense of freedom. There's so many aspects of just be who you are, being be the best that you can be. And what I like about it is there's not that sense of looming, you're not made to feel bad for every independent thought, dream or statement that you make. You feel better coming out original than when you went in. And to me, I think that's what all religions and spiritual paths should be. You should feel better after doing what you do with your group by yourself, then when you went in. And if you don't, if you don't feel good about coming out of church, if you don't feel good about yourself, or when you come out of whatever temple you're in, then maybe you really need to question that that belief system is for you.

Camille: 56:58

Because it should make you feel good about you, should make you feel better about the world. And then above all, it should be about love. It should be about acceptance and inspire you. And if your favorite or spiritual pathway isn't doing that, do yourself a favor, because this lifetime is so short, move on. It's like a bad relationship or a bad job sometimes you quit, sometimes you

get fired, or sometimes it's a mutual termination. But that doesn't mean that when you move on to the next thing that you have to harbor those old feelings. You don't have to start a new relationship with the baggage you had with the last person you were with. You don't have to go into a new job with PTSD and be like, "Oh, the last three jobs treated me like crap, I guess this one will too." It's like no, you're supposed to move on and progress, become a better human being. So if your relationship is not working, if your jobs not working, if your faith isn't working, move on to something that will. And don't be bitter about it. That's the one thing that I just can't stand the most in life is when people are like, "Oh, he treated me like shit, that fucker. You loved each other at one point, yes. Did you share something together? Did you really commonly love that person? And then things just didn't turn out right. Or a series of events. Or maybe it just wasn't the right person. But don't hold on to that bitter feeling. "Oh, that church was bad for me. Oh, that job was bad." No, be grateful. Because that job helped put food in your belly and helped pay for your car, and help keep your house afloat, you paid rent or you paid mortgage. That person showed you that maybe they made a broccoli casserole, and no, you don't like broccoli. It could be something as simple as realizing the things that each of those experiences gave us. And then moving on and finding that wonderful thing. Because you can't really move on if you're still holding on to all that icky stuff. It's kind of like a self inflicted rule of three.

Renee: 59:00

And final question, is there anything else you wish to share about anything?

Camille: 59:15

I know that they have taken you know the Pledge of Allegiance out of a lot of schools. And you know, on the back of everybody's money, it says "In God we trust" and people want to go on the God part. I really wish that all religions would realize that when these things say God, it's not specifying a specific god, it can be your god, it can be your goddess. So just throw in another D and E SS on there. Don't get so offended at every little thing. Sometimes, just try to incorporate it so that it fits more into your life as an individual, and don't get so hung up on all the tiny details. And I wish everybody would just remember that whatever spiritual pathway you're on or whatever religion you are, it's just one facet of one giant diamond that we call humans, we call the world, the universe.

Camille: 1:00:23

And above all, I wish more people cared about the planet. I mean, we're losing coral reefs at a 39% rate, global warming is very real, bees are becoming extinct. We're killing off dolphins and turtles are choking on plastic bags thinking they're jellyfish. I don't think it matters what religion or spiritual pathway you have. Everybody should be trying to help the world. And whether that's recycling or switching to hemp jeans. I guess they are making hemp jeans now, kind of cool. But without this world, it doesn't matter what religion, or race, or socio economic background, or how much money you have in the bank. If we can't keep this planet alive, we all die. I really wish people took it more seriously. Stop using pesticides that you know hurt plants. Stop eating crap for what is it, Monsanto. They're bad, okay? Try not to take in so many preservatives. Don't beat

yourself up about every choice you make. If you want a piece of chocolate cake, eat a piece of chocolate cake. If you're diabetic then just make sure it's sugar free. Just remember that you're only human. You're beautiful, and you're flawed, and you're perfect, and you're imperfect. And I just wish more people understood that we're all one entity on a single rock. And we just got to keep this rock afloat. Or there won't be any diversity. Embrace each other instead of looking at each other saying "Oh, well there's this person or that person," why don't you just look at the person for who they are. And not their beliefs, or their political, or their skin tone, or their religion or their gender, gender identity, or frickin gender preference, or sexuality. It doesn't matter in the end. We're all human. I just wish more people saw that.

Renee:

Thank you.