

Mike Nichols

Interviewed by Diana Brown at Latte Land on State Line Road, Kansas City, KS
July 6, 2014

Transcribed by Krystal Luce

Abstract: Oral history interview with Mike Nichols conducted by Diana Brown in Kansas City, Kansas, on July 6, 2014. Mike Nichols is the author of *The Witches' Sabbats*, taught classes on Paganism for decades, and owned The Magic Lantern occult book shop in Kansas City in the 1980s. This interview was conducted for the Religion in Kansas Project as part of a summer fieldwork internship funded by the Friends of the Department of Religious Studies.

Note: All oral histories in the Religion in Kansas Project are licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License.

Brown	Um, so, if you want to say just your name and your age and where you're from to start off.
Nichols	It's Mike Nichols, my age is 61. Where I am from? Originally, I was from a little town in Missouri called Carrollton. About—population of about five thousand. Then I—after that I went to college down at Columbia Missouri, MU, got my graduate degree there—undergraduate degree there. Went back some years later to get a graduate degree, but in library sciences, but never finished. Um, but after getting my undergraduate degree I moved to Kansas City in Seventy-Six. I've been here ever since.
Brown	All right. So, at this point almost, you're almost from Kansas City.
Nichols	Pretty—pretty much.
Brown	Well, so what—do you have any sort of religious upbringing at all?
Nichols	Yes. I was raised in a very traditional Roman Catholic.
Brown	Everybody I talk to is Roman Catholic.
Nichols	Well--
Brown	It's so funny.
Nichols	Well, in my experience, the classes that I've taught over the years, my best students, for whatever reasoning, have a Jewish or Roman Catholic background.

Brown	Jewish! [raises hand]
Nichols	Yeah.
Brown	Hm.
Nichols	<p>One of the reasons I theorize is that I don't need to explain to them why the ritual. The Protestants are all like, [Unintelligible sounds] "Why would you do this?" They're all against the bells and smells, as they say. And, you know that whole Protestant reformation thing, but being brought up Catholic—it was very funny, I went to a parochial school, Catholic school, for the first eight years of my life. Through eighth grade. Eight years or nine years, school life, I should say. My mom was the first lay teacher in that particular Catholic school at our parish, so we had nuns and priests around our house all the time. And so I was an altar boy. Loved the ritual, loved the liturgy, just loved—and most of all, of course, the liturgical calendar. I just loved the way that grounded you in the rhythms of the year. What I couldn't accept was the theology behind it. From day one I had a real hard time conceptualizing or believing that humankind existed within—in a fallen state or it needed redeeming. [Laughs] So that—so that made the role of Jesus and everything kind of like [pause] why? You know. Even if mankind did need redeeming, I didn't understand why some guy dying two thousand years ago would have done the trick. [Laughs] So, I—for me the theology of it never took. And I'm lucky in that regard because I've got friends who bought into it and I'm thinking of a particular friend of mine who lives in St. Louis, also raised Catholic, experienced such guilt trips about his sexuality when he reached puberty and so forth, bought into the whole idea, you know, this—any feelings like that were sinful. Of course, he's since become Pagan. He's very bitter about his upbringing and the pain that he went through that caused him. And so I'm one of the lucky ones, I dodged that.</p>
Brown	Yeah, I wonder why that is and how that works where for some people that sort of penetrates and for others it just doesn't?
Nichols	<p>No, I know he had a bigger family. I was kind of the odd—especially for a Catholic family—I was an only child, I was the kid who my parents thought they were never going to have. They tried to have kids, but it wasn't happening, but when my mom turned forty suddenly a miracle came. So maybe I didn't have all the pressure from the siblings and all that. My dad was the cradle Catholic, he was raised Catholic in the first place. My mom converted to Catholicism when they were first married and as is often the case, she became more gung-ho about it than he ever would have [unintelligible; laughs]. So, not that either one of them—[unintelligible; noise] all this noise is coming from—not that either one of them ever encouraged my interests along these lines. In fact, my mom—my dad died first, and my mom died not too long ago and even on her death bed she was not reconciled to my faith, so that was sad.</p>

	[05:20]
Brown	Was she reconciled to you? Did you have a relationship?
Nichols	Yeah, but it was strained because of that. When I first started my interests in witchcraft and first started teaching when I got into college in 1970, she told her friends that it was a phase I was going through. And would you believe after like thirty, forty years, whatever, she was still telling her friends that it was a phase I was going through? It's a long phase.
Brown	Well, you know, Augustinian theology, if you repent on your death bed then it was relatively speaking a phase.
Nichols	[laughs] I suppose that's true.
Brown	So, I don't know, so when did you start encountering things that you would consider to be pagan or where did you learn about...?
Nichols	Well, it started out for me, I guess when I was in Catholic school and Catholic grade school, I first started questioning a lot of my religious upbringing. And one of the first and most important moment, a pivotal moment I think for me, as I got interested in—and this was in let's see, in eighth grade, this would have been 1966, so it was really kind of before the modern women's lib movement thing, but I'm only [unintelligible; noise]. I like everything balanced and fair and it seemed to me unfair and unbalanced that God was always thought of as male and never as female. And so I went up to my teacher's [unintelligible] and said that, one time during recess and said, you know, "Why is God a man?" And she said, "God's not a man, God's a spirit," I said, "Yes, I understand that, but why do we always think of God as a man, a man in the clouds with a beard and when we pray we say Our Father?" And she just looked at me and she said, "Why do you ask a question like that?" I said, "I don't know, I just thought it didn't seem fair." She said, "Well, at noon recess you march right over to the rectory and ask Monsignor Togallen. Well he was an old Cath--, an old traditional Catholic priest, but he did his best actually because that was during the years of Vatican II and there was kind of a breath of liberalism kind of moving through the church at the time. And so he told me, well, Catholic theologians don't believe God, that God, well, you know, he didn't know how to tell an eighth grader that God is an asexual concept so he ends up by telling me it's ok, you can think of God as either male or a female, which was liberal for that time. Oh, I was ecstatic about this and I came back after our recess, in Catholic school you all stood up by your desks and said prayers before class is recommenced, so you can imagine, there I was, third row back in second or, second row, third desk back, as loud as I could saying, "Our Mother, who art in heaven," and Sister Celeste said, "Out in the hall." [Both laugh] And she stood there with her face turning bright red, which was a nice contrast to the black and white they used to wear, and she said, "Well, why did you say that?" and I said, I thought I'd pull rank on her and said, "Well Monsignor Togallen said I could." And she

	<p>stood there just seething for what seemed to me to be a minute at least and finally she said, “Well, from now on, you just pray like we pray.” And you know, I think that was the moment that I realized I was on a different track and I knew that I believed in something like a God that wasn’t the same kind of God that was being believed in by all the people around me. But when I went to church on Sunday, their God was not my God. Their God wasn’t big enough. And, so I became interested initially in Eastern religions because, you know, that was the—those were the years during which the Beatles had met the Maha Rishi and even in Carrollton, Missouri, you could—we didn’t have a book store, but they sold books on those little spinning racks at the drug store and you could buy books, paperbacks, on Eastern religions. So I started picking up books on, you know, everything I could get my hands on: meditation, Taoism—I was particularly drawn to Taoism, Shinto—I loved—I read everything.</p> <p>[10:16]</p>
Brown	Do you remember any of the book titles that they sold just at the drug store or anything just struck you?
Nichols	God, I’m trying to think. I read so, I’m a huge bookaholic, I’m trying to think. Houston Smith’s book on comparative religions.
Brown	They would have sold something like that just at the drug store?
Nichols	Yeah, yeah, yeah. And just occult books, too. Astrology was really big at the time. My first book on witchcraft, specifically, would have been Sybil Leek’s <i>Diary of a Witch</i> . And I saw her on Johnny Carson’s show, you know, and she came on with her [unintelligible] sitting on her shoulder and it was sort of familiar.
Brown	I was looking for that on YouTube and I couldn’t find it.
Nichols	<i>Bewitched</i> was on TV, you know, and there were a lot of pop culture references to witchcraft. And I remember seeing the movie, hang on, what’s the name of it? <i>Witch of East</i> ?
Brown	<i>Bell, Book and Candle</i> ?
Nichols	<i>Bell, Book and Candle</i> , thank you, Kim Novak. And thinking at the time wouldn’t it be cool if there really were witches, you know, hidden? Not, you know, kind of underground in our society today and then Sybil Leek shows up on Johnny Carson, lo and behold, there are witches alive and talking about it. So, I had to order her book and Paul Huson’s <i>Mastering Witchcraft</i> , another earlier one. Hans Holzer was a big writer at the time, wrote, gosh I can’t think of what his witchcraft titles. He wrote on other supernatural stuff, too. Ghosts.

Brown	He's sort of a journalist-ish, sensationalistic kind of.
Nichols	Yes, exactly, well put. But, you know, I just read everything I could get my hands on. Frank Donovan's book <i>Never on a Broomstick</i> .
Brown	What's that?
Nichols	It was kind of a history of witchcraft. I used that as a text book in my class for a while. Probably the longest running book that I used as a text book for my class was Stewart Farrar's book <i>What Witches Do</i> . When Margot Adler's book came out, <i>Drawing Down The Moon</i> , I switched to it. <i>Spiral Dance</i> , did <i>Spiral Dance</i> come out first? It might have been.
Brown	They came out in the same year, but one of them might have come out before.
Nichols	Yeah, I can't remember which came first. It might have been <i>Spiral Dance</i> . So I used that, I think, first and then Margot's came out and since hers was much more kind of scholarly oriented and history oriented, which I've always been myself, I recognized her from having been a correspondent on NPR and stuff. So I switched to her book and stayed with that for a long time. But my reading list, I should have brought it; I guess I can send it to you.
Brown	You can send it to me.
Nichols	I had a, like a six page annotated bibliography that I used for my class and it was like, you know, go home. I didn't really give assignments since it was a Communiversity class, you couldn't give grades, so I couldn't really give assignments. So, you know, I would just say go home and read as much of this as you possibly can and use the annotations to see which things you're specifically interested in, and then, you know, because I had like little mini sections on like parapsychology and ghosts and other stuff that was kind of quasi-related. Then the main sections were broken down into history of witchcraft, witchcraft, the feminist take on witchcraft, oh stuff on comparative theology, I even included books of fantasy like Susan Cooper's <i>The Dark is Rising</i> .
Brown	I never read that one.
Nichols	Lloyd Alexander's Prydain Chronicles, and children's books, and stuff that had things to say about magic and ritual that I thought were important and in some ways that you don't get reading a non-fiction book. Kind of giving you more a little bit the experiential side of it. That was one of the great things about Paul Huson's book <i>Mastering Witchcraft</i> , it was one of those books that as soon as you read it you wanted to run out and start practicing. You knew, you wanted, as soon as he talked about how to do a book of shadows you just wanted to go out and buy a blank book and dig in. [laughs] It was great. So anyway.

Brown	<p>So, you're a teenager, I think, or you're in Carrollton still, reading everything you can.</p> <p>[14:58]</p>
Nichols	<p>Right. That went on for four years all through my high school. And by the end of that time I was really mostly, you know, I started reading about witchcraft, but I felt like I don't want to commit to this until I really know everything there is to know. And that was as a result of after having read so much about Eastern religions I felt that there's a lot about Eastern religion that appealed to me, Hindu and so forth, the many gods, goddesses and gods, but no matter what I did I always felt like those Eastern religions came off feeling Eastern. That my Western frame of mind just didn't quite wrap itself around. You know I read Alan Watts and I'd read all the other people who are good at explicating Eastern thoughts to Western man, but it still, it felt foreign. And I thought well what, you know, what was going on in with my ancestors in Western Europe before Christianity started, which can't be more than two thousand years old, I thought, naively, not realizing that it came to like Scandinavian countries much later. So I thought I started reading about that [unintelligible; noise] same thing basically that Sybil Leek is talking about, it's just a later version of it and so that's when I started getting into it. I kept myself at a distance for those four years in high school, I did nothing but read and study, and at the end of those four years I finally decided, you know, I can read about this the rest of my life and never read everything there is, never learn everything there is to know, read everything there is to read, so I'm ready to take the plunge and so without having met another witch in 1970, without anything but my own [unintelligible], I just decided this was what I wanted to do, I had bought my first little silver chalice, my first altar tool, and on a night of the full moon, the summer before my freshman year of college, there was a little apple orchard back behind our house in Carrollton and I took that chalice out and sat under the full moon, I made up my own little ritual, self dedication, and from that moment I was on this path. So, next part of it was that I got to the University of Missouri.</p>
Brown	<p>I'm not sure this is working. Good, yes. I'm paranoid about that always, like, anyway, so.</p>
Nichols	<p>Got to the University of Missouri as a freshman. When I got there, I noticed—it was weird—hardly anybody from Carrollton in my class went there, they went to Wentworth or somewhere else. So I had like really no friends down there and I thought, I noticed that there was this off-campus group called, it was a free university called The New Missouri School For Thought and Action. And, in their catalog, they had a course called Witchcraft and Magic. And I thought if I enroll in this course, I'll at least meet people that have, you know, like-minded people who are interested in similar subjects. So I went down to their office to enroll and the guy behind—and this is another one of those serendipity things—the guy behind the desk—oh, I did do this, in a moment of bravado, I said, "You know, if the instructor would like a teaching assistant or anything I would like to, you know, do the prompt work I'd volunteer because I'm so interested in this," and the guy behind the desk looked at me and he said, "Do you know anything about this stuff?" And I said, "Well, I've</p>

	<p>been studying it for the last four years,” and he said, “Really? Hang on a second,” and he goes off into the other room and consults with this other guy and comes back and says, “How would you like to teach the class because the guy we had lined up to teach it has left town, we don’t know where he is or if he’s coming back,” I said, “Okay,” and a couple of weeks later I was standing at the front of a class of about thirty students.</p>
Brown	<p>And you’re a freshman in college?</p> <p>[19:34]</p>
Nichols	<p>And I’m a freshman in college. Never having taught before, I had a roommate in college a year ahead of me who was an education major so I picked his mind and said, “How do I approach teaching this?” and he told me about something called the thematic unit structure for class. And each class would be laid out with essentially a self-contained topic. So, I did that. I did the first week was—I also should have brought my syllabus I suppose—first week was introductions, definitions of terms, that kind of thing. The second week was the history of witchcraft. The third week was the philosophy and theology of witchcraft and the fourth week we moved on to, I don’ know, divination or something and then the sixth week was magic—positive magic, magical defense and all of that kind of stuff. It was a twelve week course and every class was two hours long. I had about thirty students and after about a year it grew to a size where I would typically have about sixty students and we had to get one of the university’s—by this time the university took it over, they called it the Communiversity. So it was now sponsored by MU and we were allowed to use their facilities and so we actually had to use one of the larger tiered lecture auditoriums for me to do this class because there were so many people in it and the interest in it at that time was so strong and so high.</p>
Brown	<p>And did you structure it basically as you were lecturing for the whole time?</p>
Nichols	<p>Yes.</p>
Brown	<p>And maybe taking questions?</p>
Nichols	<p>Yeah, you know, there was nothing traditional about it as far as teaching it because usually, I mean, this kind of stuff is taught one-on-one, master-apprentice. And I had a friend, Vicki Vyatt [SP; name], who did teach the craft that way, by now I’d started to read other people who were also practicing witchcraft. And she says, “I don’t know how you do it. You know, I’m teaching just one-on-one, I got one student and we do this and you stand in front,” but the thing was I never did teach it as a means of getting people to practice it. I taught it basically as an information thing and so that I intentionally made it so that there was enough stuff in it and enough resources that I pointed people to that if they wanted to start practicing, they could, but somebody who was only there for the information and didn’t want to start practicing wouldn’t feel self-conscious and wouldn’t feel strange or out of place or anything like that. So it really kind of kept that balance the</p>

	<p>whole time I taught it. [Laughs] And I taught it from nineteen-seventy to nineteen-seventy six in Columbia, every semester, including summer semesters, without a break. When I moved to Kansas City in nineteen-seventy six, I found out that UMKC also had their branch of the Communiversity. The guy down in Columbia said, "Do you want to just continue doing it down there," and I said, "Sure," And so when I moved down here the way that moving worked out, I think it was like at the very beginning of summer if I recall, and I had—I went down to the local Communiversity office and they said, "Well, classes are starting in two weeks,". I didn't even have my boxes unpacked in my apartment yet and I already had, I had my first class in my apartment when I moved here and so I had people coming in and sitting on unpacked boxes and stuff. And I continued to do it there and I also occasionally did it at classrooms at the university. And, let's see, then I opened my bookstore as a metaphysical bookstore.</p>
Brown	<p>So you're probably responsible then for, you're teaching this for six years, you know, in Columbia, you're probably pretty responsible for creating a community there, essentially.</p>
Nichols	<p>Well, and then, that followed with six years in Columbia and fourteen more years in Kansas City, again without a break. I taught twenty years straight without a break. So, yeah, for example the Heartland Pagan Festival, I don't know if you've heard of it?</p>
Brown	<p>Oh yeah.</p>
Nichols	<p>The people who started it were mostly former students of mine.</p>
Brown	<p>It's like you can trace these communities back to these series of classes.</p>
Nichols	<p>And again, it's like throwing a stone in a pond, and the ripples, you just never know how far that's going to go. And yeah, so, it's really amazing to see all these people that have taken off and written books on their own that were former students of mine. It's great.</p>
Brown	<p>Do you have any sort of former students that you're particularly like, that's really cool, or?</p> <p>[24:54]</p>
Nichols	<p>Well, yeah, yeah there was, I always did a section in my class because one of my other interests was academic parapsychology. And I'm not talking about TVs of ghost hunters or anything like that.</p>
Brown	<p>Society for Psychical Research kind of stuff?</p>
Nichols	<p>Bingo. Yes, very good. [Laughs] Frederic Meyers, Henry Sidswick, Edmund Gurney, and the people who founded the Society for Psychical Research in London and then the American Society for Psychical Research, William James and Richard Hodgson, all those guys. So, I did, I taught an actual for credit course at UMKC on the history of</p>

	parapsychology, but I also included one week of parapsychology in the witchcraft class because I felt that people needed to, you know, if they're going to do magic they needed to know that there was actual scientific research and scientific evidence that supported a lot of this stuff into our course. That magic and folklore had always claimed was true and so I always did that, part of that. And I went totally off track, where was I?
Brown	I don't know what I was asking you about—oh yes, students that you thought had done interesting things?
Nichols	Oh yes. And one of my students George Hanson turned out to be a parapsychologist, published in all the major journals. He had never heard of parapsychology, I don't think, before he took my class and he got so interested in the scientific side of it that his career took off. He worked with, oh gosh, I believe he worked with Dean Radin and some of the people at the, what was it called? The Noetic Institute. Edgar Mitchell, a former astronaut, I mean, he knew all those people. We occasionally, even after he left Kansas City to take off on his career, we'd occasionally get together and he'd write me and I got a copy of his book of course.
Brown	That's a good advertisement for teaching, you know. You can know that you helped create this thing.
Nichols	Yeah, it is, it's a lot of fun. It's still a surprise to me. After my bookstore closed in nineteen eighty nine and that was such a depressing time for me. I kind of went underground for a while.
Brown	Was this in relation to, well I'm going to ask you about the bookstore, too, but I want, I also want to ask you about sort of how—I forget his name, the guy who committed those murders?
Nichols	Yeah. It is. And it is so, such a difficult subject for me to talk about, I mean I will talk about it but it may be the part that I'll ask you to leave out of your thing.
Brown	Let's start with just talking about the bookstore then, because that sounds like a sort of dream come true, something that I wish existed still, you know, like specifically an occult bookstore, not just a shop with supplies.
Nichols	Boy do I ever hear you.
Brown	I'd be there every day, you know, every weekend.
Nichols	I resisted, there were a lot of people who wanted me, you know, to sell crystals and all this other stuff. And I was like, no, I want a bookstore and I did everything I can—could, to keep it a bookstore, and no less a person than J. Gordon Melton once came in. And, I

	knew him, I met him actually at a conference for Spiritual Frontiers Fellowship. He did a talk there.
Brown	What's that?
Nichols	<p>Spiritual Frontiers Fellowship, well for one summer I worked for parapsychologist named Bob Ashby who lived out at Lake Quivera, a part of Kansas City suburb that's over on the Kansas side. Bob was educational and research director of SFF and they put on an annual conference where they talked about all kinds of parapsychology stuff and J. Gordon Melton was one of the people who was one of the speakers there. And so we were roommates actually at the hotel where they had the conference. And so I got to know him, got to know what his work was and the fact that he was collecting Pagan paraphernalia, newsletters and all of this stuff and had probably—even though he's not Pagan himself—had one of the largest collections of Pagan ephemera that anyone within the country has amassed. And so we struck, we hit it off great. So when he visited Kansas City he came in my bookstore and after strolling around and looking at the titles, we carried twelve hundred titles, standard. Twelve hundred. He said, "This is probably the best occult bookstore I have ever been," Like, okay, anybody else could come in and say that, but J. Gordon Melton coming in and saying that? It's like.</p> <p>[30:03]</p>
Brown	Hang a sign about it or something.
Nichols	Really. I was in heaven. So yeah, it was a dream come true.
Brown	So tell me about how you started it.
Nichols	The bookstore?
Brown	Yeah.
Nichols	Well, at the time I had a partner, I didn't have the money to start it on my own but I had a partner who was a former student of mine, who had taken my class. He was a successful business man in Kansas City and he said, "I think you should be doing a bookstore," and he put up the money for it, he said, "I'll be the money side, you be the manager. You run it." After it was going through two, through four years, I can't remember how long, I bought him out so that I was the sole proprietor at that point. Just in time for it to start going downhill. [...]
Brown	Did you ever think about turning it into like a mail order type of thing or?

Nichols	Yeah, but that wasn't my dream. I wanted a bookstore where people would gather and I could have classes there. It was an oasis for people in the late eighties here in Kansas City, there's never--
Brown	It sounds wonderful.
Nichols	--been a place like it before or since.
Brown	Can you tell me some of the kinds of things you did there when it was going?
Nichols	Yeah, well, sell books.
Brown	Sell books.
Nichols	Talk to everybody who came in. Did my classes there for Communiversiety. All of the book racks and things were on wheels because that was so we could move them all out of the way, kind of like fan them down the sides of the store and then pull them towards the center part of the store with folding chairs and then I had a little lectern that I could put up at the other end of the store and there I was surrounded by twelve hundred titles of books.
Brown	Yeah, all your resources.
Nichols	All my resources right there. Typically classes, I had to limit the class at that point to no more than thirty because the store just wouldn't fit anymore. And I typically had people on waiting lists. [. . .]
Brown	You had a couple of, or was it just one, a newsletter that ran out of the bookstore? [34:49]
Nichols	I did. Right. I put together, there were actually two students of mine, who started a newsletter before I did my own. They called it <i>The Rune</i> , and they came to me and asked me if I would write. They decided to publish it for each of the eight holidays of the pagan year. They asked me if I would write a little, knowing that the holidays were especially my thing, they said, "Would you write a little essay about each holiday?" and I said, "Oh yeah, I'd be happy to do that," and that was the genesis for what became my book and what became my essays. Eventually I started, well my bookstore was called <i>The Magick Lantern</i> , 'Magic' with a 'k'. And then the newsletter was called <i>The Lantern's Light</i> . The logo was the hermit from the tarot cards holding up his lantern. It was not just my articles but articles from my students and poetry and jokes and just kind of all kinds of stuff and we sold it through the store. For an in-house journal, it had very high standards and I was publishing it on my Commodore computer. [Laughs] It's one of those things that probably J. Gordon Melton has copies of.

Brown	Yeah. Well I was going to say, if you have copies I'd love to see them because somebody gave me like volumes six through twelve of <i>The Rune</i> and as part of this project I'm going to digitize them and put them on the websites so that they'll be more widely available. So if you'd be interested in doing something like that with <i>The Lantern</i> --
Nichols	Yeah, I could do something like that.
Brown	--that would be amazing. So cool to page through these things. You know? There's nothing better, I mean the ephemera, like, my heart, I have like a giant plastic box of stuff.
Nichols	Really?
Brown	Yeah.
Nichols	You really do have the heart of a researcher, don't you?
Brown	I think so, yeah. [Both laugh].
Nichols	That's awesome. Do you have all the <i>Green Egg</i> ?
Brown	I don't, actually. I don't have any of those. But I kind of collect a bunch of, I collect not just Pagan stuff but I collect Christian science newsletters and all kinds of things. Whatever I can get my hands on basically.
Nichols	Tim and Morning Glory who did the <i>Green Egg</i> were old friends of mine. They lived in St. Louis and were part of the Church of All Worlds. Of course, they were founding members of that, and they've been here many times. Morning Glory passed away recently. That hit me really hard. And Tim, great friend, kind of kooky both of them, but I loved them.
Brown	Do you know how he's doing?
Nichols	I follow his posts on Facebook but he seems to be hanging in there. I mean, Morning Glory was a force of nature. She was, somebody called her America's High Priestess, and I don't think that's too far from [unintelligible; true?]. She did lectures on her collection of Goddess figurines and things that were similar. They were not just good lectures but they were passionate and heartfelt and fun. So, yeah, I can't imagine and of course, Morning Glory is credited with coining the term polyamory. [. . .] That was something that was dear to my heart as well as hers and she just going to be missed. We've lost others of course, along the way, many. But she was somebody I was personally close to. That's the first time that's happened to me.
Brown	Well, I guess as far as specific traditions and things go, I wonder if you could talk about sort of how your personal practice evolved through this time. What elements of that are particularly important?

	[39:18]
Nichols	I had, there are a couple kinds, how a coven starts is difficult to say sometimes. When I was still in Colombia, a coven kind of coalesced I guess is the best way to say, around my friends and myself. We were very traditional in the sense of believing that the person who leads the coven should be its high priestess. And I was chosen as the high priest. And then after we had the high priestess, the high priestess typically has one person that she chooses as her deputy, typically called the hand maiden, and the hand maiden then will become high priestess after her and it's up to her to choose whomever she wants to be her high priest. It's not always a couple; it can be just working partners or whatever. So I was in the odd situation of being chosen by a succession of high priestesses within the same coven so I was its high priest even though I considered myself very much second to the high priestess. I mean, you know, I had my classes which I, you know, which is where, you know, I kind of ran things my way. But people were, and my classes never, ever, acted as recruiting grounds for the coven, I mean to me that was forbidden. If somebody found out that I had a coven, or that I was in a coven, and they'd come up to me and say, "Hey, I'm interested," then I'd talk to them about it and then some students did join. But I kept those two things rigidly separate and people were always surprised when they came into the coven at how much of a backseat I took after seeing my lectures and stuff because they tend to be dynamic and presenting lectures and stuff and in the coven, I was there to assist the high priestess.
Brown	And is that still kind of the same way you kind of conceive of things and work?
Nichols	Yeah, pretty much. Well I'm, the coven to which I belong is called [. . .] and it followed a Welsh tradition. And about the time that my bookstore was coming to an end so was the coven and partly because some of its members were moving out of the area and dispersed and so at that point I've been invited to join a few other covens along the way, but I have this, this is just my personality, but I have sometimes this odd loyalty even to things that no longer exist and so I haven't joined another coven although I've often been guests at other people's covens. There's one now, in fact, the lady that I've been dating is a priestess at this coven and I've been attending her coven rituals on a regular basis. But yes, I still, and I tend to see probably more than in the seventies. I think initially, well it's hard to say, whether there is a true egalitarian thing between high priest and high priestess, whether the high priestess should still be in the lead just a little bit, I lean towards that and I think it's partly a reaction to being brought up in a society where men have always had the lead roles in spiritual traditions so it's partly to redress the balance. That's how I see it.
Brown	The Aristotelian cure, or something. It's kind of like that, you know?
Nichols	Yeah, I mean because I've always felt that, you know, oh gosh, there's a quote from Elizabeth Cady Stanton, one of my personal heroes. Once she got involved in the

	women's [unintelligible; noise] stuff, she gave an interview once where she said, "Women will never achieve equality in a society that has no place for a goddess,"
Brown	Interesting. [44:25]
Nichols	And that rang true to me. Dion Fortune, you know, one of the few women that have really made a name for herself in the field of Qabbalistic magic and writing, once said the same thing in other words. She said, "The goddess-less religion is halfway to atheism." And I, that resonates with me, too. How can you have spiritual tradition that ignores half of the human pop--, well slightly over half of the human population? It's not possible. We're missing something. So, yeah. You know, and I've, by the way done a lot of reading in the field of feminist theology, too. It's another one of my favorite things to read and it probably, those works, Sheila Collins' book <i>A Different Heaven and Earth</i> and books like that have had a more powerful impact on my theology than any other kinds of writers, than any Pagan writers.
Brown	Feminist theology can be really sort of mind expanding even if you think you're already sort of on board.
Nichols	Right, right. And even the ones that tend to be a little over the top. I read them because they do make good points and you know, if I can read, and I understand their angle, I would be, I would probably be angry, too. But, I always consider myself feminist because to me feminism is something that is; it's not defined by gender roles. There are plenty of women who are the [unintelligible; name] of yesteryear or, I don't know who would be the example of today, but you know, who believe in a traditional Christian, man is the head of the house kind of nonsense and traditional gender roles and stuff. And that's never worked for me, so, even though I am a male, I feel like there are males and females on both sides of the feminist issue and I'm on the feminist side.
Brown	I'd like to ask then how you kind of conceive of the God or the Goddess?
Nichols	That's a good question. [Pause] I probably think of myself as a pantheist more than anything else. To me when people ask the question, "Do you believe in God?" it's almost meaningless without stopping to define what you mean by the word God. To me God is everything that exists, it's nature, of course. So how could I not believe in God when I define God that way? You are God, Goddess. I am God. We are, everybody is, to me that also has a moral imperative that goes along with it because if we are all God, Goddess, then we're all one essentially. We're all connected. So how could I ever do anything, an act of violence, against you or anyone else, because in doing that I am also hurting myself at the same time, because we're one? And nature, same thing. So that's the kind of God and Goddess I believe in. Now having said that, I'm also kind of a polytheist in a way because when I actually get down to doing spiritual or magical work. Let's say I'm making

	<p>a [unintelligible; little doll?] for somebody. I realize that the pantheistic view of God that has everything in it contains both healing and sickness. It has growth and decay. It's life and death. So if I'm doing a healing spell, I want contact with the force, that part of the all, which has just healing, not healing and sickness, and I could do that by saying, you know, "I invoke the oh great part of the force that has to do with healing and not with sickness," but that's kind of cumbersome, so I use kind of a cosmic shorthand and I invoke, well depending on your tradition maybe it's Asclepius or maybe Govannon if you're Welsh or whoever, whatever God or Goddess of healing you resonate with because by doing that you're just calling up on that part of the force that has to do with healing.</p> <p><i>[50:12]</i></p> <p>It's like different facets of the same jewel, you're just interested in that one facet, and so you invoke that and you connect with it. You connect that part that's inside you with it, too, which goes back to the word religion itself, which is relinking, so you connect, you link, that healing power in yourself with the healing power outside yourself and you get this channel of energy that works. Not only can I cite from parapsychology the laboratory experiments on petri dishes full of enzyme selections and such but I can also say that it's worked from my own personal experience. And the funny thing is that even though I see, when I invoke a particular God or Goddess, if I invoke Ceridwen or Arianrhod or somebody like that, I realize that I am just invoking an aspect of the great force that's out there and yet sometimes when you do that, that aspect that, what's the word I'm looking for? That archetype begins to respond to you as though it were separate and real. You may hear her voice. You may get a visitation from her in a dream. I'm still not going to wake up the next day and say, and try to convert everyone to Ceridwen worship. That's not how it works. But it's real. And it's real for me. And it has real effects on the real world.</p>
Brown	<p>And it sort of follows too that just because something is an aspect of the whole, I mean, if we're all aspects of the whole, or parts of the whole, but we're all real, too, you know, just like.</p>
Nichols	<p>Yeah, and that to me is one of the key elements of our religion is that we don't have this neo-platonic dualism of spirit on one side and material world on the other. They're absolutely intermeshed. You can't have one without the other, they're two sides of the same coin, it's the basic symbol of the ace of pentagrams, of the tarot cards, you know, that the spiritual and material go together and it's a big, big mistake, philosophically, ecologically, to try and separate them because then you're doing things like stripping the rain forest and all the rest.</p>

Brown	Well I guess, I mean speaking of that then is land or any piece of land in particular important to you in your practice?
Nichols	You know, I think a lot of Pagans today are, hold certain places in extra reverence. I don't know many Pagans who wouldn't want to go visit Stonehenge and stuff. But the important thing here is to realize that any place, again it's all part of the one, any place you cast your magic circle is a sacred space. You create your own sacred space and any place on this Earth is sacred space. We don't have to have special buildings. We don't have to have churches, we don't have to have synagogues, we don't have to have anything set apart. A mosque or anything like that. You know you go in there it's holy you come out here it's not.
Brown	Yeah, right, right, yeah. And I'm not even thinking of buildings, I'm thinking of sort of, you know, places that are important to you, like your backyard or a tree or something. Particular places that you connect with.
Nichols	I think a lot of people, well like Camp Gaia for, where they hold the Heartland Festival, a lot of people feel that way about Camp Gaia. Having said all of this, I've got to confess that I have something of a reputation of being not quite right when it comes to nature because I'm not into camping. I'm probably too enamored of my creature comforts. I have a sleeping disorder so it's very difficult for me to sleep in a camping situation and you know, the downside of nature, because nature has both positive and negative, I actually freak out if I get ticks on me. [54:58]
Brown	That's not pleasant.
Nichols	Not pleasant. I mean, people started building houses for a reason. But to me that is part of nature, too. I mean this sounds silly but to me there's no, there's no contradiction in terms of talking about an urban Pagan.
Brown	Oh, I totally agree. It's not like these things came from nowhere, out of the sky or something.
Nichols	Bingo. These are our works. And, you know, we did this. We built this city. And in some cases we did it beautifully well, I'm a big fan of architecture. I look at, you know, the wonderful architecture, you know the great gothic cathedrals and so forth and I go, "Wow,"
Brown	And in other cases we kind of did ourselves a little wrong.
Nichols	Well yeah, and you know, in terms of ecology, what we're doing, I don't even know what to think anymore. Sometimes it seems like I read what the latest scientific reports are

	and, you know, the ice caps melting and stuff. I sometimes really truly do wonder if we're past the tipping point already. If we've done ourselves in.
Brown	But whatever it is, it's not unnatural.
Nichols	No, it's not unnatural because we are part of nature. Every, you know, if a bunch of beavers build a dam across the river and it screws something up ecologically for those downstream, it's not because they've done anything unnatural. They're following their nature. We've followed ours. In some cases we, we're intelligent beings, quote, quote. So we should know better about some stuff. I think we should have copped to solar energy and wind energy and stuff a little bit before we did. Of course there's lot of other stuff in play there. The whole economic system based on petrol chemical stuff. It's surprisingly [unintelligible]. So that's a whole different story, but it is still us. It's still us. We're part of nature, whatever we do.
Brown	Speaking of that, too then, do you think, do you feel like creativity plays a role in your practice or to what extent?
Nichols	Very much so. I remember, gosh I can't remember if it was Margot or Starbuck who said, "The ritual," for her, "filled the same need," I can't really paraphrase it, "that poetry fills." It's the same for me. There is a poetry in the ritual. And the creativity that comes with creating your own ritual, it's like writing—I'm a musician too, I play guitar and sing. And so it's a lot like that. You're creating poetry, you're creating art.
Brown	Yeah, that's what I think part of the most appealing, coolest thing about it is.
Nichols	Oh, absolutely.
Brown	So it's my little fantasy, my ex and I, who is a poet, having like a poetry and occult shop mixed in together.
Nichols	I should tell you my first idea for a bookstore. When I was, before I ever had one, my dream for a bookstore I wanted to open, this was back when I was in college, I wanted to open a bookstore called <i>The Arcanum</i> [possibly <i>Arcana</i>]. And it would be, all along the walls it would be very kind of rustic old barn wood and stuff and along the walls from the entrance would be big poster sized [not clear; blocks?] of the major arcana from the tarot. Probably Rider-Waite decks so then everybody could recognize. Then, in the bookstore, lots of books, but on the other side through maybe an archway in a brick wall or something, a coffee house. It would be a part of it. And the bookstore would open at noon every day, true noon, so you'd have to astrologically figure out, and this was on the basic principal that people who are occult, people don't get up before noon.
Brown	Exactly. It's why I always miss the Farmer's Market.

Nichols	Exactly. And at local sundown, no matter when that was, depending on the time of year, the bookshop part would close and the coffee shops would open and stay open until true midnight, whenever that was. Never did get to do that, but that was the dream.
Brown	So what do you do now, are you retired? [59:44]
Nichols	Retired now. I used to work at Sprint and was a manager—well I started out there as a desktop computer technician. Back when Windows 3.1 was big. A while ago. They decided to kick me up into management which I was very, very out of—I liked working with computers, I liked that immediate feedback of coming to somebody’s rescue when their computer was screwing up on them and they couldn’t get it, couldn’t get something printed out right before the meeting they needed it for. And I’d show up at their desk and you know, save them. But, I made a deal with my boss, I said, “Ok, I’ll accept this position of manager if you allow me, if I don’t like it, like in thirty or ninety days,” whatever it was we said, “that I can go back to being computer tech,” and he said, “Okay,”. Well it turned out I did like it, because I was running a group of young computer techs, some of the best I’ve ever worked with, and so my group of techs kept all the desktop computers working for about one-third of this Sprint campus. I had about fourteen people who were direct reporters to me. And since I had been a tech myself I knew what they had to deal with on a daily basis, I knew when the upper level administrators were asking too much. I could push back, I could be an advocate for them, and often was. And that’s how I saw my role basically. And when Sprint started doing its lay-offs. I was just, those were nightmare days for me, because I mean they’d ask us to stack rank all of our people who reported to us, and there was probably not a hair’s breadth’s difference between a lot of them but we had to nevertheless say that this guy was better than the next. Or girl. And you knew that the lowest third was going to get cut at the next round of lay-offs, no matter how good they were. And I would be so upset that I would, I’d go into one of those meetings and I had to have one of my employees telling me, “Mike, it’s alright, I’ll be fine, I’ll find another position,” but those were horrible days for me. I lost sleep. At the time it was over, naturally they had me lay-off as many people as possible before they laid me off. They had me do the dirty work first.
Brown	Charming.
Nichols	Charming. So typical. And by that time I was glad to be rid of it. So yeah, I’ve been retired for about three years. Start social security in another few months.
Brown	Exciting.
Nichols	If it’s still there for me.

Brown	Yeah, really. Well, at least for a little while.
Nichols	Have we gotten through any of your questions?
Brown	Yeah, one way or another. Oh, I guess, I mean, how would you describe yourself these days? Do you call yourself a witch, do you call yourself a pagan, you know?
Nichols	Yes and yes.
Brown	Yes and yes?
Nichols	Uh huh.
Brown	Okay.
Nichols	<p>Still a student of religion generally. I still read books on religious topics across the board. I was asked by Vern Barnett, who was the man who founded, my local Unitarian minister who founded Kansas City's first interfaith council. And that was back when I had my store open, in nineteen eighty seven or so, I think it was he started it. And he used to come in my store all the time because he was in a place he could buy all of Joseph Campbell's works in one place. And because I made sure to stock them all the time, and so he and I got to be great friends and we decided to do an interfaith council for Kansas City [unintelligible]. He's the one who wrote the religious column for the <i>Kansas City Star</i>. And so he asked me if I would represent Wicca on Kansas City's first interfaith council and I said I would be honored, of course, of course I would be honored. This was cool for a number of reasons. Number one it meant that Kansas City was one of the first cities, I think, that had a Wiccan on their interfaith council from the get-go. I wasn't added later. I was on the flagship team. So that was the cool part. The downside was that, number one, I kind of felt maybe should have been a woman because there were already two men in the group—too many men in the group, but you know they were representing traditional religions. But we did have a Native American and some others in the group. And the other part that, that was so funny, was Vern would often say, "Ok now, we're going to plan this event," or "We're going to have a Thanksgiving interfaith Seder. And I want you to go back to your congregations and ask them," and I'm like—</p> <p>[1:05:28]</p>
Brown	My congregation?
Nichols	"My congregation? What the--?" [Laughs]
Brown	I'll put out a poll on the lantern or something.
Nichols	Right? We're just not structured that way, so, you know, the most anybody has is a coven and by tradition that's not more than thirteen people. And so our basic structure is

	cellular, it's small. I think that's one of its strengths, really. But when it comes to this kind of organizational work, it's a real handicap. I got onto a panel discussion with Trish Telesco and a few other authors out of Heartland one year. It was during the year that I think Bush had said first starting during the, what do they call it, the government will give money to religious groups to use for charitable stuff. And Wiccans had been denied any of this because we don't have church buildings.
Brown	No, we have bookstores and things like that.
Nichols	But that was, you had to have mosques or synagogues or church buildings. You had to have a certain pastoral structure. You had to have a certain, there were a whole bunch of requirements and to my horror, Trish Telesco got up there and said, "Well, if we're ever going to be accepted as a real religion in this society, I think we need to start building our churches and I think we need to organize it in terms of clergy and laity," and I'm like, "No." If we're here to discuss anything it's that we all have this direct access to the divine. There is no place more sacred than any other place. No. I was horrified. But anyway.
Brown	I would be in agreement with that.
Nichols	Did I answer your question? I don't even remember what it was.
Brown	Sort of. It was about how do you identify yourself?
Nichols	Yeah, so still a teacher. I've always thought of myself as more of a teacher than anything else. Somewhat of a writer, but I've got another book that I've written but it's not done. I'm not sure it's ever going to get done. Bit of a personal detail. I lost a son two and a half years ago. It really has changed so much. So many things in my life. I don't—it's kind of in some ways robbed me of a lot of my motivation. I'm still dealing with the grief of it. You know, I don't play my guitar as much as I used to. I don't do a lot of things as much as I used to.
Brown	How old was he?
Nichols	He would have been twenty three. It was a drug overdose. I don't know what, you know, I'm still dealing with it on a daily basis, and sometimes that's all I can do, so, I don't, I'm being gentle with myself. I don't force myself to do things that I can't do or don't feel like doing. I'm still invited to do lectures. I'll be doing my lecture for the Iowa state Pagan Pride day in Des Moines coming up in August. They want somebody to come up and very generously offered to fly me up to be the lecturer on the holidays. So I still do lectures like that. There's a group here in town, well you know Kacey Carlson, you know Kacey, she does this thing here once a year called Temple Indigo.
Brown	I'll be going to that.

Nichols	Oh good, I'll be doing a lecture out there.
Brown	Yeah, that's what I thought, I saw you on the roster.
Nichols	Right, and I wasn't going to do it at first because I couldn't come up with anything new and I said, "Kacey, I think you're going to have to cross me off the list this year," because I don't like repeating myself. If I can't come up with something new, it's like, because a lot of the same people come each year. And I love the work she's doing. The whole thing about sacred sexuality, I'm so on board with that. So, I woke up one morning and thought recently I thought, I know. I know what I'll do. I'm going to do a lecture on is there sex in the afterlife. A serious lecture. And I told Kacey, she goes, "That's awesome," [1:10:39]
Brown	I'll look forward to that.
Nichols	So, yeah, I'm going to do that and it's going to be based on a lot of, again a lot of my background in parapsychology and the evidential material in the field of survival, probably reviewing medium/mystic data, reincarnation data, near-death experience data, talking about the possibility or probability of our consciousness existing outside the body and the evidence we have that it can continue after bodily death. And then segway into how the mediums of the late eighteen hundreds during the spiritualist era surprised everybody by whenever they were talking about the next life they would always, well people would always say, you know, in the next world aren't we supposed to, if you're in heaven or wherever, they didn't talk about heaven, that was the odd thing. These mediums were all conservative, most of them women--
Brown	They're all Christian.
Nichols	--Conservative, Christian backgrounds, and when they got into trance, nothing Christian was specifically coming through. Instead they were talking about the Summerland and this beautiful country with trees and grass and sky. And, well, what do you do about the people who, You still have bodies? Yes. Is there still the distinction between man and women in the next world? Yes. That brings up a delicate question. And aren't you supposed to be with your loved ones? Yes. What about people who have been married two or three times? How do you choose between them? You don't. You're with all of them. But what they basically described was a polyamorous next world.
Brown	Camp Gaia in the next world.
Nichols	I know. And it was such a shock coming from these women who in their non-trance states would have been appalled at such things, but as soon as they were in trance, this was the next world that started coming through. So yeah, I'm going to talk about that, and how

	not only do we continue to have sex in the next life, but it's probably polyamorous [laughs].
Brown	Good deal.
Nichols	It should be a lot of fun.
Brown	You know what, I will be right back.
Nichols	Ok.
Brown	Actually. Here we go. Anything semi-related is good, so, you know, it occurred to me to ask, I don't know if you're still married or not, but if your wife is also Pagan or considers herself...
Nichols	My wife and I have been separated seven years. I'm very exclusive friends with her, and especially after our son died, you know, she, I mean we both have taken it hard obviously but her more so than me. I mean, just, she had such a close relationship with our son Collin. So, I'm going to be there for her. And I'm still in close contact with her and talk with her all the time. But we don't live together and oh, as far as when we did, she was, we met through her taking my class. But, she was never really into the religious aspect of it so much as the practice. She was more into helping with the spells and that kind of thing. She had grown up with a family where, her old sister whom she idolized became a Jehovah's Witness and just tore the family apart. She was no longer allowed to communicate with her family and because you know, they weren't Jehovah's Witnesses too, and she would witness to them but that was about all she could do because, as far as interaction, well.
Brown	I didn't know that they were so strict. [1:15:12]
Nichols	I don't know if all groups, all of them were religious, or this group or what, or whether that was just Tracy's [SP; Name] family. But at any rate, it tore their family apart and Becky's take on religion was, "It's the last thing I want in my life is anything that's religious." In fact, she tells this story of when she first came to the first lecture of my class, and she found out there was a religious aspect to what I was teaching, she almost left. She came very close to leaving, but she stuck it out, and we got to be friends. So she understands and is not only Pagan-friendly but I would say that if she were ever to describe herself as religious it would probably be Pagan because those ideas are the closest to her own personal beliefs. But, I don't think she will ever take again the label of being a religious person. It's just too painful for her.

Brown	So she might be more likely to call herself just like a practitioner of magic or something like that?
Nichols	Oh, no, I don't think she does that too much of that anymore.
Brown	Ok. And then, completely unrelatedly, I had a couple of other questions about your store. I wondered about what kinds of, how you organized it, what kinds of genres and things you had, like you said you had all of Joseph Campbell's books, for instance.
Nichols	Right.
Brown	Would that have been in sort of a religious studies section or a mythology section, or a?
Nichols	Yes. I kind of organized the store by subject area, so I had like maybe one section of books specifically about Wicca and witchcraft, and I would have another section of books completely about magic, practical magic, how to do spells. Another section on divination, all kinds of divination, tea leaf reading to crystal ball reading to tarot. I had a huge tarot section, I think I carried like something like fifty different tarot decks. It was huge. Another huge section on comparative religion, religion in general, everybody from Joseph Campbell to Houston Smith to Mircea Eliade. If they were good in that area I'd make sure to carry. So, whole section just on feminist theology, feminist theologians, goddess religion, I had everybody from, oh god, names now. I can't, oh, well I mentioned Sheila Collins. Merlin Stone. Who's on your [unintelligible]?
Brown	There's Carol Christ.
Nichols	Yes.
Brown	But what were you thinking of?
Nichols	Yes, yes. I'm trying to think who wrote—Naomi?
Brown	Naomi Goldenberg?
Nichols	Yes. And the woman who did the work on the dead sea scrolls? Pagels? Elaine Pagels.
Brown	Oh, yeah, Elaine Pagels.
Nichols	Elaine Pagels. People like that. And then I had a whole section on fantasy and, well not science fiction, science fiction would be—principally fantasy books that contained magic that were, as a main theme, I mean if I were there today I would carry the <i>Harry Potter</i> books obviously because they, those books teach things too in a way that is slightly different than a non-fiction book. What else? Gosh. Those were probably the main areas.

Brown	<p>What are some of the, I don't know, books that are important to you that you've read more recently, you think?</p> <p>[1:19:45]</p>
Nichols	<p>Well, I'm doing a lot of readings still in the area of parapsychology and trying to keep up with that. Dean Radin's books are probably, I think, [unintelligible]. He started out with a book called <i>The Conscious Universe</i> and then his second book was <i>Entangled Minds</i> and his most current book is called <i>Supernormal</i> with a foreword by Deepak Chopra. Brilliant, brilliant scientist who understands the, not only does he do splendid research himself but he also understands the resistance of a lot of scientists who don't accept the unconventional research in parapsychology which is a phenomena which in itself needs to be examined and researched. One of my favorite authors from past years is Lawrence Leshan who wrote <i>The Medium, the Mystic, and the Physicist</i>, once said, and I am trying to get this quoted exactly right, because it is so brilliant, he said, "Scientists, especially when they leave a field in which they specialized, are just as pig-headed, stubborn, and unmovable as any other human being and their unusually high intelligence only serves to make their prejudices all the more dangerous." Bingo. And that's what a lot of scientists do. You know, especially scientists who catch the media, they go around saying, "Oh, there's no evidence for ESP," they've never looked. They've never looked at the field. Anybody who approaches the field with an open mind, like Carl Sagan, who said, who for most of his days was like, "There's no such thing as ESP," finally looked at the field and goes, "I was wrong. There's something here," but of course, that never gets reported. It happened just a little bit before he dies and everybody remembers that he was against ESP but nobody remembers that he changed his mind. So, anyway, Dean Radin is a good one for telling that story in his books and telling his [unintelligible; noise]. I'll be going through a little bit of that lecture of it at Indigo.</p>
Brown	<p>Does the internet continue to be important to you or is there any sort of source?</p>
Nichols	<p>If you know where to look. The internet is problematical because there's so much junk out there. That's true with books too, though, a lot of people don't realize that but you know they say Wikipedia is terrible because, you know, anybody can put anything. But you know, honestly, it's pretty self adjusting and self regulating and people who notice fictitious or false stuff on Wikipedia are pretty quick to clamp down on it and occasionally you hear people say, "Well, it's not like, you know, Wikipedia is not like the old encyclopedia Britannica," but I've read articles by people who have written entries for the encyclopedia Britannica and they said, you know, "Yeah, I wrote it, because I was not the best in my field because they couldn't afford that, of course I was not a nobody either but I submitted it, it was maybe reviewed or vetted by two or three other scientists, and they put it in, and it had mistakes," so, yeah. I don't think that one can make the</p>

	argument that there are necessarily a lot more mistakes on Wikipedia than there is in our traditional encyclopedias. People don't realize how badly off the mark some of those are.
Brown	Yeah, just because it's published doesn't mean that it's not full of its own BS. So, got to read between the lines with everything and be careful.
Nichols	Well it's, I think it's faster, the internet provides us so much information so quickly. And that's a good thing. Sometimes it's almost too much. I worry about how, I said that I had started on a graduate degree in library science and of course I'm concerned about how searches and so forth are done on the internet and the almost monopoly, stranglehold, Google has on how we search. The political overtones of that. Some fellow wrote a book recently called <i>The Googlization of Everything: (And Why You Should Be Concerned)</i> [<i>The Googlization of Everything: (And Why We Should Worry)</i>]. And it's brilliant. It talks about the fact that you do Google maps, you know, if you do a Google map of an area where there is like, contested territory between two nations, if the IP address is over here in this nation, it will show that territory as belonging to you. If your IP address is over in this country, it will show the contested territory as belonging to you. And [laughs] that's just one of many complaints of how this kind of strikes through and tears into the hearts of traditional librarians.
Brown	What concerns you about the searching? [1:25:54]
Nichols	Pardon?
Brown	What concerns you about the searching?
Nichols	The fact that they use filters to let, I mean, it's not an equal playing field. You use different kinds of searches to make certain sites come up more often than other sites, or come up higher on the list, I mean you got to scroll through twenty screens to get to the site you want to and it should have been the first hit. But, I don't know, because of their advertising or whatever it, you know, Google puts something else first. And it's gotten to be, like, almost people's only search engine. I remember when there were lots of them out there and people used Alta vista and all the rest. And you had choices, and I guess you still do, but most people don't know about them. They just use Google. And so they exert more and more and more editorial control. That's scary. I don't know what that has to do with witchcraft. [Laughs]
Brown	I mean, I guess that's basically my questions, is there anything else that you think, I don't know, what advice would you give to somebody who's sort of starting out?

Nichols	That's hard. In one sense, I think that witchcraft has changed so much from the days when I first became interested in it. I did an essay on my, it's not in my book but it is online, called "Old Guard Paganism". I don't know if you ran across that?
Brown	I did, I saw it.
Nichols	It's a lot like grandpa shaking his cane, you know, "You young whippersnappers don't realize what it used to be like in the old days," but it kind of has a little bit of that tone, but I wanted it to have a little bit of that tone I guess because there really have been so many changes, I mean, from the time when I first started doing it [unintelligible] people just automatically associated it with the Satanism and, you know, to where we are today. Big picture, big difference. It's, I think, on the one hand a lot easier for somebody just getting into it now to become a part of it. In the old days, of course, when I first became interested there weren't any, there wasn't any, there weren't any pagan festivals like Heartland or anything like that and so people who got into it were people who, I don't want to sound like they were more serious, they were more studious, they read more books, but I think they were more serious, [laugh, unintelligible] I think they read more books. Whereas today people often get into it as the result of a friend saying, "Have you heard of the Heartland Pagan Festival? Come on out. It's great," Well, that's one side of it, that's not all that it is, hopefully. I don't think. I hope that's not what it's turning in to.
Brown	What is that? [1:29:25]
Nichols	Just, Sunday go to meeting Pagans. They're just, it's like that's what they do when they go, when vacation time comes around, they schedule their two weeks to go out to Heartland and sit around and pass the mead and have a great time--
Brown	Social, social-esque.
Nichols	Yeah, socialize. Maybe attend some of the rituals, but that's another thing I've noticed over the years is when Heartland first started the focus was on the different presenters, the lecturers, the authors. Now, so many people go to Heartland every year sheerly for the social aspect of it and even though there are authors there and lectures going on and workshops, they don't bother to attend any of them. Like I said, I'm used to having thirty some plus people at my lectures and some of those workshops, you're doing good if three or four people show up. And it's like, I'm sorry, but I put a lot of work into preparing a lecture. It's not worth it to me to put that much work into a lecture if I'm only going to have three or four people in the audience.
Brown	Well, Temple Indigo should be better in that sense, I think, because it's more of a dedicated...

Nichols	Yes, it is, and Kacey kind of keeps that focus which is one of the things I love about her. And like I said, I think it's extremely important work. In some ways I'm probably more, despite the fact that I'm widely known as being a Pagan author, I hate that word, Pagan Author, whatever, I'm probably more interested in my the whole topic of sacred sexuality and the work that she's, not all Kacey, but that group out of Chicago.
Brown	Yeah, the temple.
Nichols	Amanda David Torres. You know, I think that so much of, I'm going to get on my soap box if I do this, but there's so much in our society where we're so off on our wrong-paved, how we view sexuality and it's so intrinsic to human nature and so basic and we really need to come to grips with it and get a better take on it than we have and, you know, that's why when Kansas City organized its first "Slut Walk" I was out there with the women who were marching with my sign, too. Which, I had made a sign that said "You say slut like it's a bad thing". And because to me it's not a bad thing. And this whole thing of victim blaming, slut shaming, and women who, you know, and you can go back as far as people like Victoria Woodhall, Margaret Sanger, everybody thinks, "Oh, yeah, Margaret Sanger, birth control." Yeah, that's true, and she was a nurse and she had experienced these horrible incidents when women who had medical problems after having so many pregnancies and botched abortions, too, but yeah. And she realized the need for birth control from the medical point of view but her other agenda that she didn't talk about, I mean, she was a lover to H.G. Wells, to Havelock Ellis, to, she believed in open relationships. And she realized that women would never, unless they had birth control, they could never pursue sexual relationships for the fun of it the way men do if they had to constantly worry about pregnancy. Victoria Woodhall, same thing. These are women who are my heroes and so the topic has been around a long time. I'm really, I'm passionate about it.
Brown	Well. [Laughs].
Nichols	So I'm so happy to be a part of Temple Indigo and supporting Kacey. She's great. She totally gets it.
Brown	It's very cool, I'm really looking forward to it. So, excited.
Nichols	So how did you get interested in it? I'm going to interview you now. How did this all come about for you?
Brown	Um, well, which part of it I guess? I don't know. This project, or--
Nichols	Yeah, let's start with that.
Brown	Well, I guess this project happened because, like I said, it's part of this larger Religion in Kansas project where we're basically, there was this opportunity to be paid to do my own

	sort of oral history project on whatever I wanted and just kind of present something as part of the interview to get this job and I just kind of jumped on it. Like that would be a great summer job.
Nichols	No kidding. I bet it's been so interesting.
Brown	It has been, I've been, well yeah. Just having really interesting conversations, so it's been great. So there's that. Then, you know, I came to, I'm in a Religious Studies master's program in KU and I came here basically to study Paganism and occultism from a sort of Religious Studies perspective. So there's that, that aspect of it. [1:35:15]
Nichols	And you were focused on the Pagan aspect of it from the get-go?
Brown	Yeah, pretty much, although I wrote, one of the first papers I wrote was actually about Dion Fortune and yoga, so, that was, but you know within that spectrum of broadly occultism and sort of, I don't know, alternative spirituality.
Nichols	Cool. You've read the book <i>Women of the Golden Dawn</i> .
Brown	I haven't. I've seen it and I've sort of meant to.
Nichols	I'd recommend it.
Brown	You'd recommend it?
Nichols	Yeah. There was some really interesting women who were part of the Golden Dawn. William Butler Yeats, you know, big Romantic. Maud Gonne was a part of it. Lady Florence Farr. Lady Wilde, Oscar Wilde's estranged wife, she was a member. Moina Mathers, MacGregor Mather's wife. Really interesting.
Brown	That was published through Weiser I think. Originally.
Nichols	Yes, I think so.
Brown	Interesting.
Nichols	Yeah, there's a whole lost history there, you know, like most of our history.
Brown	Yeah, that's what I found when writing this paper. There's just very little to work from. So, you know, it's really working from like primary sources, not a lot of secondary stuff done on it at this point. So, and even less, of course, on the women, you know there's starting to be even more work on people like Crowley. Yeah, unfortunately there's still a little bit, well very much neglected, actually. There were a few dissertations that I found, which was cool.

Nichols	Anything on Doreen Valiente, I think she's going to be a pivotal figure.
Brown	I haven't seen anything, I've seen her mentioned, basically, talked about as a figure in different books, nothing that's sort of like a monograph about her but she does seem like somebody to look into and again, somebody whose work I really haven't read except again to browse the <i>ABC of Witchcraft</i> . But I need to read the <i>Rebirth of Witchcraft</i> for sure.
Nichols	She's somebody who kind of has, when you read her book, you realize she kind of has the heart of a folklorist.
Brown	Yeah?
Nichols	Yeah. She's really good with that side of it. And so, yeah, I think her books are really important. What else? So, what piqued your interest in paganism to begin with, that you would focus on that personally?
Brown	Well, I started, I mean I guess as a project I started becoming interested in it partly from a translation perspective in terms of, I mean I was interested in how people perceive of, or conceive of the gods, basically. The gods and goddesses. And there sort of seems to be in a lot of writing both explicitly Pagan writing and writing that Pagans have sort of drawn from anthropology and stuff, sort of implicit understandings of how to understand, well yeah, how to understand the deities and whether they're one thing, whether they're ultimately aspects of one thing or whether they're all sort of, or whether there are seven basic things and every sort of god from different areas is, can be translated into another god of a different area. Or, you know, kind of in what ways are, or are other ideas but how they're completely separate and every one is this kind of singular being. So I was kind of interested in these distinctions and interested in exploring them somehow in relation to the idea of translation.
Nichols	You know that brings back to Joseph Campbell, too. A lot of people, and I admit that my initial attraction to Campbell was saying, you know, that all of this is part of the same story being told in different ways and, you know, that insight was critical to me. I found Joseph Campbell long before he became a media, pop media hero. Before the Bill Moyers interviews. I was already reading him and I just thought he was marvelous. But then, a little down the road, I started reading people who were critical of him, for being too, what's the word? [1:40:13]
Brown	Sort of homogenizing?

Nichols	Yeah, homogenizing everything just matching up. And there really were differences and stuff. Yeah, I think both approaches are kind of cool and both are valid, it's one of those glass half-empty, half-full, you can look at it either way.
Brown	There are advantages and disadvantages to each theological approach, basically. But what's interesting to me to is that it's clear that, I don't know, there's this match between scholarly writing and pagan theology, whether it's explicit or implicit, you see the trends match each other as time goes on. That's very interesting to me, too, to wonder where people are drawing from. To see that progression.
Nichols	Do you, how do you define yourself in terms of religion? Do you see yourself as Pagan, or?
Brown	I'm coming to. I think I'm starting to feel more comfortable calling myself that, and that's only happened, you know, this year I would say. I was kind of armchair, forever and ever, when I was a kid my mom got me books and tarot decks and sets and stuff and just said, "This is what I was into when I was your age,". Yeah, so that was kind of always in the back of my mind.
Nichols	I can't imagine what that would have been like.
Brown	Right, if somebody had just given you, your mom's, like, "Here you go."
Nichols	Instead of resisting it.
Brown	She gave me <i>Teen Witch</i> by Silver RavenWolf. And so then I just, you know, it was always in the back of my mind and I kept sort of reading about it, but it wasn't until, I'd say I was twenty six, that I really started you know ,reading and thinking and beginning to sort of do things. So that kind of went on.
Nichols	But didn't I hear you say you had a Jewish background?
Brown	I did. Yeah, I was raised Jewish, we had, we did Shabbat every Friday. I was <i>bat mitzvah</i> 'ed. So that's why this funny thing with my mom.
Nichols	Interesting.
Brown	Yeah, I don't know. So, yeah, and I was very involved in like the Jewish Student Group as an undergraduate and things, although I was also very interested in everybody else, too, and I went to everybody's meetings. It was like the little anthropologist in me or something. So, but, yeah, all of a sudden then I guess three years ago now I started being more personally interested and maybe I really want to do this, and started sort of doing little things and setting up an altar and doing small things, and then this year when I finally started sort of getting to know people and becoming part of a community in Lawrence, I started to feel more comfortable with the idea of maybe I can take that, you

	know, identity on. But, you know, it's been, all the sudden it doesn't feel as difficult as it used to. But, I was very attached and still am attached to the Jewish identity, too. So, I never had a bad experience with that and I still like to, you know, like at midsummer, for instance, I did a little Havdalah service, like during the ritual whatever, just for myself, so it's been something to try to negotiate, the identities.
Nichols	I think that's cool. Well, and you know, my Catholic upbringing will always be a part of me. I think I probably understand liturgical theology better than a lot of people do. And I've read a lot of stuff about liturgical history and so forth.
Brown	That's always been one of the most appealing things to me about Judaism as well, is the liturgical year and it's all, you know, lunar and I think people don't realize how sort of earth-based in a way Judaism really is.
Nichols	Who was it Raphael Pa?
Brown	Raphael Patai?
Nichols	Patai!
Brown	Yeah.
Nichols	That proclaimed the Jewish Goddess?
Brown	Yeah, I've still never read that actually.
Nichols	Really?
Brown	I mean I've read other things about--
Nichols	I carried that in my store. Yep, there were definitely goddesses.
Brown	Yeah, oh yeah. For sure. I mean, I've definitely, I haven't read that one but I've read other books that definitely [audio skips ahead?]. [1:44:52]
Nichols	--trying to convert me back to Catholicism. So like, "Please come to church with us? I don't ask many things of you, but, please come to church. I'll give you a choice. You can either come Easter Sunday morning or you can come Easter Saturday night for the Easter vigil right before." And well there was no contest in my mind because Easter vigil is one of the most liturgically intense moments of the entire year. So, I said, "Yeah, I'll go to that one," and so I went and one of the things they do that night is bless the holy water for the whole year, the coming year, and I had actually participated in this as an altar boy for many times, but I had forgotten how it was done until I went back and saw, well I hadn't forgotten, but I saw it like with new eyes for the first time because by now I had been

	through enough Wiccan rituals where I saw the High Priest and High Priestess as the aqua[unintelligible] to the male so the cup is to the female and conjoined they bring blessings. And so here in the middle of the mass the priest goes over and there's this big candle that sits on the altar all through the pastoral season and it's a special candle with little herbs in it and it's anointed and it burns all through the pastoral season and he takes the candle out of its holder. Meanwhile, they've taken the baptismal font, which usually is in the vestibule of the church and brought it up onto the altar which looks like nothing more than a big cauldron of water really, and he takes this candle over to the cauldron and starts doing this with it. And I'm like--
Brown	Oh my god.
Nichols	Exactly. And I'm looking around the church to see if anybody sees what I'm seeing. Not a flicker. And I'm like, aren't there even any Freudians in the audience? [Laughs]
Brown	Yeah really. Somebody. Any twelve year old boys?
Nichols	Pardon?
Brown	Any twelve year old boys.
Nichols	Yeah, something. And it was like, okay, and nowhere again, nowhere in the New Testament or the Old Testament or the Dead Sea Scrolls or the Nag Hammadi library do you find anybody saying, "Here's how to bless water," No. Where do they get that? They got it from the ancient pagans I'm sure, and you know it was like, of course like you say, it makes perfect sense magically because if you take something like that big cauldron or chalice or cup that's a symbol of the feminine and you bring something into juxtaposition of it that's a symbol of the masculine procreative force, than anything that exists between those two forces as they're brought together, where it's wine in a chalice, or mead, or water in a baptismal font, is going to be charged with life force. It's life. You can't get away from it.
Brown	It does make most religious things a lot more fun once you have a certain perspective on it. Things become a lot more exciting in a certain way.
Nichols	Exactly. Exactly.
Brown	Are there any shops that you go to that are around?
Nichols	Not so much anymore. I'm a little disappointed at the current state of Pagan and Wiccan publishing. It's almost a cliché now, but it's still true, to say that every book you pick up on witchcraft just rehashes the same material over and over and over and over again. I'm so done with that. I have to read probably twenty books before I come across one new thing.

Brown	And the problem with that, too, I feel like is that everything is sort of marketed as something slightly different so for a beginner you feel like you have to do all this before you can start. You know, even though it's kind of the same thing over and over again. I mean you should be always reading and everything, but at a certain point you have to stop being introduced to, and you have to start doing.
Nichols	Right, absolutely true. So, I don't actually frequent a lot of like occult bookstores or new age bookstores. In the first place, most of them don't have very many books anymore. It's mostly crystals and other sorts of stuff. I shouldn't say silly. I'm a book person. Yeah, and so, I [unintelligible] too much. [1:49:56]
Brown	I enjoyed the <i>Village Witch</i> , [unintelligible]. I mean they don't have a huge, it's not really a bookstore but it's kind of just--
Nichols	Well Kacey makes that what it is. And it's her personality I think, helps define that store. And I've got to say when I have my store, I don't know if it was my personality, but it was a, it really was an oasis for people in a time that was very critical of anything occult or whatever. Where people could gather together, I mean so many people that met in my class and stuff ended up getting married and are still married today. It's just amazing. And I still, even after all the other jobs I've had after that, that's the one that I often dream about to this day it haunts my dreams, it was a special place. And everybody who went there got this as they came in the door, it was like, "Oh, I'm home."
Brown	Where was it? What was the address?
Nichols	It was in Westport, which is, do you know where Westport is?
Brown	I do, yeah, haven't spent a lot of time there, but.
Nichols	And, it was just home for a lot of people. A lot of people just liked to hang out there and talk and talk. I had chairs sitting around so that people could just hang out and talk about stuff. And people came in all the time just to do that. I had one patron who used to come in regularly. She knew what exactly what date I'd be getting my new shipment from [unintelligible] Leaf. And she would be there to help unpack the boxes, be the first one to see the new Tarot decks. I had a lot of people, in fact, who just would come in to help on a volunteer basis, I didn't pay them anything, I couldn't afford to pay them anything, but they would just come in just to be there, just to be a part of the excitement and part of the...
Brown	Would you ever, I mean, could you ever imagine doing anything like that again with the bookshop?

Nichols	Probably not.
Brown	Not at this point?
Nichols	Publishing has changed so much, like we were talking about, electronic publishing. I'm really, I do so much of my reading with audio books now.
Brown	Really?
Nichols	It just, it frees me up, I don't have to sit down and hold something, I can be, I can listen to it in the car, I can listen to it while I'm cleaning the house, doing the dishes, whatever, and I actually retain things better that I've heard rather than read. I'm a throwback to the oral culture I think. But yeah, I can often remember things verbatim if I've heard them spoken and that's not true of what I've read. So yeah, audio books have been a real boon. I even go to the extremes of occasionally taking eBooks and using software to convert them into audio books so I can play them on the MP3 player using a synthetic voice. They're getting pretty good.
Brown	Are they?
Nichols	Yeah. There's the AT&T true voices are good, the Ivanna voices are really good. Still got to have a program to do the translation of the text with the text to speech program, which there are a number of them out there, like Text Aloud. But yeah, they'll take a source, like an eBook source or just ask a text, whatever, and translate it into whatever voices you have on your computer and then you can make an mp3 file out of it, put it on your player, and you're good to go.
Brown	Well that's cool. That's something to look into.
Nichols	Yeah. I mean a lot of people are not into that, they have to see something to retain it, it's the opposite, I have to hear it. Well I don't have to, but it's easier to hear it.
Brown	Well.
Nichols	Have I given you anything useful?
Brown	Oh, much. Much. Yes. This has been great. This has been really great.
Nichols	Good.
Brown	Thank you so much.
Nichols	I've enjoyed it. [1:54:24]