

An enlightenment of Witchcraft in Asheville

Jernigan Neighbors , Arts & Features Editor

Witchcraft sparks conversation easily in a city like Asheville but many people might not know where to start or are conscious of closed practices utilized by specific cultures.

“Witchcraft is sacred fun, not dour, guilt-driven or fear-based. It is based on daily conscious choice, creativity, diversity and inclusion, with simple ancient ethics,” said Oldenwilde’s High Priestess, Dixie Deerman, more commonly known and recognized as “Queen Lady Passion”.

Deerman said she earned the title “Queen Lady Passion”. “Queen” is a magical title earned, “Lady” from conferring High Priestess rank and “Passion” conveys their passion for the craft.

The High Priestess said she has worked as an R.N. specializing in mental health for the past 35 years.

Deerman’s talents are not limited to working as an R.N. and High Priestess. Deerman said she also authors how-to magic books, is an eco-activist, diviner, herbalist, counselor and sponsor of persecuted Pagan/Wiccan inmates in 612 prisons nationwide.

“I have been full-time High Priestess of my 501(c)(3) religious nonprofit Coven Oldenwilde in the same Covenstead in West Asheville, NC since 1994. (In Gardnerian tradition, the High Priestess ‘rules’ the Coven; while the High Priest or Elders may be consulted, the buck stops with and any brunt is borne by the High Priestess.)” Queen Lady Passion said.

The author said readers can verify accomplishments and magical lineage on wiccans.org and oldenwilde.org sites.

“Coven Oldenwilde’s focus is perpetuating the beauty and relevance of ancient magic in modern time from diverse cultures and timelines,” the High Priestess said.

Deerman said she was born a psychic synesthete with several magical talents, and came out publicly as a witch at the age of 13.

“I was a solitary practitioner for 20 years, and served a decade of that time as a bruja for a Hispanic neighborhood in Texas,” the witch said. “I moved to North Carolina in 1993 to work with others.”

The High Priestess said she met her partner, Diuvei, at a national witch gathering at Lake Lure in 1993. She said he was a Third Degree Gardnerian High Priest and the two shared a primary Goddess rare at the time, Hecate – who rules, land, sea, sky and the underworld.

“He moved from California to North Carolina, and we handfasted (a-year-and-a-day witch ‘wedding’) in Tennessee,” the High Priestess said.

Queen Lady Passion said she desired and spent years getting traditional training and the two founded Coven Oldenwilde in 1994.



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Eris Jenkins tidying up Raven and Crone’s front desk area.

“We don’t discriminate on any basis,” Queen Lady Passions said, referring to Oldenwilde. “We are polytheists and we celebrate all eight annual Sabbats, perform Rites of Passage and legally ‘marry and bury.’”

She said North Carolina accords them the same rights and responsibilities as monotheist clergy.

The High Priestess said the Coven eliminates unjust laws, saves trees from developers, protests injustice and teaches classes at witch gatherings.

“We encourage witches to be open, civically engaged and to proudly defend our kind,” Deerman said.

Queen Lady Passion said fields crisis calls both night and day, and Oldenwilde is open to discussing their craft on many different platforms via radio, television, news, podcast ect.

“The mysteries are vast and inspiring,” the High Priestess said, referring to various types of magic. “Some spells are mental, others elaborate or technical.”

The Oldenwilde co-founder said she follows bliss in fascinating skills, including survival, herbal medicine making, astral travel, levitation and much more.

“Our public Samhain rite in 1995 made national news on the television show ‘Extra! Extra!’ when 6,000 families attended, word reached New York City,” the High Priestess said. “An elite publishing house named ‘Sterling’ sought a perennial magic bestseller and phoned us to write it.”

The Oldenwilde co-founder said they advise people to set the tone, raise the bar and let troglodytes play catch-up.

“Be public, engaged and resolute,” Queen Lady Passion said.

The High Priestess said some misinformation commonly used is ‘harm none’ was originally meant as a warning to Xtians not to attack witches, so with reprints many assume nothing is curse worthy.

“There are people, legal injustices, unconscionable wars, corporations and racism/sexism/ageism etc., whose onus it is for witches to address,” the co-founder said.

The High Priestess said published books, ways to take action, products, community service and more can be found on their public website.

“I work magic constantly, daily,” Deerman said. “It is as easy as breathing to me.”

In addition to covens like Oldenwilde, Asheville is also home to local witch stores like Raven and Crone.

“I think if you learn to connect with nature, you are able to see the inner relationships between all of nature and see magic in everyday things,” said Raven and Crone shopkeeper and witch, Rosanna Barbour.

Barbour said both sides of her family come from Appalachian folk magic practitioners but each side is located in different areas.

“People who practice Appalachian folk magic do not know they practice because it is hidden in a lot of Christianity,” Barbour said.

Barbour said as a trans person, it’s hard to find a space in a community for yourself in deep parts of Appalachia.

“Not that Christians are not accepting, but when you are in a deeply rural, deeply Christian space, they are not the biggest fans of trans people,” Barbour said.

The Appalachian native said without being accepted into a Christian community, the only way to explore herself, and be openly trans, was through magic and folk practices.

“It’s also been a way for me to heal both generational trauma from colonization from white supremacy,” Barbour said. “It has been a way of healing for me.”

Barbour said she incorporates indigenous practices into her own work because her mom is Eastern Shawnee and part white.

“A lot of Celtic traditions are lost,” Barbour said. “A lot of resources you have now are reconstructionist and based off of things written by Christian missionaries.”

Barbour said colonization was very brutal for indigenous people to the point where they are losing their language, the tradition of celebration surrounding the lunar cycle and agricultural cycle and much more.

“A lot of our traditions are dying or not being passed down to the youth,” Barbour said.

The shopkeeper said a big point to understand is being careful and courteous to closed practices.

“White sage is like a medicine and is traditionally only handled by medicine people, not just any indigenous person,” Barbour said.

The practitioner said indigenous people want to protect the earth and keep their medicines alive.

The herbalist said many non-white practitioners who practice Santeria, voodoo, hoodoo, conjure work ect., are located in Asheville

“They do not hide but they are hidden,” Barbour said. “It’s part survival to keep traditions and cultures alive and protect them from being whitewashed.”

Barbour said some advice she would personally give to new practitioners is to find a connection with nature and with the energy of the universe.

“It takes a lot of self reflection,” Barbour said. “Especially because you are decolonizing your entire mindset to return to those practices.”

Many witches find different ways to connect and practice by tracing their personal roots.

“In the metaphysical sense, Asheville is a very magical place,” said one of Raven and Crone’s shopkeepers, Eris Jenkins.

The Asheville local said he follows an Appalachian and Celtic witchcraft path based on their ancestry, and they enjoy working with herbs.

“Witchcraft is really a practice that has a lot of traditions tied to it,” Jenkins said.

The shopkeeper said their family is from Appalachia and their great great grandmother was full blood British.



Ros Barbour lighting incense at the store’s altar.

“In some ways it almost feels like cycle breaking,” Jenkins said. “It feels like you have to kind of search, research and dig deep into the things that are already making you up.”

The Celtic witch said practicing raises a lot of questions about ancestry and connections to your bloodline.

“Are there really ways for me to know in the actual physical sense or do I have to go to the astral realm?” Jenkins said. “It’s like finding yourself, but for me more like finding out the people I used to be, my ancestors and then how that forms me now living in modern Appalachia.”

The shopkeeper said people first starting their personal practice with witchcraft must enter with an open mind, and confront various ways of perceiving the society constructed around you.

“There’s what you feel drawn to in nature, whether it’s the moon, herbs, water or delving into your ancestry,” Jenkins said.

Jenkins said some resources for witches are out in the open like Raven and Crone, local covens and Mother Goddess Temple, but others are hidden away in backwoods areas because they incorporate closed practices or want their magic to be seclusive.

“People gatekeep their own spaces for good reason,” Jenkins said.

Jenkins said much of magic has been either lost, hidden or has bled into other cultures that were dominant in order to survive.

“Christianity and Witchcraft are interwoven,” Jenkins said. “Especially as Christianity was used to colonize.”

Jenkins said many things came from Pagan roots like holidays, the saints and local celebrations.

“You kind of have to decolonize and peel back the layers if you really want to get to the heart of everything,” the Celtic witch said.

Magic can hold various forms and branches of meaning.

“This path has been a spiritual journey that began at my birth, with the first peak of intensity circa 1989,” said the founder of EarthSeed Temple Arts, Ra Ma Danielle-Marie.

Danielle-Marie is an astrologer and cosmic priestess who has lived in Asheville since the fall of 2012.

“My first real initiation was when my uncle died of AIDS in 1990, which opened up my mother’s healing journey, and in turn, mine as well,” the astrologer said.

The astrologer said they studied the art of starkeeping for over 28 years, and holds a Masters of Arts in Cultural Astronomy and Astrology with merit through the Sophia Centre.

“I merge yogic technology, the Celtic medicine wheel, indigenous African Spirit technologies, astrology, ancestral healing and my lifelong path as a priestess into all that I offer,” the founder said. “My practices are rooted in these.”

Danielle-Marie said they founded EarthSeed in 2017, providing astrological divination and pilgrimages to locations like Egypt, Avalon and South of France.

The astrologer said their favorite aspects of EarthSeed include being able to merge creative artistry into everything they offer while simultaneously providing service to others on their designated paths.

“Discernment is everything,” Danielle-Marie said. “Do not fall for the glamor that some emit. First and foremost, learn to create sovereignty and awaken your intuition.”