

80 Neo-pagan witches practice 'craft' in Eugene, speaker says

By Andrew LaMar
Of the Emerald

There are witches in Eugene. Not just the types that show up at door steps on Halloween night begging for candy, but actual people who practice their "craft" on a regular basis.

Linda Jencson, a University doctorate student in cultural anthropology knows such witches.

In fact, Jencson did her master's thesis on witchcraft during which time she surveyed 144 self-proclaimed witches.

Jencson spent part of her Halloween day speaking on neo-pagan witchcraft as part of the University Museum of Natural History's lecture series.

While writing her master's thesis, Jencson used an anthropological process known as participant observation, a process that requires participating with the group being studied and asking them questions.

Jencson said of the 80 witches in Eugene, most are in their 20s and 30s and three-fourths of them are women. She said a study that surveyed 144 witches found that 66 percent of the witches had college degrees and many of the others were pursuing degrees.

Jencson said neo-pagan witches are a "loose, disorganized, eclectic group" preferring to practice alone or in small groups, and although each group has its own variation of practice, most groups form circles to contact their gods and to practice their magic, she said.

"I found most of the ceremonies to be quite beautiful. I definitely felt very different in the circle... other times I felt nothing," she said. "I'm kind of skeptical... but there are things that happened that I can't deny."

She said while participating in the witches' worship she would often get goose bumps, the type of goose bumps she might get while listening to a large choir at a church service, and after some training, she was able to predict the future quite accurately.

She said the groups she worked with did not practice black magic or magic intended to harm or limit people. There "aren't even rumors of satanism in Eugene," she said. One of the fundamental beliefs of the witches she worked with is a belief in karma, she said.

Halloween is a particularly special day for neo-pagan witches. Jencson said the day is sort of a combination of Memorial Day and New Year's Eve, lending itself to very important ceremonies. She said witches claim their god opens the gates to the underworld on Halloween, allowing them to more easily see the future and perform magic.

"Neo-pagan witches will be gathering all over the world (on Halloween) to work their power," she said.

Jencson noted that Eugene has a large number of witches for an area its size and attributes it to Eugene's atmosphere.

"Eugene has a lot of seekers, people leftover from the 1960s looking for meaning outside mainstream society," she said.



Linda Jencson

Dead will be honored on Dia De Las Muertos

Latin American folk music and a speaker will highlight the fourth annual Dia De Los Muertos (Day of the Dead) celebration Saturday night from 7 to 9 in the EMU Forum Room.

The event, which is free to the public, is sponsored by MECha to honor those who have died.

In Mexico, as in other parts of Latin America and the world, special calendrical days are set aside to honor the dead on an annual basis. This observance, which dates from pre-Columbian times, has become known as the Day of the Dead or El Dia de los Muertos.

While it is an occasion to honor those who have died, the observance also focuses on the cyclical conception of fertility and life for the future.

Sandunga, a six-member acoustic ensemble will perform and Jose Angel Gutierrez will speak on "The Myth of Death" at the celebration.

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