

around someone is going to come up and slap you. People who power trip too much get slapped in some way." Queen said.

The ceremonial mood is well-established now. The participants show mixed emotions of giddy happiness, reverence, thoughtfulness and energetic fervor. They are about to invoke the Goddess.

"Isis, Astarte, Diana, Hecate, Demeter, Kali, Inanna. Like a bee my mind is buzzin' round the blue lotus feet of my Divine Mother, my Divine Mother."

Again and again they chant the verse as they form a fountain of multi-colored movement around the fire. A tambourine has joined the witches chants. The energy of the ritual is now electrifying the circular area. The Goddess is with them and they pick up a new chant as their dance becomes frenzied as they shout back and forth:

*"The Goddess is alive, magic is afoot!
The Goddess is alive, magic is afoot!"*

The magic of it all. Or magick, as it is sometimes spelled by those pagans who don't wish to confuse their brand of

magic with the "rabbit-out-of-a-hat" forms. Some people wish to cast spells, but that isn't the only reason witches begin study of the Craft, according to Jencson.

"Most of the people I talked to sort of discovered it on their own by reading science fiction books, or feminist books or through anthropology (comparative) study," Jencson says.

Covens, the formal meeting groups of 13 witches, are rare in Eugene, according to Jencson. Instead there are gatherings of "circles" that are informal and have no set number that must attend.

Jencson also finds that witches have varied reactions to being labeled a witch. "There are many women who have tried the witchcraft rituals and don't like the word witch, but like the rituals. There are people who will use witchcraft all the time. If they are playing trivial pursuit, they will the dice to fall a certain way. If their cat runs away they blame witchcraft, but they'll still say, 'I'm not a witch.'"

Jencson herself will not say whether she is a witch. "I guess you could say I am since I know how to do all the stuff."

She prefers, however, to call herself pagnostic. "I'm an agnostic who leans toward paganism," she says.

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Queen's experience was different. At age 11 she began practicing the Craft, but when she reached adolescence she stopped practicing to pursue other avenues.

"I came out as a lesbian and forgot all together that I was a witch. When I became involved in the women's movement there were a lot of references to witchcraft and that kind of pulled me back to it," Queen said.

They are in the process now of working the magic. Witches come forth with personal petitions written in crayon on pieces of paper. Each witch has singled out one thing he or she wants to give up and one thing to gain. The papers are tossed into the fire. The chants begin.

*"Solar fire burn away, remnants of a bygone day.
Solar fire burn away, remnants of a bygone day."*

Some of the witches celebrate this gain and loss exuberantly, jumping over the fire repeatedly and laughing and crying out. It is

almost dark in the Eugene backyard, and following the intense release of energy, the witches gather in front of a stick god erected near the alter. In no particular order they affix flowers, cookies and dolls to him. It is a quiet, personal denouement of the Summer Solstice ceremony.

Witches have memories of ceremonies that stick in their minds. One of Jencson's favorites took place on a hillside in Eugene with 40 other witches. "Everyone passed around a little globe and said what they intended to do to make the world a better place. It was kind of nice, it was also outdoors," she says.

Because of the weather and lack of remote areas in the immediate area, Jencson says most circle gatherings are in back rooms in houses.

The notion of sexually wanton naked lesbians cavorting in the woods is more than a little off-base, according to Samantha.

"The most we do is worship

skyclad (naked). It's not a sexual thing, its a symbolic baring of our souls to each other," she says.

Samantha also invalidates the myth that witches, "go around hexing people all the time."

The Summer Solstice ritual is winding down. As a final work of action, several of the witches think into pieces of paper and throw them into the fire. They have willed the end to world hunger with this action. Each of the witches who called the spirit directions sends them away now with a chant.

*"The earth, the water, the fire, the air.
Return, return, return, return."*

The group is rejuvenated from their exercise and the final closing chant is quick and upbeat.

"Merry meet and merry part and merry meet again.

To fire, to water, to earth and to wind.

In the circle of life the dance never ends.

Merry meet and merry part and merry meet again."

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