

The witches of East Burnside

No bats or broomsticks in this temple, just good vibes and good food

BY KATY DAVIDSON

Of the many signs near the old wooden door of the Full Circle Temple, one is clear and definitive: Woman Only Space.

It doesn't say anything about skeptics, of course.

Being the cheeky individual I am, I've always giggled at the idea of womyn's groups and the New Age ideals that are attached: crystals, energies, witchcraft, spells, pagan fashion. I've never felt the

need to be surrounded by only women, never wanted to get naked in the woods and share my feelings. I've never been to Michigan.

But I have been ignorant. This is what I learned the week I visited the Full Circle Temple for the first time.

Outsiders might be thrown off by the term "temple" because of its connotations in mainstream religion. Although the old house that is home to Full Circle sits on busy East Burnside Street in Portland, it is about as far away from the spiritual mainstream as you can get.

Displayed prominently in the newsletter, the mission of Full Circle is to practice, explore and create women-centered and women-empowered spirituality. The temple exists because of the need for safe places that encompass the diverse spirituality of all women.

"It's about being in service to each other," says Terri Treat, one of the temple's founding mothers and owner of the building. She used to live on the second floor and run her business, Cotton Cloud Futons, out of the main level.

Nearly five years ago, Treat moved her store to Northeast Broadway and officially turned the 1902 building into the communal space it is today. She says, in spirit, it had been a temple all along.

The building's interior is quirky and serious all at once. The second floor is a

smorgasbord of unique rooms, each one serving a different purpose.

The Healing Room is painted entirely green and is used for acupuncture and massage. A sparse guest room is available on a sliding-scale rate for witchy women visiting Portland.

The Blood Room is a deep-red womb of a space used for grieving and releasing, Treat says. In stark contrast, the Elemental Room is completely devoid of furniture, painted light blue and used for dancing and other activities.

I ask Treat how the women stay spiritually focused with the din of Burnside traffic outside. "We just pretend it's the ocean," she says.

Full Circle's calendar of events demonstrates the diversity mentioned in the mission statement. During one month, women may attend one of the regularly scheduled community dinners, a class called Goddess 101, a financial workshop called Temple Bones, rituals to celebrate the new and full moons, and a self-help group called Yoni First, in which women come together for vaginal self-exams, breast exams and conversation.

However, the reason most women visit the temple is the ever-present principle of earth loving.

"It's the most fundamental part of my love for the craft," says Persephone Waterfall, an Oregon transplant originally from Ohio. She was turned on to paganism when she met a

witch at a party while in college, then began reading books on the subject.

Waterfall says she also loves drumming—she is the rhythm section at several temple rituals.

I get my first true taste of Full Circle when I attend the Lammas ritual, a celebration of the first fruits of the year's harvest, the midway point between summer and fall.

I arrive in the evening, while it's still light outside. The temple interior is dark, illuminated only by a few candles. A few women gather in the Fire Room, the largest room on the main level, where templegoers have built altars to goddesses along the walls.

I meet Kali Rose, a bright woman whose claim to temple fame is her monthly Tarot salon; she charms me with her accessibility, positive nature and cheery attitude.

I'm surprised at the age range of the women—22 to 50-something—and there doesn't seem to be any discrimination based on experience.

Among the group of about 12 women are two other newcomers besides myself.

While about half of the participants are queer-identified, Treat says the temple has not suffered any internal strife about trans inclusiveness. "We don't have any policies on trans people," she says. "If you call yourself a woman, you're accepted here."

After I meet a few more women, we all make our way to the backyard, a soothing, grassy space where a cherry tree presides and drops swollen fruit onto the lawn below. We all take off our shoes and form a circle.

A woman beckons each one of us with her witchy smile and outstretched finger. As we approach her, she says a blessing

and anoints our foreheads with a blackberry, leaving her fingers stained purple and our foreheads sticky.

Treat explains the process of the ritual to us, then we all face the east and begin to pray by singing about the wonders of that direction. We acknowledge every direction in a similar way, then pray to the sky, then to the earth, then to each other.

Ginny Salkowski, owner of the magic shop Mystic Moon, which is run out of the temple's garage, suggests we each take a turn in the middle of the circle to receive the good energy of the group. This impromptu activity proves to be the most uplifting of the ritual—some women call it orgasmic.

Later, we pass around cider, melons, berries and a pie, and as each woman feeds the one next to her, she says the traditional blessing: "May you never hunger." While we feast to celebrate the harvest, some women dance, then we close the circle to officially end the ritual.

Like the other women, I'm most enthusiastic about the emphasis on the earth and the desire they feel to preserve and worship it. I stop giggling inside and actually listen.

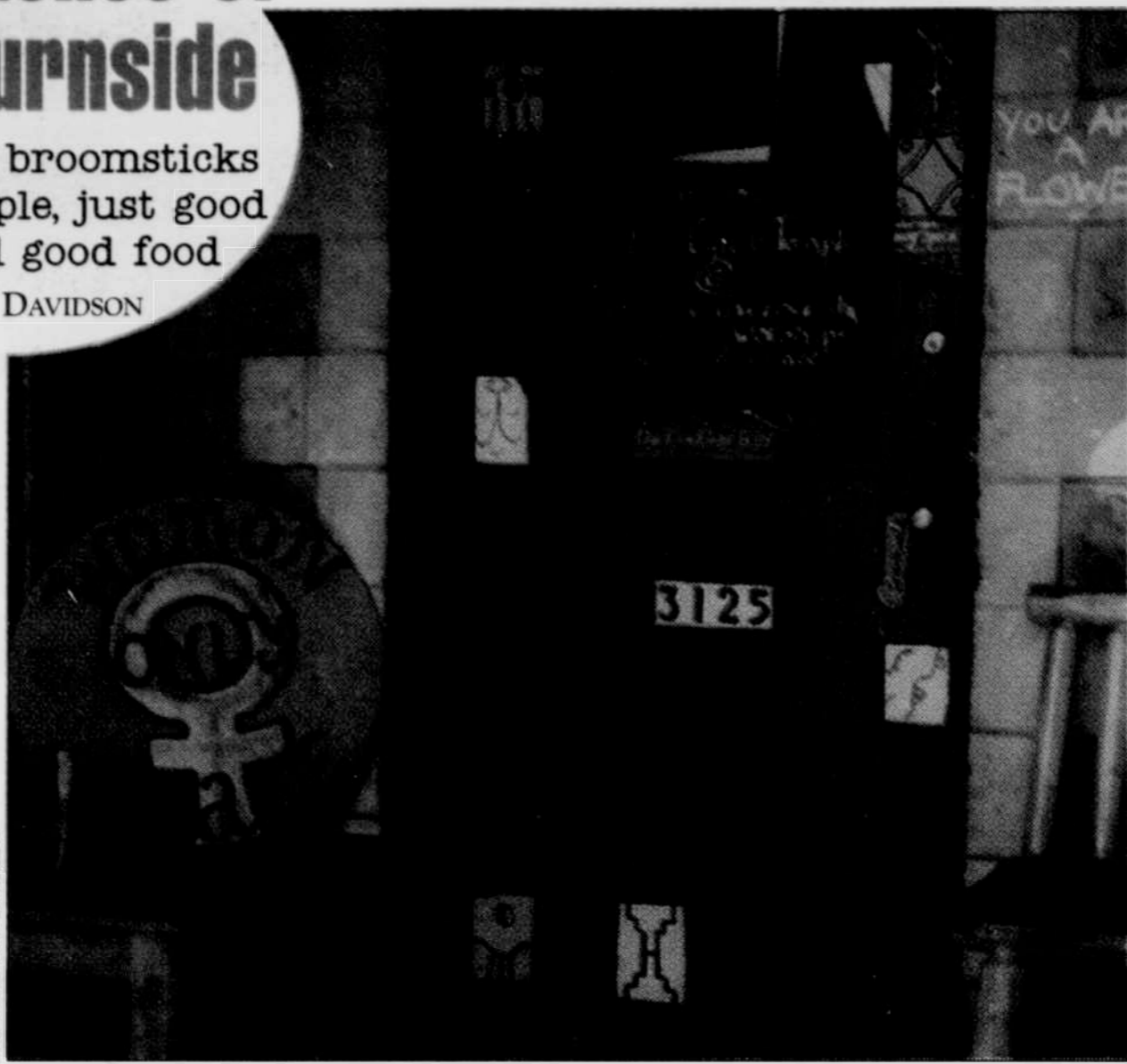
Although I don't go bra-less and underwear-less and hang crystals in my windows, I feel like I understand now. Spirituality doesn't need to come from a book or a preacher; I can find it inside me. I can think of it any time, any day—not just Sundays.

As Treat says, "A ritual can be something like washing the kitchen floor with intent."

■ FULL CIRCLE TEMPLE celebrates the new moon in Virgo ritual Aug. 29. For more information, call (503) 238-0675. The temple address is 3125 E. Burnside in Portland.

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Ginny Salkowski works her magic at Mystic Moon.



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