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Jailbreaking the Goddess: Local author's second book hits the presses

Local writer deconstructs goddess culture and feminist spirituality

By Carole Brodsky, For the Willits News

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Mendocino County sometimes seems a world away from the urban melting pots of social, spiritual and political change. In the 1960's and '70's, the convergence of a new wave of settlers brought together new people, new ideas and new politics into a county that was, at that time a fairly typical, "old fashioned" rural community.

Many back-to-the-landers not only left their homes behind, but in some cases felt compelled to cast aside their spiritual underpinnings. A hunger for "something different" spawned the birth of many spiritual movements, some of which trace their roots to Mendocino County. Portions of what is now known as the

NeoPagan movement originated in the county - borne out of the thirst to merge respect for the environment, honor for the legitimacy of a feminist ideology and the study and celebration of female-based archetypes found throughout ancient and indigenous cultures. Paganism addressed a generalized dissatisfaction with Judeo-Christian religious models that proponents experienced as dissatisfying, hypocritical or out of step with emerging cultural paradigms.

Lasara Firefox Allen, born and raised in Redwood Valley, is a child of back-to-the-land parents and part of the next generation of social, technological and spiritual innovators. She has taken some of the rebellious, independent energy from her upbringing and run with it, producing her second book, "Jailbreaking the Goddess: A Radical Revisioning of Feminist Spirituality."

The book represents the evolution of Allen's growth as a feminist, addressing and deconstructing what became, in a relatively short time, widely held beliefs within the world of feminist spirituality- ideas that she challenges the reader to question. The book provides practical activities and a "roadmap" designed for readers to use to examine and "jailbreak" personal issues of class, dominant cultural mores, sex, gender and more, with the goal of creating a more integrated spiritual life- one that is inclusive, complex and liberating.

Her first book, "Sexy Witch" was published 10 years ago. "My publisher kept asking what's coming next. I felt like I'd done enough work to understand these issues- issues that I hadn't seen addressed elsewhere. I took the work I'd done earlier into a different direction," Allen explains.

Allen's childhood and subsequent life as a Mendocino County mother, partner, author and activist formed a lot of grist for the milling of her new book.

“I am a feminist and a mystic with a pagan inclination, for lack of a better definition,” Allen smiles. She was raised within the pagan movement from the time she was a pre-teen. “I think that gave me a different perspective from some pagan adults who ‘deprogrammed’ themselves from other religions. Perhaps I’m a little less starry-eyed than other people,” she notes.

She has a unique perspective as an active participant in, and an observer of, the evolution of a new cultural and spiritual movement. “All counter-culture is built as an alternative to the dominant culture, but the bedrock is still the dominant culture, despite people’s efforts to change that. When people create something out of oppositional response, we don’t always examine what we’re carrying over from that response.” Her book is in part a call for readers to ask those disquieting questions of themselves.

“The book puts forth many questions. Is the way I worship aligned with my sociological, personal, spiritual and political values? Sexuality is a gift- a gift to whom, for what? Do my spiritual practices honor their origins? From whom were those practices appropriated? The invitation of the book is to look at the places where we resort to patriarchal norms and exclusivity- a spiritual ‘comfort zone,’” Allen explains.

Historically, and within modern feminist and pagan traditions, the archetypes of a threefold “triple goddess” - a maiden, mother and crone - have come to represent the divine feminine. Allen takes issue with this system, and in the book, rolls out another, five-fold model, not rooted in the procreative, biological element of women. “I believe the threefold system was rooted in our biological utility, our procreative utility, which in my opinion removes our personal sovereignty, focusing on what we can bring forth, as opposed to who we are, creating exclusionary and divisive elements.”

Allen listened to her community, to women who didn’t have children, to the trans community, to men who resonated with paganism, and to others who felt left out of the goddess-centered community. “I felt like it was my responsibility to listen to that feedback. My younger kid is trans, so this was also a family issue I couldn’t ignore.” To answer her community’s desire for another, more inclusive system, she studied a multiplicity of deities from around the world and throughout history to create an alternative, five-fold system.

“Femella is the Divine Child. Potens is the Powerful One. Creatrix is the female builder. Sapientia is the Keeper of the Mysteries. Antiqua is the Ancient One.” In the book, each of the five is described in detail for the reader. They are each associated with other deities embodying their particular energy, noting holidays sacred to them, animals, plants, elemental correspondences and other descriptives that help the reader get a feeling for each of the archetypes.

Femella is simplicity, timid, curious and stubborn, the wild child running in the fields. Potens carries both the pen and the sword, the embodiment of burgeoning strength. Creatrix plants and reaps the harvest, weaving, singing, building and bringing form from formlessness. Sapientia has walked the miles, read the books and tested her theories. She is the teacher. Antiqua looks at the world through her wizened eyes. She is will, the ancient one, the elder in readiness for death.

A chapter is dedicated to each of the five goddess archetypes. Like the Greek Gods, each of the five embodies “upsides and “downsides” and readers will feel more or less attracted to one, or several of the archetypes, notes Allen, who has created a quiz to help readers more fully understand and identify the elements or individual archetype that is most needed or most appealing to them.

Studying and working with these five-fold faces of the feminine, according to Allen, is a non-linear, flexible path, which can and should change over time, flowing along with the spiritual requirements of the seeker. In addition, the path Allen forges has requisite sociological implications. “In what has been a predominantly white tradition, the pagan community has been overrun with unexamined privilege.” She urges readers to question their understandings and relationship to gender, to colonialism, to evaluate one’s personal

responsibility, to take heat for one's beliefs, to examine power structures and to question even the choice of particular phrases or words that may support or break the spiritual contracts that the reader has made with themselves.

“We have responsibility to the land, to be in relationship to place- to make peace with the land that you're standing on. When I think of my responsibility, it's not just about family or community. It's about this place. People hold big festivals and spiritual events on the land. We get permission from the park service but not necessarily from the people who originally held claim to the land- whose treaties we broke. Western spiritual traditions often suggest that we just need to clean up our own corner of the sandbox- to do our own work. Compassion calls us to work toward the liberation of others. We can plug into other communities to find alignment and integrity.” Allen notes.

“Even if someone is not pagan, the book is psychologically and sociologically relevant, regardless of their spiritual orientation,” Allen adds.

The final section of the book has hands-on exercises, templates and suggestions for the beginner to the realm of magical work. The book has already received rave reviews from a wide variety of authors, activists and scholars, and Allen will be embarking on an extensive book tour through the fall. Though she loves her Willits home, she is happy to have the opportunity to get out of the county. Despite her huge social media presence and the support she receives from her readers, it's not always easy for someone as outspoken as Allen to find her “tribe” on the home turf.

“There is an insular quality to Mendocino County. I feel at home because I grew up here, but I don't feel such a strong sense of community. We're all so busy and have so much to do, and travel time creates limitations,” she notes.

“I feel a little like an ‘odd duck’ sometimes,” she smiles. “As a queer-identified person, who's committed to open relationships and a very strong, vocal feminist, it's hard to find peers. There is a very retrogressive streak here, socially. I don't know if the source was some kind of redneck-hippie amalgamation, but many of the original feminist urges that happened during the early back- to-the-land movement seem to have evaporated,” she notes, adding that until very recently, she observed strict gender divisions existing within the ‘progressive’ marijuana culture.

“I think that an ‘old school farmer mentality’ was embedded in the early settlers here- that the woman cleans the house and cans the fruit, and the man works the fields. Of course some of that comes down to functionality, and there are more and more strong women who are breaking the mold, but socially, I see a lot of retrograde judgement in my peer community.”

Allen is getting overwhelming positive response to the book. “People are so grateful that we are talking about these issues- listening to the voices that aren't usually given main stage, taking stock of who isn't in the room, asking why, and doing something about it. This book is my doing something about it- breaking the binary,” she concludes.

A companion workbook will be forthcoming in the future. For more information visit Allen's Facebook page, <http://lasarafirefoxallen.com/jailbreaking-the-goddess-a-radical-revisioning-of-feminist-spirituality-book-launch/> or purchase the book on Amazon.com.

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