

I used to see magick in rainbows. Then I found out they're a trick of light on water. I found out that Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny aren't "real." My mother gave me a classical education in Greek and Roman mythology, and a love for Egyptology, but she was always careful to say, "you realize these 'gods' don't exist. They're just stories." Fortunately, I discovered anthropology, and realized my society doesn't necessarily have the one and only "truth." There are many cultures in the world, and have been many more throughout history, each with different beliefs and ways of viewing the world.

I've always been fascinated by magick and the occult. My mother was willing to *allow* it, but only to a point, and I had to keep telling her, "oh it's just for fun. I don't really believe any of that stuff," because, I was constantly told, "that's against our religion." I learned the wisdom of hiding certain books in places I knew neither of my parents would find them. Now, in certain times and places, people were murdered for having a bible written in English, and kept their books hidden. In other times, sometimes in the same places, people were murdered for having a bible written in Latin, and kept those books hidden. My greatest fear was that, if my mother discovered the "wrong book" in my possession, I would have my freedoms curtailed, but can you imagine being a high school student in America, and having to hide the fact that you're reading or studying?

I spent a lot of time in the library, reading books I didn't dare bring home – or, at least, I read what the library was willing to carry, which wasn't much. I felt like an outsider in my own family and society, just because I wanted to believe the world is magickal, and there's more than just water reflecting sunlight. My punishment was to find a drawing of a pentacle taped inside my locker with the words "Burn, Witch!" written underneath. Now I wasn't Wiccan at that point; I hadn't even heard of Wicca. I dressed like a typical nerd, no black clothes or occult jewelry, so I still don't know what

sparked that incident, but that was my first wake up call that my family was not going to be my only problem.

In my Junior year I read “the Mists of Avalon” by Marion Zimmer Bradley. She described a pre-Christian Celtic religion in such beautiful detail, that I realized this was the belief system I had been following my whole life without knowing it, because I had no support from my society to find out. But I thought it didn’t exist anymore, and I cried. Then I started college in New York, and discovered Wicca. The religion Bradley described is alive and thriving, full of beautiful people who also believe the world is magickal, and that the Mother Goddess made me in Her image. It was like coming home after a long exile in hostile territory.

In New York I was free to buy any books I wanted, at pagan book stores, and read them wherever I liked. I referred to myself openly as Wiccan, and felt comfortable wearing a pentacle. I met others of like mind, and we could talk to each other without worrying about who would hear us. I learned about many different pagan paths – a unique brand for every person I talked to. We finally had the freedom to tailor our religion to what we, personally, believed in our hearts, rather than the other way around.

Then I moved to Florida. What an enormous change in culture! I no longer feel free to talk about my faith with just anyone. I’m “in the broom closet” again. I don’t talk about who and what I am at work, because my coworkers are so intolerant that I would probably be fired. I believe that many of them “suspect,” anyway, because of the way I dress, the art I have on my computer, or maybe I trusted the wrong person and gossip spread. One lawyer periodically asks me flat out if I’m Wiccan, because for a while I had some Harry Potter stuff at my desk. I keep evading the question, because I’m afraid of losing my job. You probably think that would be illegal, but it’s difficult to prove that kind of

discrimination. I know for a fact that our managing partner has instructed the office manager to never again hire a gay person or a smoker – the former because of his intolerant religious beliefs, the latter because he’s cheap and wants to save money on insurance. He claims to have found a way to word the application questions to hide the fact that he’s screening that way. So if they ever do fire me for being Wiccan, they’ll make sure I’m never able to prove that was the cause. They’ll make up another reason, and I won’t be able to prove otherwise.

Wiccans are fighting and dying in our armed forces, but the dead are not allowed to have their religious symbol on their grave. The living are not allowed to be military chaplains. The president of the United States has said that he doesn’t consider Wicca a religion, and wishes the military would reconsider their decision to treat it as such. Prejudice and illegal discrimination haven’t disappeared from our society, they’ve just gone underground, to varying degrees. We like to think our rights are safe in America, but they are only as safe as our families and neighbors allow them to be. They are only as safe as the people with control over our economic lives allow them to be. They are only as safe as the divorce judges who decide the fate of our children, the policemen who are supposed to protect us, and the government that writes the laws and chooses which ones to enforce, allow them to be.

It is not for us as Americans to look at our society and say, “that’s the world,” or “that’s just the way things are.” It is for us as Americans to look at our society and say, “this is not the vision of our founding fathers.” It is for us as Americans to see the society that could be, and should be, to envision the society our founding fathers dreamed of, and better; to hold that society in our vision, and then to work to bring that society about. It is for us as Americans to teach our children to envision an even better society and work to bring that about! We are Americans, we have a responsibility to the entire human race to become the best society it is possible to become – one where everyone feels completely free and safe to be their own, uniquely beautiful, American soul.