

SageWoman Interviews:

Inspiring Goddess Women

Interview by Molly Childers
Artwork by Blaze Warrender

Stephanie Rose Bird is an author, artist, visionary, hereditary intuitive, contemporary root-worker, herbalist, and eclectic pagan. I recently read and enjoyed two of her books, Four Seasons of Mojo and Sticks, Stones, Roots and Bones. A self-described Green Witch/Hedge Witch and Hoodoo interested in Zen Buddhism, she is currently working on an urban shamanism apprenticeship, and has studied shamanism for over twenty years. We're here with her today to share some insights on magic, rites of passage, and the spiritual nature of creative work.

TELL US WHAT INSPIRES YOU.

I'm a story teller — I love to tell stories. I see connections, they excite me and I write about them. Moreover, I have a passion for teaching and for self-determination. I feel that my art background can be utilized to help others create their own spells, rituals, spell-craft, spirit gardens, oils, rubs, salves, salts, soaps and so forth. I like to see people do for themselves rather than being sucked into buying ready-made potions — that misses the point.

DO YOU CREATE SACRED SPACE BEFORE WRITING?

Yes; I smudge my desk with incense, and wash down the floors with hoodoo floor washes that bring about inspiration. I hang notes from my children, family photos, pictures of the Smoky and Blue Ridge Mountains, goddesses and angels near me for inspiration. My paintings give me energy, so they are displayed in my work space as well; books are important, too, and they are in my painting studio and in my writing work space.

HOW DO YOU STAY FOCUSED WHEN YOU ARE WORKING ON SO MANY DIVERSE PROJECTS ALL AT ONCE?

I work on each project separately and give ample time between them to adjust my voice and content. I try to work eight-hour days and treat my writing respectfully — like any other job, even though it is almost volunteer work in terms of pay!

I take big breaks when needed, sometimes pretending I have absolutely nothing to do when my plate is quite full. This allows me to come to each project with passion and authenticity rather than forcing work when the well is dry. My email tag line is: "a journey of a thousand miles starts with a single step" and that is a motto I live by!



Walking an Eclectic Path With **Stephanie Rose Bird**

YOU WORK MAINLY AS A SOLITARY. WHY?

I'm not against covens, and I'm not dead-set on being solitary. When I became a witch at the age of thirteen, I was a part of a coven of three sisters and that was just fine.

I'm never really alone. I write a column for *SageWoman*, contribute to various magickal almanacs and journals, and of course, write my books. Through those vehicles I contribute to the ritual life of others, and learn from participants and readers who respond. I consider my role as a pagan author a role of leadership and often include rituals, ceremonies, spells and spell-craft in my written work.

CAN YOU DISCUSS ECLECTICISM?

Eclecticism is like being American and there are many American eclectic pagans. We avoid hard and fast rules and are generally a fluid and open-minded bunch. I don't like to be involved with judgmental activities or orientations. People think of me only as

a Hoodoo, but nothing could be further from the truth. First I am a Green Witch — I've been practicing that way longer and it speaks directly to my inclinations. I am also a Hoodoo and interested in Zen Buddhism, incorporating it in my lifestyle as much as possible.

WHAT DO YOU FIND IN COMMON IN THESE PATHS?

I find that what's shared is usually a belief in the creator being and the concept that intermediaries of various types act as liaisons between human beings and the creator being. The paths to which I am attracted also share a belief that nature is alive with all sorts of spirits, and an interest in the afterlife.

HOW DOES YOUR WORK AS AN HERBALIST INFORM YOUR WORK AND YOUR SPIRITUALITY?

I've always been intrigued and moved by nature and plants. Plants spoke to me and inspired my art beginning when I began oil painting at the age of thirteen. The same thing happened with my writing — at first, it was all about herbs, but it has gradually branched out organically to related topics or personal topics that I feel a need to write about. Herbalism is fully embedded in my spiritual practice.

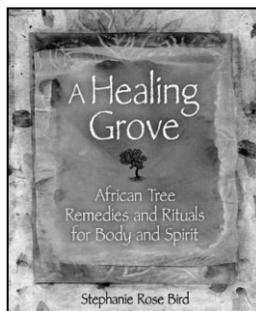
DO YOU GROW YOUR OWN HERBS FOR RITUAL USE?

I have an urban garden, so I have limited space, but I do what I can. I grow wildflowers, prairie plants and a few herbs, such as peppermint, sage, Echinacea, and oregano. The prairie/wildflowers I like to grow are huge sunflowers, black-eyed Susans, and yellow coneflower, with roses and peonies for accents. I have also started to grow a potted healing grove that contains a pineapple tree, Meyers Lemon tree, kumquats, and a banana tree (that one is inside!). My garden is a direct connection to Spirit/Goddess.

CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT YOUR NEWEST BOOKS?

I had the pleasure of both illustrating and writing a book that I am very excited about. *A Healing Grove: African Tree Remedies and Rituals for Body and Spirit* (August, 2009, Lawrence Hill Books) is centered around the health benefits of African and African diasporic trees. It is full of tasty tidbits, recipes, rituals, remedies and ceremonies. Readers will find all sorts of trees in between the pages of this book, ranging from the common oak to the surprising sausage tree.

A Healing Grove covers all aspects of the sacred



wood, including shielding, planting, medicine preparation, tree-based divination, animal omens and an animal bestiary. I worked to create an emphasis in this book on green living, sustainability and renewable plant sourcing, utilizing the age-old lessons of traditional African culture. I was inspired to write this book because I grew up in the forest, on wetlands, in the Pine Barrens, and I am a practicing Green Witch and Hoodoo. The two traditions I practice — Green Witchery and Hoodoo — both draw heavily on root and plant medicines for magical and healing work. Trees are a great passion of mine so writing this book has been a real pleasure.

THIS LEADS INTO YOUR NEXT PROJECT, DOES IT NOT?

Yes, it does! *The Big Book of Soul: The Ultimate Guide to the African American Spirit* (Hampton Roads, 2009) is another book built around African healing wisdom. The book encompasses divination, dance, fine arts, midwifery, herbalism, ceremony and ritual.

The connection to African diaspora culture continues with *Light, Bright, Damn Near White*, (forthcoming from Praeger Publishers) in which I begin with the story of tri-racial families, but then delve into history to discuss issues, laws, and values that crop up around mixed race cultures. *Light, Bright* grows out of my experience with tri-racial/bi-racial grandparents and my own interracial family.

In this book, I look to the past for answers about a future without the issue of race looming over our heads, coloring our every move. It promotes understanding of interculturalism, multi-identity and multiculturalism, demonstrating how we are all related much more than we are different. As we face the issues related to sustainability and global change we need to recognize our common humanity. After all, looking back to the material in *A Healing Grove*, all humans, from whatever background, can benefit from food and herbal healing modalities. A connection to plants is something that we all share. ☺

— STEPHANIE ROSE BIRD is a mother of four, author, herbalist, Green Witch and Hoodoo. She writes a regular column for SageWoman and lives in Illinois.

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