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*Religious Archives Network*

*A resource center and information clearinghouse  
for the history of LGBT religious movements.*

## **Oral History Interview: Jade River**

Interviewee: Jade River

Interviewer: Doris Malkmus

Date: November 28, 2004

Transcribed by: Teresa Bergen

Doris M. This is Doris Malkmus interviewing Jade River on November 28, 2004 at the mother house of the Re-formed Congregation of the Goddess in Madison, Wisconsin. Jade, thank you so much for agreeing to give us this interview and use this information for the LGBT Religious Archive Network collection. Maybe you could begin by telling us something about the religion that you were raised in, and what it meant to you or didn't mean to you.

Jade R. I was raised in a very religious home. If it had been one step further, we would have been over the line. But we were right on that line of what is, I think, true religious experience without being too far gone to be actually considered normal. I was raised Presbyterian. And I think that most of my religious background, my church and things, were pretty un-unique. There was nothing extraordinary about it. When I was twelve, I went to confirmation class. And in confirmation class, the minister said, "There will come a time when you will question God." Well it never occurred to me up to that moment that I had that prerogative. So once the minister said that, by the time the confirmation class was over, I was pretty much over being Christian. Because it had never occurred to me that questioning God was an option, and once I was allowed to do that . . . I had never really resonated, it was kind of like when people get a vaccine or something and it doesn't take. I felt like that. I felt like I was exposed over and over and over and over to something that for most people would have taken, but for some reason I

was resistant to it. It was like I just could not conceptualize it as something that people found spiritual. I still have difficulty with that. I mean, as an adult, I look at them and think, “What about that particular set of beliefs feeds you?” It still is just foreign to me. And it was foreign to me then. There was no reason it should have been, given my life experience. But regardless of that, it was very foreign. So I began questioning God. And I began trying to think and look for other avenues. But I was pretty stunted in that I was raised in Kentucky and it’s not one of the more progressive, literate places to try and do anything. So even the libraries there are diminished. So when I would go and look for things, I couldn’t find world religion books or things like that in the library. So I was very happy when I got to be a senior in high school to find out—I did take a class on world religions and found out that there were people in the world that weren’t Christian. That was my first experience of knowing that, that there were thousands, hundreds, millions of people in the world that really weren’t Christian. And I was really surprised and relieved because I thought, “Oh, thank goodness, this is not *the* option!” Because I really had, up to that point, thought the options were like Baptist, Catholic, Methodist, (chuckles). It was some variety of Christian, no matter what kind of Christian it was going to be. And so I was really relieved to find out there were Buddhists and Hindus and all different kinds of options. So I really did start a really serious religious study at that point, looking into what other people thought and what other people believed, and how they framed their beliefs. But what I found at that point was pretty much what you find when you’re in high school and you’re doing a survey of religion, which is mostly traditional, that’s what I call them, traditional religious options. And most of them were still male-based, and most of them were, I mean, they still went back to the same biblical patriarchs. So I didn’t really see a whole lot of difference among the religions that I could survey at that point. So I decided I must be an atheist.

Doris M. Can I, just to kind of contextualize it, what year were you born? Or when were you in high school? And where in Kentucky was this? Because I would say that a high school class in the history of religions or whatever, is pretty cosmopolitan.

Jade R. I was in Louisville, which was the largest city in Kentucky, which was one of the largest cities in the United States at that point. The factory jobs had all moved South. We were the outsourcing of the Fifties and Sixties, and so it was a very large city. I was born in 1950, and I graduated from high school in 1968. So it would have been right in there. Kentucky was 49<sup>th</sup> in the educational system in the United States at that point. We had a majority of our classes on the TV, where there would be a teacher for the entire county. And then we had people that sat and watched us to keep us in our chairs. So that's why we could have whatever progressive things we wanted, but the education that we got was pretty poor. So at that point I decided, entering college, I was a full-fledged hippie when I went into college. I was a folk singer. And that had influenced me heavily, the values. I came from a very Republican family and registered as a Democrat.

Doris M. How did you find folk singers?

Jade R. (laughs) Well, they were on records, and I kept buying records about folk music, and what folk music was. And the music influenced me *a lot*. Because the values that I was singing became my values. And instead of internalizing my family's values—I came from a family that we owned our own businesses and we were pretty well-to-do. And their values were very traditional. And I couldn't, I don't know, they were like, when I registered as a Democrat, they were like, "Well, you can go back and change." They were sure I'd done it by accident, that I just didn't really understand. So I had, I entered college, and at that point I think I considered myself an atheist. And I began--

Doris M.      Where did you go to college, if I can interrupt?

Jade R.      Eastern Kentucky University. And I graduated from there in about three years. And at some point in there, I believe I moved to agnostic. I moved from atheist to agnostic at some point during college. And then I got married and I moved to the suburbs. And I married a very wealthy man. And I had a baby. And I was very sad and miserable, and I couldn't figure out why. And I had grown up as a Girl Scout and I used to stand in my living room when I was married and wonder where the grownup Girl Scouts had gone. Without really realizing at that point that they were lesbians, and what I was looking for was where were the lesbians. [laughs] Cause I didn't know, I didn't know that my scouting—I was very naïve, in some ways. I thought I was very worldly, but I was actually very naïve. And I was mourning the loss of my scouting friends, without really realizing that I was mourning the loss of lesbians. Mostly, I was just miserable as a married person. I loved being a parent. I loved being a mother, but I wasn't very good at being heterosexual.

Doris M.      But you hadn't really heard of lesbians at this time?

Jade R.      Well, somebody had called me one once. But I didn't really, I didn't correlate with anything that—I mean, I knew there were lesbians. And in fact I had read *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, which had a chapter on lesbians in it, which I found very interesting. But I had no connection to that was the Girl Scouts. I knew I resonated with my scouting friends, but I didn't really understand that those women were lesbians and that was what was going on. Although I knew I had crushes on my girlfriends. I had like a bad crush on one woman for a really long time. And even had crushes on some of my married friends, married women friends and stuff. And that was pretty much what was going along until suddenly into my life came an old Girl Scout friend of mine [Falcon River], who I had been

her camp counselor and she had been a CIT in my unit. And she said, “I want you to know that I’ve been in love with you and I’d like to ask you if you would leave with me.” And so I did.

Doris M.      That seems very simple.

Jade R.      (laughs) It was very fast. In about ten days I had packed up everything—my baby and some clothes—and left my house. Left my husband and became a lesbian. Which I didn’t know anything about. I didn’t know anything about lesbian culture, or about what lesbians did or what lesbians didn’t do. And we were right on the cusp of the lesbian feminist movement. And neither did my partner at that time know anything about lesbian feminism. And I got an attorney to get a divorce who was a lesbian. And my attorney said, “Would you like to come to a meeting of the Lesbian Feminist Union?” And I said, “Yes, I would love to meet other lesbians, because I know two—me and my girlfriend.” And I went to that meeting and there was a whole lesbian feminist culture that was just burgeoning in Kentucky at that time. The lesbians had just all basically been booted out of NOW [National Organization for Women], and so they had all joined their own group. And what I found in that community was that there were women there who called themselves witches. Well this had been part of my search. In my religious search I had been looking for. . . was this? what was this? and did it. . .? I had always had some psychic skills. And I thought to me they had a spiritual feeling. When you have a connection to spirit and that connection to spirit is informative, then is that what they were talking about when they were talking about psychic? And I was looking for the connection between those things. So when I heard that some of the women were witches, I began to follow them everywhere and *dog them* with questions. Now you have to understand that my search in religion had led me to be quite a philosopher, I thought, at the ripe age of under 23—at the ripe age of 25, I’m now quite a philosopher. So I’m following them around going,

“Well do you believe in incarnate deity, or do you believe in external deity?” And asking them all kinds of philosophical questions. And finally after a couple of months they said, “You know, Jade, this is not a religious thing for us. This is a political thing. We don’t know what witches believe. We’re just identifying with witches because there’s that women’s international terrorist conspiracy from hell thing (WITCHES) that’s come out of New York. And basically they say that if you want to interrupt patriarchy, you should just call yourself a witch. So we don’t know anything about that. But we could help you find some.” So they did. They actually knew women who were practicing witches. They weren’t in Louisville. They were in Cincinnati. And so I got in the car, my partner and I got in our car, and we went to Cincinnati and actually found women who were witches there who were able to answer my questions. Who could say, “Yes, this is what we believe. Yes, this is what we do.” And this is how things go. And we actually joined a coven in Cincinnati.

Doris M.      And had these women actually met Z Budapest or had they read it in books? About what year was this? What resources did kind of like the very earliest witches have to draw upon? And I’m thinking about before it was really out there. Like a lot of publications happened in ’76, I think.

Jade R.      Well, we didn’t have a clue. All they knew was that if you were trying to establish a spiritual practice that wasn’t based in traditional religion; that it had something to do with a ritual and with celebrating seasonal holidays. And they really didn’t know. At some point along in there, we did get Z’s book. And a lot of the stuff that we did was, open the book and hold it in front of us and say, “It is better to run on my blade—“ (laughs) we were reading—“than to enter this circle not in perfect love and perfect trust.” So we did a whole lot of read ritual, which is not really some of the more redeeming rituals you would really go to. But it was a fairly large circle. It had about 20 to 25 women in it, that met.

Doris M. Mostly of the same age?

Jade R. Yes. Very close to the same age. It would be 25 to 35 would probably have been their age range. In fact, at that point I knew a 30 year-old lesbian who was a bit mentally ill. And I was concerned that older lesbians were all crazy. Because she was the only one I knew that was above my age range. It turned out not to be true, but that was my concern in my twenties was that older lesbians just went crazy. Because she was the only one I knew that was over 30. So that became a coven for us, a regular circle where we went. And we would go as many times, they met eight times a year, we would go there for as many of those as we could. And normally made six or so a year, that were there. And I was a member of that coven for I think three or four years, for quite a while.

Doris M. And were you engaged in other lesbian community activities or political activities in Kentucky?

Jade R. Oh, absolutely. I was a member of the Lesbian Feminist Union. We opened the only women's only bar in, like, I don't know, there were some on the East Coast and some on the West Coast, and the one we had in Kentucky. We opened a bar called Mother's Brew. Because my family had run their own businesses, I was like, "Well, if you want a business, you just incorporate and sell stock and open your business." So I talked all these women into each buying a share of stock and we opened a lesbian bar. And that bar served as kind of. . . The Lesbian Feminist Union held their meetings there. And it was closed; we did not allow men in; this was part of the response by the lesbian feminist community at that time was to be separatists; to isolate so that we could really focus on how would it be if we weren't responding to traditional male expectations for women. So this was a very separatist period. I didn't know lesbians who hung out with men. There wasn't a

whole lot of trans—of crossover between the lesbian population then. And we were also, it was not okay to be out at this point. It was very closeted because we were in Kentucky, you could lose your job, you could lose your house, you could lose your kids, because you were a lesbian. So there was a lot of fear and a lot of safety by just being around other lesbians. And that was true, too, in the women's spirituality circles that we were in. This was a very anarchistic group, the coven that I was in. There were no leaders. No one was ever in charge. We occasionally rotated from place to place where we would hold our meetings. And we would rotate among people who facilitated. And quite frankly, we didn't know much of what we were doing; we were just making it up. I talk about Z as being like a cargo cult; she would come through and scatter artifacts, and then we would be left with those artifacts out of which we tried to construct a spirituality movement. And at one point we did have a conference where Z came. And it was in Columbus, Ohio, and it was called Witches and Amazons. And there was a woman there who talked about having been to the Amazon. And Z was there, and it was the first time I'd ever really met Z.

Doris M.      Having been to the Amazon?

Jade R.      The Amazon as in the river, the place in South America. She had gone there to look for Amazons in the Amazon. And that was one of the speakers. And the other speaker was Z, and she, Z, is very charismatic and a very good public speaker. And she spoke. And I had never really met or seen anyone who was informed about feminist craft. And she was very self confident. I was so inspired by her speaking. And I have to give you this genre, which is we had ridden there in a panel van with the back of it full of beanbag chairs. And we were all stoned. So when we got back in the van, I said to my friends then, sitting on my beanbag chair, I said to my friends, "If I just had a little money, I would organize for the goddess. I know what to do." I'd organized the bar, and I'd run my own business

before that. I managed a daycare center. I said, “I know what to do. I think I could help this. I think I could, you know, like figure out how we could like have some kind of structure or contact or connection between us. If I just had a little money, I would really focus on doing this.” And I got out of the van. My friends dropped me off, I went in the house and my phone was ringing. And I have to tell you a segue, which is back to my grandmother, with whom I had a pretty bad values conflict. My grandmother belonged to the country club, had crystal chandeliers, had red flocked wallpaper in her dining room, lived in a very bourgeois house, was really very focused on how you looked and how you represented yourself to the public. And not very focused on anything external. So, and my grandmother had said to me—I had very long hippie hair, and my grandmother had said, “Cut your hair or I’m taking you out of my will.” And I said, “Okay, fine, take me out of your will,” every time she said that. Well it turned out that every time we had that conversation, she took \$10,000 off of my inheritance. But I did inherit: a diamond ring, a five-carat diamond ring with a 24 quarter carat starburst—I’m telling you that because it was huge—I mean, it was so huge that when you put it on, people thought it was fake, a mink coat, and nuclear power plant stock, (laughs) (This is why I have to say I had a values conflict with my grandmother) and a little cash, a very little bit of cash. So I thought this was pretty clearly a message that these items need to be transformed. And having just said, “If I had a little money, I would organize for the Goddess,” And then getting this like message in the form of diamond ring, mink coat, nuclear power plant stock, I was pretty clear that she had spoken. (laughs) So having gotten this pretty clear message from the Goddess, I began to really look into keeping my promise. How is it that you would organize a group of anarchists. Because basically, the entire feminist spirituality movement at that point was extremely anarchistic. There was no leadership. There was no structure. There was no—I’m speaking, too, from the Kentucky experience, ok? I think maybe on the coast, something else might have been going on. But in Kentucky, there was nowhere to go to begin to make

structure. Going back to my coven that I was in, and the example of the anarchy: what you had to do if you wanted to be a priestess in that coven was. . . in the Craft, there's a lot of stuff where it's a year and a day. Which basically ends up to be two years a lot of the time, because there's only certain dates you can do something. So if you wanted to be a priestess, you had to declare that you wanted to be one, and then you had to act like one for a year and a day, which was two years. And then the group had to agree that you had done that for two years. So if you can envision a group of 30 lesbian feminists, fully in their critical, anarchistic mode, agreeing that you had acted as a priestess for a year and a day—ostensibly two years, because you could only do it on Candlemas. Candlemas was the only day you could declare. Candlemas was the only day you could become a priestess. So that meant that it was two years, because you had to declare and then a year and a day went by. So the second Candlemas had to go by. But that group did agree that I had acted as a priestess for two years. And so I was declared a priestess by my coven at that point.

Doris M. Did your coven have a name?

Jade R. No, I don't think so. It was just like, "the spirituality group," I think is what we called it. It didn't really have a name.

Doris M. And it's in Cincinnati.

Jade R. It's in Cincinnati, which is about, it was about a three-hour drive that we would take, regularly, to go up there and be a part of it. And so that was, I had that piece, which is someone said I was a priestess. So that was a beginning. And then what happened was then I started looking at "Could I do this in Kentucky?" And what happened was, the lesbian community in Kentucky--none of this that I'm speaking about is happening outside the lesbian community—this is all lesbian

community stuff. The lesbian community in Kentucky was by and large intimidated by the witches. They [Kentucky lesbians] were, there was a lot of Christians. A lot of Dignity [Catholic], Integrity [Episcopal], MCC [Metropolitan Community Church] stuff that was considered the spirituality of that community. And so when the lesbian feminists popped up and said, “Yeah, and we’re witches,” it was *not* well accepted. It was, in fact, looked at with a lot of disdain and fear, I would say. Even fear. Kentucky is not the most progressive of places to begin with, so. . . .

Doris M. I’m hearing that lesbians were participating in Integrity and Dignity and MCC. Were there any, like did you pick up any energy from those women that they weren’t happy doing that? That they were trying to reform patriarchy, or that they weren’t quite comfortable working with gay men in those organizations? Or do you just remember. . . ?

Jade R. No, they were fine. The sense that I got, the most contact I had with people from MCC and the feeling that I got from most of them was, “Finally, there’s someplace we can go.” More than anything else. Again, this is like 1977 at this point.

Doris M. But their Pentecostal approach didn’t leave any room for the Goddess?

Jade R. No. Not at all. No. (laughs) No, there wasn’t, and in fact we could *maybe* be Satan. You know, they weren’t really sure. You had to be careful because Satan could be lurking anywhere. And you know, we might maybe be Satan. So, so at that point, thinking of organizing in Kentucky, I kept looking around, trying to see would there be anybody that I could look to other than—I did have a small group of people; there were about six of us by that time, five or six of us, that were going to the group in Cincinnati together from Kentucky. And had been doing

things on our own. And I was trying to figure out if there were enough women there to sustain a movement. And I didn't think so. So I began shopping for where there might be some community that could sustain an organizing effort. And I actually went places and looked. I went to California and talked to Z. I went to the East Coast to see if there was anything out there. And basically what I found was the community that seemed to have the most to offer was Madison [Wisconsin]. And at this point in my personal life, what was going on is my ex-husband had decided that he was going to sue me for custody.

Doris M. Was that based on your lesbian lifestyle?

Jade R. Yeah, because I was a lesbian. Yeah. And he had remarried and had another child. And that child was developmentally disabled and he basically said, "I want my good kid. I want my whole child." So I really needed to be able to go someplace. My criteria for leaving was: someplace where gays and lesbians were present; someplace where women's spirituality or pagans were present; and someplace where I could be protected. And at this point, Wisconsin was the only state in the United States where gays and lesbians were protected by law.

Doris M. Protected from custody battles?

Jade R. We were full citizens. We had rights here. It was the only state in the United States.

Doris M. Oh, the human rights?

Jade R. Yeah, where we were protected from discrimination, in Wisconsin. So I decided, okay, it has lesbians, it has pagans, and I'm protected. So I was to Wisconsin very quickly. So my partner at that time and I—still my Girl Scout partner—and I

came to Wisconsin. And I basically secured my custody by moving here. Because they had to file across state, and there were no grounds in Wisconsin. Because being a lesbian was legal in Wisconsin. So I came here and began to start to organize. And because my experience in Kentucky had been entirely in the lesbian community, I started a group here, a lesbian spirituality group. They have like, in Wisconsin, they have little community centers everywhere. And so there was one that we rented a room and then we started a lesbian spirituality group. And that went on for a while. And we began to grow and change and get bigger. And we finally got to the point where we were having like sixty, seventy women coming to this lesbian spirituality circle.

Doris M. This is about 1982.

Jade R. Yes, this is 1982 by the time I got to Wisconsin. And one of the women that I actually met at a lesbian event was Lynn Levy. And I had been kind of putting out the call to the Goddess. I had heard, Gandhi had made a statement that if you wanted to build a movement, you had to have a press. So I thought that one of the first things we could do, then, was start some kind of written down thing. And there was no, there had been a magazine called *WomanSpirit*. And *WomanSpirit* had published for, I think, ten years, and then quit. So there was this void. There was no communication anywhere among women's spirituality women. So I had decided that Gandhi was probably right. And that one of the things that maybe we could do was to start a press. Only I'm not very good at editing, I don't know anything about photography, and I knew nothing about paste-up or layout or anything it would take to get a newspaper together. So I figured I needed three people. So I began to look for those three people. And at a lesbian pancake breakfast I met Lynn Levy. Linnie, we call her. I mean, we call her Linnie. Her name is Lynn Levy, but everybody calls her Linnie. I met Linnie. And she had a degree in photography, a degree in printing, and she's an ABD in English. And I

thought, well, that will do. (laughs) I thought I needed three people, but this one will do. So, she started coming to the spirituality groups. And then I started talking to her about my visions and, how I wanted to organize and that I wanted to publish this paper. She said, “Okay, I’ll do it.” So we started publishing. And that was the very first thing we did before we did anything else is we started publishing a paper which is *Of a Like Mind*, which we published for 18 years at that point. For a long time—it seemed like a long time, it was probably not that long—it was just Lynn and I. And we had our offices on my back porch, which was a screened-in, four-season sun porch. That’s where our offices were. I took my grandmother’s money and I bought a computer and a mailing program and began to try to figure out how the computer and the program worked. And began trying to put together a mailing list.

Doris M. How did you do that?

Jade R. Put together the mailing list? Well, we asked *Country Women* if we could have theirs, and they were like, “No, we’re not giving it away to you *nutballs*.” That was basically, they didn’t know who we were, and they didn’t have any reason. At this point, I’ve talked to them since, and they said, “Well, if we knew you were going to turn out to be who you were, we would have given it to you.” But at that point, they’re like, [in a gruff voice] “No, we don’t give away our mailing list.” We basically started networking. We’d find a few women, and then there would be a woman who said, “Well, I know somebody in Michigan who’s interested in this.” And we put an ad in *Lesbian Connection*. And we, just began to, amass a mailing list. And I remember we had a bulk mail permit, which meant that we had to have 200 to be able to bulk mail. And we were like scrambling for that first time. You know, we’d be like, “Okay, I think I’ll mail myself three.” (laughs) Because we couldn’t find 200 women to put together to do that. And we would

prospect. We would send them out to people in hopes that maybe they would be willing to get it.

Doris M. [Interrupting] What about, were these basically still using lesbian kind of—

Jade R. These were all lesbians.

Doris M. All lesbians. That's what I'm wondering is if there are straight women's organizations yet.

Jade R. No. No, no. It hasn't even crossed our mind that straight women would ever even be interested. I'll tell you about that. So the office is on the back porch, we've been publishing the paper for a couple of years. It's doing okay; we've got a moderate circulation. We *are* the paper.

Doris M. And your subscription list keeps going up.

Jade R. It's going up, yeah. We're actually getting subscriptions. That was amazing, like the first few subscriptions that came in. "Woo hoo! Somebody's going to give us money for this!" It was like nine dollars, eight dollars. It wasn't very much for a year's subscription. It was published on newsprint. It really was a newspaper. And a lot of what we saw our purpose for at that time was not. . . it really wasn't. . . [it was like a newspaper.] There was a certain number of articles, but it was contacts, connections, and where were people, and who was doing what and if you were doing research on tarot, where was someone else doing that research. So a lot of it was that bonding and connecting and finding and was there a group in this area, and who was here, and was there anybody there. We had groups that we would put together for like pen pal circles. It was just a whole lot of real basic connecting, just trying to find each other. And then about half the paper was stuff

people. . . [want] like articles and information. But the other half was real seriously looking for people and trying to, you know, “Where’s there a conference, where can I go?” And at this point, everyone I knew in all of these circles, called themselves Dianic. Because Z was a Dianic. And so we were all sourced from Z. And so we all called ourselves Dianic.

Doris M. So you know about Z, and you know about women in Madison and Cincinnati.

Jade R. Right.

Doris M. You’ve visited a few places on the East Coast and in California.

Jade R. Yeah.

Doris M. And have you like developed a much thicker, like number of covens and contacts across the United States by this time?

Jade R. Yes. We’re beginning to like get a good base of people. Subscription for the paper is probably about six or eight hundred [1984] And we’re thinking, well, that’s a pretty good amount. And we’ve gotten down publishing. We’re getting pretty good at it, getting the articles in, getting them out. Lynn is doing the editing, the paste up and layout, and I’m doing the mailing list and the day to day operations, the bank statements and, you know, taking everything in. But there really isn’t anybody else there but Lynn and I.

Doris M. And you’re talking about maybe eighty-three, four, five now?

Jade R. Yeah. And so we’re sitting, having a philosophical discussion, looking at the lake, because that’s what my back porch looked out on was one of the lakes in

Wisconsin. Outside. . . . Dane County, in Madison. There's four big lakes [in Madison area] and my back porch was on one of the lakes. So we're sitting there looking at the lake, and I say, "Well, I don't know what Dianics believe, do you?" She says, "I really don't know. Do you think they all think what we think? Or do you think they think something else?" And we had this discussion for quite a while. And finally we said, "Well, why don't we just get them together and ask them?" So we decided we would have a conference. And we would call it "Defining Dianic Wicca." And we would like invite everybody that we knew that called themselves a Dianic to come. So we put this conference together and we sent out the information. Of course, we had the paper, so we had a source, for these people. And of course if you have, if you're sending it to 800 people, there's probably 1600 reading it. And then if you're really doing something, a lot more people actually get contact through that kind of thing. So we thought well we probably have enough so that we could get a base of people to come. So we started advertising for "Defining Dianic Wicca" conferences. We invited Z. We invited anybody who was anybody, actually, at that point. Diane Stein, Shekhinah Mountainwater, Ruth [Barrett]. Just a whole lot of people to come to the "Defining Dianic Wicca" conferences. And they did. And we ended up, I think, with about sixty people at our first conference. And we had, it was still very lesbian feminist, so we didn't have really any workshops or anything like that. We had discussions, and we had position papers. And we had important questions that we were answering. And we had had about, we had two years' worth of topics that we had decided we would cover half of them in one year and half of them in the next year. Like, "What is your relationship to the Goddess?" That would be like one. And, "Do you really think astrology has anything to do with the Dianic movement?" That was probably from the most profound to the most mundane of the topics covered. And we would get women together and basically argue about what Dianics thought. For two years, we did that. And then at the end of two years, we were still not done arguing. So we had a few more. (laughs) Finally, I

think it was the fourth year that we changed it to “Developing Dianic Wicca.” And that was like, okay, we spent a lot of time defining what Dianic Wicca was, so why don’t we now work on how do we continue to create a movement, the Dianic movement?

One of the biggest surprises, I think, about the Dianic conferences, was that straight women came. We didn’t know that any straight women anywhere identified as Dianic. And we were like way shocked when they pulled up. And at some point it became clear that straight women considered themselves Dianic. We’re like, “No!” Because my entire experience up to straight women arriving in the driveway was that this was a lesbian thing. This was part of the lesbian feminist movement. But then here are these straight women who said, “Oh, yeah, we’re Dianic. And have been for years.”

Doris M. And they’d been on the mailing list and been connected with other groups?

Jade R. Yes! Yes! They were all around, and we hadn’t really ever realized that the paper was going out to straight women. I mean, it was interesting because the assumption in the paper was that they were lesbians. And that lesbians were reading it. And it was pretty much, I mean, it was the way lesbians talked to lesbians. And yet here had been these straight women that had been listening in on our conversations all along. So that was our first kind of wake up call that maybe this was resonant with more than just, more than just the lesbian community. That there was a larger community that this was speaking to. We didn’t at this point call ourselves Goddess women. We either called ourselves witches or pagans or we’d say we were doing spirituality, or something like that.

Doris M. This is 1985 when it’s the first conference. And you’re talking about not knowing it until 1989.

Jade R. No, we had no clue.

Doris M. But then knowing you needed to meet again in the next couple of years.

Jade R. Right. And then we continued to meet. And what we found out was that there's a group of people that call themselves Dianic who are mixed gender. And that we had a couple of those people there who had identified Dianic as this mixed gender Dianic. And we called them Old School Dianics, because they were actually there before the feminist Dianics were. And they're mostly from Texas. Mostly they were sourced out of Texas from a woman named Morgan McFarland. And they were not very happy, really, when they found out that wasn't what we were talking about. They were a bit disturbed. But most of—that was a small group, like two or three of them were in that school. (coughs) Excuse me. But then a majority of them, though, they knew what they were talking about. And they were talking about a spirituality that was focused on female divinity. Which was really what Dianic Wicca was about. The other thing was, at that point we were all Wiccan. That was another thing. We were all Dianic Wiccan. I'm telling you these things because now that's not true. Now you could say you were Goddess woman, but you could be any, you could call yourself in addition to that any number of things. So the nomenclature has changed in the last 20 years, from being Dianic Wiccan to being, reclaiming Goddess woman, or something. You could be any number of things and still call yourself a Goddess woman. So when those women showed up, we were like "Wow, we really better rethink this." (laughs) And maybe we should—well, first of all, we need to stop talking like we're only talking to lesbians. Because that's how we'd been talking, like in the paper.

Doris M. But you could have chosen to just kick them out and go on your own way.

Jade R. No, because part of the thing that we had talked about from the beginning was that we were not a lesbian organization, we were a women's organization. Because we felt like we were very strongly, that the Goddess—okay, one of the things that happened is the women's spirituality movement grew out of the politics of the feminist movement. The politics of the feminist movement objected to women's spirituality. They thought it was navel gazing, and that it removed women from the important work to be done.

Doris M. The political work.

Jade R. The important political work that needed to be done within the feminist movement. But the feminist movement, the women's spirituality portion of the feminist movement, held that there is no underlying social change without changing the religious structure that informs everything else. And so we held to that. And we held to that, that that is not just about lesbians changing, that's about women changing. And then through the women becoming empowered in their own spirituality, that they would actually then be the change that changes the world. So we argued with the political lesbians that we were sustainable. And in fact, it's very interesting now, here, twenty years later, we exist. And a majority of them don't. So part of what we said in the beginning was, "You work and work and work, but you have nothing to go back and recharge. No way to sustain. And we work just as hard as you do, but we also spend time finding ways to sustain ourselves so that we can continue the work."

Doris M. Meanwhile, with that wonderful philosophy, in walked these women from Texas, saying, "What about us?"

Jade R. (laughs) And basically, the women from Texas—they weren't feminists. And that was the defining thing with them. They were not feminists. We were totally

willing to allow any woman there, so long as she really held a feminist value. And the women from Texas were really very mainstream pagan, which is what I call anybody that's outside the women's spirituality community, I refer to them as mainstream pagan. Which has, at that point, really had a lot of hierarchy. And their gender issues weren't very far along. They said that they believed that women were equal, but it was hard to see it in their actions and how they behaved. And that's how these women were. And so whenever they tried to—

(End Tape One, Side A. Begin Side B.)

Jade R. There were more than just these women from Texas. I mean, there were other straight women that came, too, that weren't from Texas that were feminists. But that in traditional Craft, what happens is, it is a hierarchy. And if you train someone who becomes ordained, and then they train somebody who becomes ordained, every time that someone that you train trains somebody and they become ordained, it affects your status. So one woman there said, "Well, when I'm a queen—" which is after you've ordained, someone you've trained has trained somebody who's become ordained, who's trained somebody who's become ordained—she said, "I can do anything I want. And when I do that, I'll have women-only circles." And we're all like, "Well you can have women-only circles right now!" You know, the response. So it was just like. . . it wasn't, at that point, we weren't terribly kind to each other. (laughs) And we weren't very kind to those women. I think we tried, but they were just really in a different place where their philosophy had not encompassed at all where our political thought was. So they were the type of person we were rallying against. So we were not particularly accepting of their philosophy. Although we were fine, then, with the other straight women that came who did have a feminist underpinning. It was shocking that they were there, but it was fine. And they actually continued to come. We had a contingent of women of all sexualities, who began to be really

involved in the Congregation. And at this point I'd have to say if you asked me what is the makeup of the total Congregation, I would have to say that we are still heavily lesbian, but we are probably, I would say fifty/fifty, maybe, at this point. And maybe even a little bit more heterosexual since the Web. Because the Web has made us be much broader. And the movement itself has gotten a lot more public. So I think we're probably maybe tipped even more than we used to be.

Doris M. But feminist principles still dominate—

Jade R. *They do.* Like for example, I'm talking about now, right now, we have an email list. And should you happen to wander off of some feminist principle. . . . Then you will get educated. And sometimes not in the most kind of ways.

Doris M. Kind of a list-serv of sorts.

Jade R. Yes, it's a list-serve. Yes, it's a list-serv. And if you happen to say something that doesn't meet basic feminist philosophy, people will, hopefully as charitably as possible, explain to you why that thinking is in error. Occasionally it's a little bit less than charitable, but they try hard most of the time. And part of the thing about the Congregation is the Congregation does not have. . . . Okay, I'll start at a different place. When we got ready to incorporate the Congregation, [1984] perhaps you've figured out that part of the thing that I like to do is just go find out about stuff. So there was my religious seeking. And so then I tried to find out about how were religions organized. If we were going to organize a religion, how are religions organized? So, I actually went to the library, the law library, and went and got materials from a lot of different religious organizations because, I thought, I was a non-profit administrator of a women's employment and training program, and so I knew non-profits. And I knew religion in the United States and I thought, there's no reason why we cannot have a religion. Now this was

somewhat controversial, actually, because organized religion was part of the bugaboo. You know, this was part of the thing that we were not supposed to be emulating, because organized religion was bad. And here I was suggesting that we organize, and that we incorporate. So there were some people that were very intimidated just by that. But I kept thinking that there must be a way to structure an anarchistic religion. And maybe because we were here I could find something like that. So I started doing a lot of research and I basically found out that, yes indeed, in the United States, a congregational structure is an anarchistic structure. That because of the early settlers in the United States, that when the Congregationalists came here, what they had was an affiliation with each other on shared belief, but not any kind of dictatorship or hierarchy or even, you know, where someone tells anyone else what to do. Everybody is autonomous. And I thought, “Well for once I’m grateful to the founding fathers.” I’m seldom grateful to the founding fathers. But I’m seldom grateful for our country as it is at this moment, that’s what I mean. I mean, in some ways I really am, and in some ways I’m very disappointed. Because the recent presidential election [Bush/Kerry 2004] was very disappointing. But I was very pleased at that point to realize that the way that our country is structured, we have a religious option, which is basically structured anarchy. And I thought, if people will listen to me long enough to realize, if they’ll listen past the organized religion point, I can explain to them how we can all be affiliated but not be bound by anything. And part of the thing that we had done with the paper is there’s a statement called “The Affirmation of Women’s Spirituality,” and we had published that in the paper. And the reason that we had done that is because if you’re going to talk to witches, then you get negative practitioners. You get people who do hexes, curses, bad magic, Satanists. You know, Satanists are really Christians, because Satanism is really just Christianity inverted. It really doesn’t have anything to do with Wicca or anything like that.

Doris M. You know, I'm thinking it would be very helpful just to read that list right now.

Jade R. The affirmation?

Doris M. Yes.

Jade R. Okay. (tape clicks off, resumes) I'd be happy to.

Doris M. And this came out in 1982?

Jade R. Actually, I brought this with me from Kentucky. But it was. . . . I wrote it there because I was trying to find a way to talk about what my beliefs were and how, and to have a code that I could fall back on, so that, if I was confused I would have like a moral compass for myself. And I would have to say that it kind of just came to me. I was in the woods on winter solstice and I ended up alone between two sets of people and sat down and wrote this. So that's where it came from. And I brought this with me, and then it became part of the Foundation of *A Like Mind*, and Congregation. It's called "The Affirmation of Women's Spirituality." And this is how it goes:

There is one circle of women's energy, and I—you would put in your own name here, so I would say I, Jade—am a part of this energy and it is mine to direct.

I wish to direct this energy to know

that I can create my own reality and that sending out a positive expectation will bring a positive result; that the energy which I send out returns to me; that there are an infinite number of possibilities for my life; that every situation is an opportunity to practice and develop my craft; that my instincts and intuition can be used to guide me; that my only power is in the present; that the Goddess, or life force energy is within me.

To will, that I shall try never to use my energy unwisely, or to limit the free will of another; that I shall grow in wisdom, strength, knowledge and understanding; that I shall, as much as I am aware, act in honesty to myself and others; that I shall never use my energy for what I know to be evil, aggressive or manipulative, and shall only use my energy for positive ends; that I shall grow to understand the cyclic, life-affirming rhythms of the earth, and always act with love towards her and all her plants and creatures; that I shall transform all negative in my environment;

To dare to be myself; to take responsibility for myself and my actions, and to know that consciously or unconsciously I have drawn situations to me; to be strong and independent, even in the midst of struggle; to accept and understand those whose ethnic/racial backgrounds, social or economic class, appearance or sexual preference are different from my own; to stand firm and committed to women and my spiritual beliefs, even in times of isolation, pain, desperation or negativity; and to understand when to speak and when to keep silent.

So mote it be.

Doris M. Thank you for reading that. I read that in your book, *To Know: A Guide to Women's Magic and Spirituality*. But I think it encapsulates something. And it also reads like the congregational approach to religion that was typical of the sort of outsider religions, of the Pilgrims, for example.

Jade R. Exactly.

Doris M. Where they would have a testimony that they would agree to.

Jade R. And that's what ours is. And it's not a test of belief. You don't have to take it and pass it. A test of belief is, "I believe in one God, the Father Almighty," and you

have to say, “That’s what I believe.” This is a statement of belief. And what we ask people to do is read it and consider it. And if they feel resonant with the majority of it, then they can join the Congregation. And it’s not that you have to say, “I believe in every single word in there.” It’s that, “A majority of that expresses a majority of my philosophy.” So it’s really hard to represent the Congregation in some ways, because they’ll say, “Is this what everybody in the congregation believes?” And I have to say, “Well, most of us believe it most of the time,” or, “Most women in the congregation believe that most of that is true.” I have a file in my file drawer which is when people write that say, “Yes, I do believe, but here’s what I don’t believe.” And I just keep them on file. You know, the “I create my own reality” is very controversial; we get a lot of mail from people who say, “That’s not what I believe.” And we say, “You’re still welcome here. That’s just what a lot of us believe.” So we took that as a foundational document, that Affirmation. And that’s basically started that congregational structure with that document as the statement of faith of the Congregation. Which went well, you know.

Doris M. You were talking about convincing people to go ahead and organize and incorporate.

Jade R. Exactly. And so part of the thing about the congregational structure was when we realized that that was an option within the United States constitutional things. We thought well, “Okay. We’ll take advantage of the congregational structure.” So we became the Re-formed Congregation of the Goddess. So that’s where the congregation comes, because we truly have a congregational structure. It’s not that we have a huge congregation sitting in church every Sunday. It’s that that’s the structure, is congregational. The re-formed part is because a majority of the women who come to the Congregation come with a memory. They don’t come feeling like this is foreign. When I first started reading about the Craft and

encountering women who called themselves witches, my reaction was, “Here’s people that are like me. Here’s people that think like me, that believe like me.” And where my experience of Christianity had been so foreign, to suddenly find a philosophy that was so like my philosophy, was very much like coming home. So the re-formed part, à la Mary Daly with the dash. “R-e dash f-o-r-m-e-d,” is re-formed, as in made again. Because the women in the Congregation, many of them, probably most of them, think that at some other point in their existence, they have circled with women before. And that this is something that calls to them, and that they look for. They cannot be content in their spiritual selves unless they have it. Interestingly now, we are, for many women, especially the heterosexual women, an option among several. So for example, this is where they do their women’s work. But they belong to another group where they celebrate with their men. One of the things that’s been really difficult to talk to people about, raised in the United States, is we are so raised to believe that there is *a* religion, you must get that religion, and that must be your religion. Where in paganism, there’s many temples on the top of that hill. And you go to the one that meets your needs at that moment. And I try to explain to people that we are a choice among many. We do not say, “This must be your only choice.” Please feel free to go out and do mainstream mixed paganism if you have a husband that you want to celebrate with. But there’s certain spiritual things that you do with women. You don’t celebrate blood mysteries with your husband; that’s women’s mysteries. You do that here. And with him, you do whatever it is that you do there. And I’m a priestess here. This is my temple, this is my work, so this is what I do. But I don’t hold you to this being the only thing that you do. So it’s very interesting, because that’s so foreign to women. Cause a lot of them will say, “Well, I would come there, but I have a husband,” or, “That can’t be the only thing that I do.” And I’m like, “na-na-na,” you know, “You’re thinking like a Christian, basically.” If you think that way, you’re thinking like a Christian. Which is “Yes, you need to get one church. You need to stay in that church. You

need to hold the beliefs of that church. And your whole spiritual underpinning needs to be of that faith.” And that’s so antithetical to paganism, in my view. You know, you’ll find other people that say other things. But in my view, it’s antithetical to paganism.

Doris M. Can I, like look at, take this and ask a question about-- You said that lesbians were kicked out of NOW. And I remember that kind of dust up. Did that ever happen in the Re-Organized Congregation of the Goddess?

Jade R. Not yet. No, no. Lesbians still are, we are highly visible and in fact I would say the majority culture in the Congregation is still a lesbian culture. If you come to one of our conferences, there will be straight women there. And they do, I think, feel welcome. But it would be hard to not think you were at a lesbian event most of the time, I think.

Doris M. Are there many leaders in the conferences who aren’t lesbian?

Jade R. Yeah, a few. But we’re still, a majority of our leadership is lesbian.

Doris M. How about your connection and the way that the lesbian community in Madison has sustained the Congregation?

Jade R. Well, we have a very good interface between the lesbian community and the Congregation. The Congregation began, and we began, the lesbian community and the Congregation kind of, we’re symbiotic here, in a way. We sponsor a whole lot of the activities and things that happen within the lesbian community here. In Madison, for 15 years there was an event called the Lesbian Variety Show, which was very much a part of the Madison lesbian community. It had a variety show. It had a Friday night show with a cabaret; it had an art fair on

Saturday; it had an art show that hung for the entire weekend. It had a large show, which was the variety show, on Saturday night. On Sunday, it had a poetry reading. So it was a whole weekend event. And auxiliary activities, like they started having pancake breakfasts and late night dances arose out of the community that weren't sponsored by Kissing Girls, who was the producer of the event, but were part of that. And the Congregation was always the sponsor, the fiscal sponsor and the primary thing of that variety show.

Doris M.      When you say that you were the sponsor, was that because you had the nonprofit st. . . .?

Jade R.      That's right. because we had the nonprofit status. We recently assisted Kissing Girls in producing a play that was very, it was a play about lesbian culture from the Sixties, Seventies, Eighties and now. That was this last summer. We've done a lot. One of the main funders for the gay and lesbian community here is New Harvest. It's a foundation. And they've gotten so used to us being somebody who applies [for another organization], they're kind of like, "All right, who are you now?" Because, it's interesting, we have in Madison a gay and lesbian social service organization. But they don't, the lesbian community does not view itself as part of that. Because it's very gay, you know. So the lesbian community, if they want to be. . . if they want to do something, they come to the Congregation and say, "Will you sponsor my karate class?" So the New Harvest people are like, "All right, who are you now?" Because we're so many different, we're fiscal sponsor for so many different people. Yeah, probably about ten or twelve over the years.

Doris M.      Like what kind of different things? The variety show and martial arts?

Jade R. We've done the variety show, we've done martial arts, we've done plays. We did Lesbian Sex Camp. We did JoAnne Loulan, you know, wrote books about lesbian sexuality. And we sponsored a lesbian sex camp. We sponsored, there was a summer games and activities, like a picnic that we sponsored for several years. We sponsored a women's technical production company that's going to do lights and sound for theater and for shows. So we sponsored the people who did lights and sound for Holly Near and Meg Christian and all of the—I could go down the list. But almost all of the women's music performers who came to town, the Congregation sponsored their lights and sound crew. We like held their stuff and we did that for years, sponsored the tech crew that did that. So we have just been a very integral part of the lesbian community here. And I feel like we've provided a really important service to that community because we allowed them to access things without having to go and plead their case in front of gay men. And we understand their community. Where, in Madison, at least among the lesbians that I know, the lesbian community and the gay community are very separate. The gay community is very. . . well, their values are really different. Because we're very strongly still feminists. And so when we run up against the feminist ethic against the traditional, I don't know what to call it. . . . what I see as kind of mainstream values, compared to feminist values, if you go to somebody and say, "I want to do something that celebrates lesbian feminist culture," and they're like—(laughs) One of my favorite discussions on this was there's a bunch of lesbians, this is a true discussion, saying, "Does it have four legs? Does it have a flat surface? It's a table, sit down." And the gay men saying, "But it doesn't go with our ambiance. It doesn't go with our décor. We can't possibly put that piece of trash in this room." So that's the kind of thing. And when lesbians would go and say, "This is what we want to do," they'd say. "Why are you concerned with that? It doesn't fit." And so what's happened is, we have some crossover and it's getting better. But increasingly, lesbians are accepted. In the past, it's been more where lesbians had to go to somebody who you didn't have to have, you didn't have to educate first

before you could, you had to petition to get what you wanted. And educate to get where you wanted to be. So, they came here. They came to the Congregation.

Doris M. So the Congregation has been central to the lesbian life in Madison. Which tends to be a little bit separate from the gay life.

Jade R. Very.

Doris M. And it, surprisingly, has been attracting a lot of straight women.

Jade R. Yes. It's interesting. You know, but I think about it and I think, for example, as I understand it, a lot of the domestic abuse shelters were all started by lesbians, who were then. . . eventually, the straight women came in, and now they're pretty much run by straight women. So I think lesbians are cutting edge. I think we are okay about being out there on the edge. Because we're out there on the edge anyway. So when we start something it's something that everybody goes, "Oh, yeah, I should have had a goddess." You know, that kind of thing. (laughs) "I should have had female divinity in my life. That would have made a difference. I've got to get right on that. (laughs) So I think that it's true. So a lot of women have said, "Oh, I need that." "That's resonant with me." And they don't see it as a lesbian thing. They see it as, "Female divinity is an important part of my life, so I'm going to go where those women are." So that's a piece of it.

The other thing that I wanted to tell you about is we also have a thing called the Women's Theological Institute. Which is, sponsors programs and training. And we started basically the first women's seminary in the country. And we started it here in Madison. And we started with about twenty women. And the piece of it that, at first it was called Cella, because that was the only piece of it. Now it has several different programs. It's kind of like a college. It's really quite

like a college where, there's arts and sciences and letters, that kind of thing. So now it has more than one college, basically, that you could be a part of.

Doris M. What do you mean by Cella?

Jade R. Cella is a training program. It's a six-year program. And it, you can take it if you simply want to have further in-depth study of your spirituality. Or you can take it if you want to, that's how women in the Congregation pursue ministerial credentials. And because we are legally incorporated, we can grant legal ministry credentials that give you the same rights as any minister anywhere. We have women that have gone to work for hospice, have the potential—we have somebody trying to go to work for the military at this point, who is beginning to accept pagans as, you know, she's one of our ordained priestesses. We call our clergy priestesses. She's one of our ordained clergy, and the military is beginning to talk about accepting paganism as one, as a legal religion within the military. And she's working on that. Not us, but another organization had, they have a pagan chaplain now in the prison system here. So we are beginning to make inroads. And it's the same as everybody else. You can marry, you can bury, you can have a circle. That's what we call congregation, smaller groups. You could have a circle of your own that was part of the Congregation. So it's a six-year program and it's a course of self-directed study. And we probably have had, oh, I'd say three or four hundred women in it over the course of its history.

Doris M. When did it begin?

Jade R. That's a good question. I can't remember.

Doris M. Hold on a minute. I'll look. (tape shuts off, resumes)

Jade R. Okay, so it's '88. It's October, '88, was the first time that a group actually met. And Cella is basically, it's the same root word as like "cellar," or, it means the inner mysteries. If you went to a temple, you would find the Cella of a temple. It's the most internal part of the temple, where the mysteries are kept. And the Cella program is for women who want to find the inner mysteries. And that's why the name is chosen. You could look it up in the dictionary and find that. So that's why it was chosen. And I was saying, we probably had three or four hundred women in it over the, since '88. We have probably about, I'm making this up, I think we have about sixty graduates, something like that. Many of the women who *were* in the program *are* in the program. They're not done yet. And now we have out-station campuses in seven locations throughout the country and several groups. The groups are no larger than twenty and there are a couple of groups that meet here in Madison. So we have more than one group here in Madison. And we, women are going through it. It's very, it would not surprise you, having heard the beginning of this, how it's structured. Which is, it's a self-directed program of study which sets out a broad range of parameters that you can fill in any number of ways. So like, for example, one would be learn about ten goddesses. And then the way that you do that is up to you. So you could research them, you could study them, you could read about them, you could ask people. And then you'd have to have some way to show that you'd done that. So like for example one woman made a quilt with symbols of her ten goddesses on that quilt. And researched them enough so that she knew their symbols, and then put their symbols on a quilt. And that was her ten goddesses. Another woman made flashcards which she illustrated goddess on the front and filled in on the back about different goddesses. Some women make bibliographies, some women make clay figures. We've had women make banners. So each woman's response to the thing is different and based on what it is that she feels will connect her to her spirit and to that, the information that she's got. So it's hopefully a very spirit-centered program. And it's also the way that women learn, and the way that

women do things. Because we don't learn, I don't think we learn well just in like a mono culture or in where I tell you this is what you need to learn and you repeat it back to me, and then I say, "Okay, what I know, so you're smart." It's very much, each woman decides her individual program. So we could line up four women here that had been in the program and ask them what their program was like and they would each sound extremely different, one from another. They would sound very unique and individual. Because every woman designs it for herself. And then within that, there's like areas of specialization. So a woman might want to be a healer or an organizer, or a ritualist, or a scholar, or something like that. So there's many different ways that you can pursue it. And then recently, within the last year, we've added two other programs. One is for crones, for women who are over 53. And that one is based on the same type of things, except that it also includes a life retrospective. You know, what did you do with your life up to this point? What do you want to do? Now let's start doing it. So that's one of the new ones. And the other one is a program for guardians. And those are for women who resonate with an Amazon archetype. And who feel that their spirituality is more expressed often in physicality, or in some kind of action or movement than the other ones are. And they all have the same kind of core curriculum, just like English 101 at a college; they all share the same core curriculum. But each one goes out in its own direction.

Doris M. Can you say how the interest or the impetus to add the crone to the other Cella program came about? Was it women at the program? Was it here at the mother house? Where does new information or new—how do things change?

Jade R. Well, part of the thing that's interesting in women's spirituality right now is we are. . . it is primarily women who were feminists. And so what's been happening is our age group is aging. We do have an influx now of younger women, but they skip a generation. So it's kind of interesting where our demographics probably

run from late thirties to sixty, and then there's nobody until you get to twenty. And now we have a whole batch of twenty year-olds who are coming in. So it's weird, because we missed a generation in there in some way that I don't know, feminism didn't get to them or didn't resonate with them or something. So what happened was our population of women who were part of the Congregation aged. And part of what they were saying was that they really needed some way to prepare for that aging process. That we are one of the first generations to live to be this old and to probably have another twenty to thirty years to continue to live beyond this. And they needed some way to get closure on the portion of their life that, in the Craft we would call the maiden, mother, crone. The mother portion of their program--although many of these women are not mothers. But it's just their working years, their productive years, whatever you want to call it—and move on into, “And now what? Now I have 20 years where maybe I don't have to go to work every day. Maybe I have a retirement income, or maybe I can do the things that I kept saying I was going to do but I didn't have time to do. How do I structure that? how do I look at that? How do I let go of what I did and say that was good, and create a future for myself as a mature adult woman?”

Doris M. So this conversation might happen in individual circles and it might happen on the list-serv. But it kind of percolates to people who make decisions about the program.

Jade R. Yes. The people who. . . . There's a council that makes decisions about the program. Basically what happened, the way that this truly got started was there was a group of women in California who said, “We have a group of crones. And we want to pilot this program. Can we, will you let us? Will you come here and do this with us?” And I went. And with every WTI—Women's Theological Institute—Cella group, there is a convening advisor. And I went and was the convening advisor for that group through the pilot. And it grew up to be this

program, basically. And *they* approached *us*. They were like, “We’re a bunch of crones and—“ They were very funny. “We’re a bunch of crones, and this is what we want.” (laughs) They were very clear about it, and they were very good. And we did pilot the program and then there were a few changes that happened because of the pilot. But it was actually very inspirational, because part of it that really worked was the retrospective. And those women shared the retrospectives with each other, which was awesome. We had women who wrote plays about their lives and performed them for us. And women who put together photo-documentation of their entire life in different manuals and books. Women who wrote, like, their story as mythic heroes. And they were awesome. They were awesome, the retrospectives. And it was very inspirational. And very good for them to share that with each other and then to basically say, “OK, that’s that. Now what?” And to be able to move forward on that.

Doris M.      What about the guardian phase?

Jade R.      The guardians—what happened, and this was very interesting, and this has very much to do with lesbian culture within the movement. What happened was that increasingly the idea of goddess woman became skirt and scarves. You know, it was somebody. . . in the beginning of the movement, we were all arriving in our jeans and T-shirts. There was no costume. There was no, you know, we were all there, and everybody was pretty much on equal footing. And then what happened was, like if you take for example as a microcosm of that, our conferences. There were women who continually came to our conferences, but then dropped out of attending things. They would be there parking our cars, moving our chairs, being present, but not participating fully. And after a while I began to notice that those women were there and had *stopped*. And so I started interviewing them and asking them, “What’s happened here? What changed? You know, like in 1975, you were in the circle with me. Now it’s 1980-something, 1990 late, and you’re

standing here parking my car, what's happened?" And they basically said, "Well, I'm not a goddess woman anymore because I've been disenfranchised by foofiness."

Doris M. By who?

Jade R. By foofiness. (laughs) By the image of goddess women as, YES, scarves and skirts and spangles and glitter, and that kind of thing, "and there's no place for me here anymore. But I still feel resonant and I'm coming because this is. . . you are my people, this is my tribe. So I'm still here. But you've cut me out of this." And those were primarily the lesbians that were saying that. So I was like, "Oh, well, wait a minute. Let's get you back in here. Let's figure out, what do you want? Tell me what you would call yourself. Tell me how you would define yourself." And we actually went through a long period of time where I facilitated discussions with them and interviewed them and talked to them. And connected them again. You know, where before we had been connecting like the early goddess women. And here I found this genre of goddess women that weren't connected to each other. And I started connecting them. And they were meeting, and they were talking. And, "How would you name yourself?" And they said, "Guardian." And some of them still don't like it, but it's become the nomenclature. And then, "How would your spirituality be? What would make you feel like you were present here? What would appeal to you?" So, for example, we started including in our programming things like archery. Which it's not, ok, it is a martial activity, but that's not how they're using it. In magic, when you use magic, magic is something with a goal that you energetically send the magic to the goal. And so the archery is just a symbol of energy manifested and sent to the goal, to them. So they're not using it as a martial skill. They're using it as a way that their magic works. And it's kind of—all of a sudden here they are, fully franchised again in the group. They're teaching each other and sharing with each

other and finding places to do things in ritual where now almost every ritual has a guardian, or five, in it.

Doris M. I just check out if this has coincided with interest in transgender appearance in the larger culture. If the larger culture issues somehow brought to the surface ways of looking at it, and understanding what had happened within the circle that made it easier to understand and for this to become a separate group.

Jade R. I don't think so, and I'll tell you why, which is why the congregation has always had a large butch element, who defined as butch, you saw Norma Jean. (There was a woman here earlier that is very butch.) Very much present in the Congregation. But what happened was, just over time they stopped feeling included in that. So it wasn't so much the transgender issues, I think, that made that happen. Because none of these women that I know of consider themselves trans-gendered. Because part of the thing that I think is the belief is that woman includes any behavior a woman can do. So rather than stepping over that line and saying, "This is a male behavior, therefore I am male," they step over this line and say "This is a male behavior, therefore the definition of male behavior needs to be changed. Because this is a woman doing that behavior." So rather than identification with transgender, they have more of the old feminist model of what is women's behavior. And yet a lot of these women are very butch. So when we basically said, "Why aren't you happy?" they came forward and said, "Well, you're painting me out of this picture." So then we went, "Oh, okay." And then what's been really interesting is having done that, and again, all these other women came up and said, "Oh, I want to be Xena, too!" So it wasn't then just the butch women who were then kind of put out that here, again, they had identified this whole thing and then all of these other women were like, "Me too! Me too! Me too! I'm so with that! Let me do what you're doing! Let me shoot your arrow! Let me. . . whatever!" So now I would say that even that has broadened to the

point where if you say, there was a point in time where you would say somebody was a guardian, you pretty much were saying they probably had somewhat of a butch identity. Now if you say that, you're saying well it could be anybody, but it's somebody who is resonant with that Amazon archetype. Which is how I finally—it's a hard thing to say. And a lot of the butches went, "Well, okay, we'll just call it butch spirituality, then. And we have a separate spirituality than you." And so they've gone on, where they said, "We now have a butch spirituality." And they're on lists now, dialoguing and talking about what is their spirituality, and how does that manifest, and how is that different. And it's not—there was a woman on there who's trans-gendered, and she was not well received. They basically--

Doris M. A woman born man?

Jade R. No. A woman born woman who was becoming male. Basically they feel like there's no excuse for that. It wasn't a well-received thing in that particular group. It was interesting.

Doris M. Do you want to say anything about how Dianic tradition in general doesn't open its doors to women who were born men? Or not born women?

Jade R. Our policy [for membership] at this point is women born women identifying as women. And basically the reason for that is our whole spiritual practice is grounded on women's experience. It's grounded on what is it to be a woman. And sourcing that from biology. It's just a very primitive, primal, female thing. And I understand, I don't object to transsexuals. But this is really *women's* religion. And it's not, if you didn't grow—

(End Tape One, Side B. Begin Tape Two, Side A.)

Jade R. So I was saying that if you didn't grow up female, if you don't have, if you never experienced a blood mystery, if you didn't have that experience, you really are not going to know exactly what we're talking about here. And again, remember back before we were saying, this is not the only religion. From our vantage point, this is one of many. And this is what this religion is about. So it's not that we don't think that you can have a religion, even, perhaps a religion of women's spirituality. But not this one, because this is really sourced from a female place. So we actually do a lot of referrals here, where people will call and they'll say, "I want to do something, but I want to do it with my husband." We network them to someplace where they can do that. If a transgendered person contacts us, we absolutely get them involved in community. Just not this one. I understand that pisses some of them off, but really, that's what we're about. And there's even a lot of talk. . . like if you read some of the history books about what happened to the great goddess temples, they started allowing transsexuals and they fell. I mean, it's demonstrable history in our experience. So what happened was they, there were the temples, you know, the Goddess religions.

Doris M. You're talking about—

Jade R. I'm talking about like Greece and Rome and, you know—

Doris M. Pre-, kind of B.C.

Jade R. Canaan. And, I could go down the list of them. But, according to the history of those times, what happened frequently in those temples is they began to castrate men and allow them in. Well those were transsexuals. So they castrated men and allowed them in. And within 200 years, the men were in charge. And that's why the pope wears a dress. (laughs) That's joking. But it's still based on that exact

thing. That is part of—I mean, I’m joking about that’s why the pope wears a dress. But in a way, it’s the same. It grew out of that same thing. And those temples, the demise of those temples, and the takeover of those temples, was the allowing of transsexuals into the temples. (phone interruption)

Doris M. Phone call. But is there anything else that you would like to talk about before the interview ends?

Jade R. I guess one of the things that I would say is that the women’s spirituality movement, by and large, has really, really grown. And that it’s fueled by a lot of different things. One of the things is we have *Buffy* and *Charmed*, on the TV, with Wiccans on them. Which has brought a whole generation forward that don’t think that Wicca is odd, and think it’s something that has power and should be explored. Hence the twenty year-old influx. Because they grew up watching *Charmed* and *Buffy*, and think that Wicca is a viable religious option. And that brings a whole different energetic to it. There was a book published, Megatrends, do you remember ever having seen that book? Well then they published Megatrends for Women. And like the fourth or fifth megatrend in there was the Goddess; [it] would be one of the major things that would affect women. And what’s happened is, it’s brought a tremendous influx of women into Goddess religion who haven’t been there before. So instead of kind of the old guard, being a majority or so, we’re beginning to have just a whole lot of people who have come forward and who want education, want health, want spirituality. And we don’t know what to do with the influx of numbers. That’s part of it. And it’s made. . . so part of what’s happening is even with, well, within women’s spirituality and even within Dianic Wicca, there’s been a lot of change. So like some women who would have twenty years ago said, “I’m a Dianic Wiccan,” now just call themselves a Goddess woman. Or some women who, there will be a feminist Dianic who says, “This is how I do things and this is what I believe,” and

another feminist Dianic who says, “This is how I do things and this is what I believe.” And they are not similar; they are different, one from another. So what’s happened is both the age and the growth and the acceptance of the movement has really made changes. Also, we are a religion of converts; there are, 30 years ago, there was Z. And now there’s this whole entire religion and we are entirely a religion of converts. And there’s a sense of having chosen it and choosing it. And now we’re faced with children who we don’t know if we should educate them or not. Or if it truly is a religion of choice do you bring children into it and raise them in it? And there’s a lot of debate and argument about, is it. . . there’s a thing in the Craft, the Goddess calls her own. Which means that she chooses you. You don’t chose her. So what if you educate a child not chosen? Are you doing, are you really servicing something, or will we end up with a hollow religion like Christianity? By educating those not chosen. So there’s actually a lot of conflictual information in and among our group at this time about how do we move forward. And how do we create a system that sustains what we have begun. Because I don’t think any of us want to say, “Well, that was a good religion for forty years and now I’m going to die.” And that’s going to be the end of it. How do we create something that sustains and continues beyond us. And how do we do that. And is it truly, if you watch *Charmed*, are you chosen? Are you really, truly, you know, is it speaking to you? And it’s been very interesting where the old Craft philosophy coming up against this new influx of young women. And what our thinking was, compared to what our thinking needs to be. Do we educate teenagers? Do we do outreach? Because before, really, all we did was connect. We never did outreach, particularly. Well, do we do outreach? Do we set up traditional places of meeting? How do we go forward? How do we move? And we really haven’t resolved that yet. You know, it’s really very much in flux. And what’s happening is there’s lots of different answers to these questions. To the point where I know some Dianic circles that meet every Sunday and have a sermon all the way over to some that are still the old anarchistic, come in your

jeans and T-shirt model. And it just really varies now. And yet they might all say they were Goddess women. They might all say they were; some of them would say they were Dianic. And it's very interesting to watch this religion mature and alter as it begins to meet the needs of the women within at this point.

Doris M. It's fascinating! And I wish that we had another hour or two to continue the interview. I want to thank you, Jade, so much for all that you shared. I can't tell you how rich what you've talked about has been.

Jade R. Thank you.

Doris M. And I'm looking forward to having your responses to the tape once it's transcribed.

Jade R. Oh, great. That will be great.

Doris M. Thank you again, Jade.

Jade R. It was wonderful to talk

(End Interview.)

[100 minutes]