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Title

Jade River Oral History Interview and Transcript

Date

November 28, 2004

Extant

1 hour 41 minutes interview (three files) and 1 transcript

Abstract

In this oral history, Jade River, co-founder of the Lesbian Feminist Union and founder of the Re-formed Congregation of the Goddess- International (RCG-I) discusses “organizing for the goddess” after meeting Z Budapest, and moving in order to keep custody of her son. She published the *Of Like Mind* newsletter and organized the first national Dianic Wicca Conference while running RCG-I from her home.

Biographical

Samantha Jade River was born in 1950 in Bellefontaine, Ohio. Her family moved to Louisville, Kentucky in 1952 where they owned and managed businesses and were devoted Presbyterians. Until she graduated from high school in 1968, Jade was folk singer and made regular appearances on a local television program. She attended Eastern Kentucky University and graduated in three years with a degree in Administration of Private and Voluntary Agencies. She married, and lived in the suburbs in Louisville, and had a son. Although she loved being a mother, her suburban life was lonely and alienating. When Falcon River, a Girl Scout friend, now an open lesbian came to visit, Jade left her husband and moved to an apartment with her child and Falcon. They discovered the Louisville Lesbian Feminist Union and through them discovered women doing magic in the Cincinnati area.

In Louisville Jade helped organize and operate the city's lesbian bar "Mother's Brew" which also was the meeting place of the Lesbian Feminist Union. She continued practicing magic with her circle in Ohio and became a priestess in that circle in 1979. She met Z Budapest at a conference called "Witches and Amazons" in Columbus, Ohio, in the late 1970s. After that conference, she determined to "organize for the Goddess" and to keep custody of her son and

find a place for a Goddess women's organization, she and Falcon moved to Madison, Wisconsin in 1982.

Jade and Falcon split in 1983 and Jade began work on a newsletter, *Of A Like Mind* (OALM). Lynnie Levy, an experienced editor, began working as editor of OALM. Jade and Lynnie incorporated a national religious organization for Goddess women called the Re-formed Congregation of the Goddess- International (RCG-I). In 1984, RCG-I was still operating out of Jade's home, but was producing merchandise to raise funds and had created a national directory for Goddess women. They looked into buying land, sponsored all manner of women's events in the Madison area, and began hosting women's spirituality groups for the Madison community. They developed long-range goals that included paying priestesses a salary, owning land, continuing to publish OALM and directories, and offering a regular ministerial training course.

RCG-I held the first, national Dianic Wicca Conference in 1986 to "define" what Dianic Wicca was. In 1987, Jade and Lynnie went to the National Women's Music Festival, the Pagan Spirit Gathering, and the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival to present a networking workshop for Goddess women. That September, the second conference, Women and Witchcraft/Defining Dianic Wicca II was held with sixty-five women in attendance. The first instruction classes, the Cella Program, also began that fall.

These conferences, Madison area lesbian events, national networking and educational opportunities expanded over the next decade. Jade began working for the Congregation in 1988 and in 1990, Jade published, *To Know: A Guide to Women's Magic and Spirituality*. In 1993, RCG-I sponsored a workshop with Starhawk and other national and Midwestern wiccan conferences. In 1994, the LA-based Circle of Aradia became the first chartered circle within the RCG-I umbrella. In 1996, Deb Trent was ordained as 1st Priestess through Cella courses of the Women's Theological Institute. In 2000, Z Budapest ordained Jade as a Dianic Elder Priestess. RCG-I bought a Mother House in Madison. Jade is a member of the informal North American networking group of leaders from all Wiccan/Goddess traditions. She lives with her partner Raven in Madison.

Scope and Content

In this oral history, Jade River, co-founder of the Lesbian Feminist Union and founder of the Re-formed Congregation of the Goddess- International (RCG-I) discusses "organizing for the goddess" after meeting Z Budapest, and moving in order to keep custody of her son. She published the *Of Like Mind* newsletter and organized the first national Dianic Wicca Conference while running RCG-I from her home.

This interview was conducted by Doris Malkmus, who served as LGBTQ-RAN catalog collection archivist and oral historian from 2002 until 2005. She earned a Ph.D. in history at the University of Iowa and an M.S. in Archival Science from the University of Michigan.

Access

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<https://lgbtqreligiousarchives.org/oral-histories/jade-river>.

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Languages

Collection material is in English

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