

Episode 2 - Our first full episode

- Wednesday, January 3rd, 2007

Sandi: Welcome to the 2nd Episode of Ravencast, our first full episode. We have a lot to talk about today. So let's start with introductions.

Dave: I'm Dave.

S: And I'm Sandi.

D: And any good story needs to start in the beginning. So our first official podcast were going to talk about ourselves and how we more importantly got into Asatru. Both Sandi and I met at UMASS Amherst, a fine institution of higher learning.

S: Yeah, higher learning.

D: Yeah, or something.

Both Sandi and I were actually very much looking for religion there. Both of us met and both of us met the wonderful folks at Umass Pagan Students Association. Otherwise, warmly and affectionately known as UMPSO.

Now, while I was looking for religion, I really wasn't sure what I was looking for. I did have a large amount of respect for my birth religion of Judaism. And I appreciated many of the tribal aspects, care that one takes of ones family, and that connection to that tradition, that connection to what has con before, was that really struck and that really resonated with me.

However I never was interested in bowing down before an almighty power. This was something that completely did not make sense in my worldview. I remember bringing this point to my father and asking him, "What's god done for me?". And his answer, of course was, "Well nothing." That the god of the Hebrews was the god of the Hebrew peoples and this meant that my place in the universe was to pray and was to serve him. "That's it, didn't like it, then too bad". So a-walking I went.

With that in mind, I knew absolutely nothing of Asatru, when I went to college. I found out a little bit about paganism, and a little bit about Wicca. I figured, well this is something kinda interesting, and yes I played D&D. OH NO! Yes, I too was a gamer. Reformed.

S: *Laughing* Yes.

D: And so I knew, ya know, a smattering from my Amber K book that I picked up while in the illustrious Connecticut, and came with bright eyes and looking for new things. So to UMPSO I arrived.

S:[5:04]Meanwhile, I was sort of in the same position as Dave was. I knew I needed to look, or wanted to look, for something. For something spiritual. However

growing up in a more eclectic background: my mother being Irish Catholic and my father being Jewish, I had a lot to look at. They were both very open and both basically told me, "Find what it is, that you believe in and as long as you have belief than that's good enough for us. That will make us happy".

So I looked into a lot of different things, I was from a very small town so I was very limited in my resources. And I started looking into Norse and Scandinavian type things at a very early age, I would say. And when I went to college I started looking at different groups there, and I also met up with UMPSO, which is where I met Dave. UMPSO being UMass Pagan Student Organization. For me it wasn't necessarily going from some sort of religion like Judaism, it was sort of just finding where it was that worked for me. Um, definitely felt a presence there, the UMass Pagan students was, and still is I'm sure a wonderful group full of different types of people. So I got a lot of, almost you could say, "real world" knowledge by talking to different members there. Sort of grew in my belief and found out what I was practicing and looking into, was a lot like what Asatru already was. Sort of like "coming home". I found a name for what it was I was already doing.

D: Now when you said you "found from an early age that your interests", I found it fascinating because when I was in elementary school I remember devouring the entire library, 60 books or so, they had there. But more importantly they had D'Aulaires' Norse Myths. And this was a book that from an early age completely inspired me and overwhelmed me. Why was this not more meaningful in my life? Why did it take me an extra 10 years after that point to find the Norse Gods? Well, at the last page, as I turned to read the text, and note how it said, "And the Gods drifted off." And that was it. I remember going, "Wow, this is something that's so incredible, so amazing, so rich, and yet it is gone." And I closed the book never to think about the Norse Gods for years and years upon years.

S: Huh. Well I think maybe, that's because of the more strict religious background that you had. You were willing to look at mythology and say, "Well mythology is mythology and Judaism and Christianity; that's not mythology it's some sort of truth." And the reality is that it's all mythology. It's all written by people to tell a story of some kind or another about Gods or God. And maybe that's part of where that came from.

D: [7:03] It's a definite truism that our world's are only as big as we let it and I think that from an early age all us first generation Asatruar were indoctrinated with the idea of "this is something that is foreign to us." We are given background from our parents and from the world around us and Asatru was something, of course, none of us were brought up with and this is something that, of course, as the next generation comes we are going to impart upon them what our culture is, that "New Way".

S. [7:45] Well I would hope that's the best we can do, I think, just like any other religion. Like you grew up with Judaism, as your family's base, however that's not where you found your beliefs. And I don't think that we can expect the next generation of children that grow up with parents who are Asatru, to necessarily follow that path. I

would hope so, but not necessarily. What I do hope, fervently hope, is that those children that grew up with parents who are Asatru or Wiccan or some other spiritual path, get the tools. Grow up with the tools they need to find the spirituality that gives them belief, that gives them that sense of wonder for the world and that there is something bigger and more important out there for yourself. Because that, for me, is the importance of belief, at a very core level.

D: [8:50] It's true enough. I'm one of the few people I know who did not mind their religious education. I appreciate my parents' spirituality. I appreciate that the imparting that they gave me for that care and respect, for that worldview of "Something beyond the here and now". And while I completely hated the process at the time and ran away from Hebrew school as a little Jew boy of 13, fleeing from the oppression of the synagogue. But yeah, I was not running to anything. I was defiantly running away, and of course, like all of us, we have to go through that process of getting away from one's birth knowledge, where one comes from, to come to the here and now. So, that brings me to the point where I was introduced to Asatru. And from there it was probably about a good year after, I was practicing Asatru, but not necessarily believing it from a spiritual level.

[10:19] Let me explain. A lot of people have faith, something happens to them, and then they get belief. I had faith. I had a deep spirituality but it was not rooted to anything at this point. I knew I didn't like Judaism. I wanted something more. However, didn't know what exactly, what for that was. I found out about Asatru via UMPISO, and for a year I was part of the group. I was doing everything a member of UMPISO should do, but it was a rote mechanism. I was... I was, I think more than anything, training myself in what needed to be done. As a newbie that's not something inappropriate. I did not profess, I did not state that Asatru was my religion, I stated that "this is something that I was interested in", and so I put myself on probation, so to speak. And that is the walk of any newbie.

S: [11:30] When I joined UMPISO I had already had a very strong idea of what it was that I was believing, what kind of faith I had. I didn't necessarily need to look for that at that point. But what I found when I found UMPISO, was a very cohesive group, a very knowledgeable base of people on many different levels about many different things. However, I was also lucky enough to have the first ritual that I participated in UMPISO being an Ostara Blot. So I knew right away that these people who were leading this blot were two people that I definitely wanted to talk to. And at that point, that was two years for you, and I walked up to you and the other Co-President and from there started what now has been almost half a lifetime of involvement. With that group and with the group we are currently involved in.

D: [12:39] The watershed moment for me was what I call "The Hammer". You see there was a point where I was just walking around campus and then everything changed. What I mean by that is at one point I felt nothing and then another point I felt the Gods were walking with me. No, I've talked to other people about how they get into Asatru and of course their experiences. And I have talked to a number of folks who just in a moment, just completely out of the blue, the presence of the Gods were felt by them.

And there is no rhyme or reason it's just something... You know one moment they were there and the moment before they were not. I have no term for it that other than - Walking With the Gods. It's the initial start with my relationship to them on an entity-to-entity, sentient being-to-sentient being basis. I don't have any other way to put it. And of course being a religion, it's something that every person has to come to terms with. As to the start of their relationship with their Gods. And I wouldn't have it any other way.

S: [14:03] Now you talk about feeling a calling, and that being the most significant moment for you and your religion now. And for me the most significant moment was when I found community. Doing things alone, solitary, has it's importance as far as learning what it is that you believe, and being firm in your own ideas and allowing yourself to go up to other people and state these opinions without going to a group and being completely overwhelmed with other peoples opinions. Asatru in particular tends to be full of very opinionated people. So I feel it's important that you find yourself first. But community for me and finding a group, for me, was the most significant point. That was the point where it went from being this thing that I do by myself, this belief that I held singularly and feeling almost alone in that, to realizing there is a huge amount of devotion in the Asatru Community. And once you connect with that you are never alone. You always have a helping hand. So that was the most important point for me.

D: [15:36] Which is interesting, because of course, I came at it from the opposite point of view, in that I came from a religion with a tribalist aspect. And so my place in that community was pretty much pre-set, it was the relationship with one's God that didn't do it for me, and relationship with one's core spirituality that didn't do it for me, and the reason I came to being Asatru. My sense is that the start of the primal part of...the core point of Asatru is the relationship: the relationship of one to one's Gods; the relationship of one to one's environment, and most importantly the one to the community. It's that connection and process of connecting to that greater aspects around one's self. And all those points have a purpose, have a spiritual byplay there.

S: [16:43] Well right, because how you interact with the community around you is very much a part of how you interact with the Gods and that's all of the religion. That's all of Asatru is, how you interact with people, how you interact with the Gods, how you interact with everyone on a day-to-day basis. It's all connected and one of the most wonderful things about Asatru.

D:[17:11] Well all religions do take that point of view in trying to answer, you know, what the individual's place in the universe is. But Asatru, what is so great about our religion, which is why we're cooler than everybody else...

S:*laughing*

D:.....is because we have.....

S: No we're not. No we're not trying to convert anybody. Just love fest for Asatru right now I guess.

D: Yeah, whatever.

S:*Laughing*

D:[17:38] More importantly one's relationship with one's deity is an individual thing. It is a thing built upon trust. It is a thing built upon experience, and it's not just rote. We do our rituals to increase that connection. We make sacrifices to increase one's connection and one's involvement, one's experience with the Gods. This is something that builds ourselves as well. We find out who we are by our relationships.

S: So, community being such an important part of Asatru it's also important for us to state that the Internet is a big part of that as well, as much as I dislike this "New Fangle-y Technology" STUFF. We wouldn't have this podcast as a way to reach out to people. We wouldn't have had the Internet to put up a website and allow people who, like me, thought they were alone, find out and gather information. When I was starting out, there wasn't the e-mail, there wasn't the Internet. So to have that as a resource now is HUGE. Being able to read The Eddas online, and not to be relying on somebody to bring you to the library or go to the bookstore or anything like that. People can really reach out who might not necessarily be able to under other circumstances, and that's huge. I know our group in particular would be a much different group than it is now without that communication the Internet allows.

D:[19:31] And I think it's even much more critical than that, because I don't believe a religion like Asatru would be able to maintain itself without the Internet. I would say that because of our core belief in individual spirituality, and the interest in community, it just wouldn't happen any other way. You would not be able to make a core group to coalesce around. There would not be a community if not for being able to find other people from diverse walks of life and be able to have that ability to communicate with California, to communicate with anywhere and everywhere. The fact is, that when one takes a community and puts a moral code there and puts tradition, you now have a culture. In that environment computers and most importantly the Internet has a part of that culture.

Whether you like it or not, the Internet is a part of the Asatru religion. I put that out over this podcast so that people can take in that information. Despite all the flame wars, despite every miscommunication that happens on a regular basis, from e-mails that are taken unilaterally, taken out of context, and everything that goes on with the Internet. For all the problems that we have there. Suck it up, because we would not have a religion if not for the Internet. A large part of this has come about because Asatru is not exactly a proselytizing religion. [21:20] A lot of us wear hammers and get out in the real wide world. But the fact is that we're not shilling on the street corners. People find our religion because they want to find out about our religion. And the Internet is an integral part of that. You see, everyone can sit at their home computer and, our generation has found a new means of taking information and with the tool of the internet we have

brought that into our home life, our religious life as well. It's become a part of our lives across the board. Like it or lump it.

And this is something that just completely fascinates me because the Asatru religion is one of dichotomies. We have the Aesir and Vanir, and we have this core computer technology that's become part of how we keep community together. And we do our Blots outside, and we go see the natural world and respect it and find our place within the natural world and then take that home. We need both sides of that equation: the home life, the work life. We need the technology along with the natural world. These things have to be in balance. For the same reason, my point of view is "There is no such thing as a cyber-Blot". I'm sorry. I've seen people do all sorts of strange things online and I've done many strange things online, but more importantly an online religion just ain't whole.

What we practice is a very specific thing.[23:16] We are taking an old religion and making it relevant to the modern day. We have to do this in an appropriate way. In a way, that's going to be true to what we do right now, for the work that's meaningful for us, for the people around us who are meaningful, and in a way that honors the ancestors, honors our family and honors our faith. These are things that are important to us. These are things that resonate and inspire us.

Well, on that note I hope I've given people something to think about.

S:[23:54] Our third episode is going to focus on magic, art, and the Asatru mindset. We are going to have our first real live interview. We're very excited about that. So stay tuned, we hope you are starting to get interested in what we are doing here. Make sure to leave us your comments on what we can do better, what you'd like to hear at <http://ravencast.podbean.com>. And thank you to **Jeff Wells** for providing us with the intro and outro music for this cast.

See you next time!

D: Bye!

-Transcription by F.P. Molina