



UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CONGREGATION OF FREDERICK

The Legacy of Margot Adler

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Good morning. My name is Irene. I teach the Friday yoga classes here, facilitate our monthly Labyrinth walks, and I co-chair Frederick CUUPS - the Covenant of Unitarian Universalist Pagans.

The season is winding down around us. This past week, I scraped frost off my car for the first time, and knew that whatever plants got left out overnight were pretty much a lost cause at this point. For those of us practicing Paganism or other Earth Centered Spiritual paths, the changing leaves and cooler temperatures mark the end of our year. In our beliefs, the shift toward darkness in the physical world is mirrored in the spiritual realms. At this time of year, we honor our beloved dead and ascended ancestors because we believe that the Veil between the worlds is thinner. Our ancestors can hear us more clearly at this time. So we tell their stories. We speak their names aloud. We honor them with word and offering and deed.

In the Pagan worldview, your ancestors are not just those people to whom you are blood related. We also have spiritual ancestors—individuals with whom we feel a deep connection and resonance. People who paved the way for our faith as it exists today. One of those honored Ancestors is Margot Adler.

My first footsteps into Paganism occurred when I was 15 years old. A good friend of mine in high school gave me a book to borrow, and like many Pagans, the words unfolding before me were the homecoming I had never expected, but always craved. I finally found a structure for the inherent beliefs I already held.

Two decades ago, the resources for Pagans were very different than they are now. There wasn't a glorious world of information I could access by consulting the Google oracle. There weren't even

many books. I remember a time when I would buy ANY book that referenced Paganism, simply because they were rare. And I was desperate to learn.

At that time, the people I knew who were Pagan were other high school students, working out of that same small collection of texts. We were shooting in the dark. Testing things out. And, of course, my ideas of what Pagans as a whole were like, what our culture might look like.... Well, I'm not even sure I thought that far. I didn't know anything about us as a whole. The only other Pagans I knew didn't even have drivers' licenses.

That blank spot in my own knowledge was why Margot Adler had such a huge impact on me, my understanding of myself, and my understanding of the culture I belong to. I bought a copy of her book, *Drawing Down the Moon: Witches, Druids, Goddess-Worshippers, and Other Pagans in America*.

Almost 40 years ago, Margot Adler set out on a cross-country adventure to document how Pagans lived, practiced, celebrated and believed. She traveled from coven to festival to gathering, sleeping on couches and relying on phone calls and references from friends. She traveled the web of the Pagan world at that time in a way it's difficult to imagine now. She interviewed some of the founding members of our faith, and prominent leaders of the Pagan movement at the time. I began to learn the names: Oberon Zell, Isaac Bonewits, Selena Fox. As both a member of our faith and a journalist, Margot was able to write about us clearly without fighting the secrecy that was common to our culture at that time.

Margot gave me my first taste of our different Traditions. Much as Christianity is an umbrella word for a collection of varying paths including Protestants, Catholics, Baptists, Lutherans and many more, Paganism is an umbrella word as well. The groups beneath the umbrella are known as Traditions. Through Margot, I met the Discordians - a tradition that is a built-in catch 22 against taking our faith too seriously. I met the Dianics - a powerful fusion of feminism and Goddess-centric spirituality spearheaded by Z. Budapest. I met the *Ár nDraíocht Féin* - the Druid order within the larger Pagan family. I met the Radical Faeries - a spirituality group created by gay men that broke new ground in the world of men's spirituality and expanded the Pagan understanding of sexual and gender orientation within the context of spirituality and culture.

I began to understand what my family looks like. And I became so proud to be a small part of that beautifully diverse culture. Looking back, I think the community organizer inside of me was born upon reading that book. More than anything, *Drawing Down the Moon* made me want to find these incredible individuals in person. I wanted to attend the festivals Margot wrote about. I wanted to play drums and sing and chant and share and learn with my own people.

My own people. Anyone who has grown up feeling different knows how beautiful it is to finally find a community where they fit. Discovering that there was an entire culture where I'm not an oddball soothed a place in me that I didn't even realize was hurting because I had never known a time when it didn't.

Margot's book wasn't the first Pagan book I read, but she WAS my introduction to the culture I serve now.

Margot Adler went on to write *Heretic's Heart: A Journey Through Spirit and Revolution*. She became an elder in the Covenant of the Goddess.

She was also a Unitarian Universalist. Do you know what means? She's your Spiritual Ancestor too. Margot's work as a journalist, humanitarian and freethinker is a vibrant example of someone living our principles and sources. She is an ancestor to be very proud of. So speak her name this autumn. Learn a little bit about her. And know that you are a part of the ancestral line that shines before us in the darkness.

Hail, Margot Adler. We remember. We honor. We love.