

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH RITA E. RIPPETOE

Michelle Mueller: I'm Michelle Mueller, and I'm conducting this oral history interview with Rita E. Rippetoe. Today is August 4th, 2023. This interview is part of a series of oral history interviews I'm conducting with LGBTQ Pagan leaders. Our purpose today is to collect and preserve your oral history, Rita. I will ask some guiding questions, tentatively organized as early life, education and career, Witchcraft and Paganism, and LGBTQ identity. But I want to emphasize that your oral history is your story to tell. There are many attributes and experiences that make a human being. Feel free to shift our conversation so as to focus the oral history wherever you would like to at present, and I want to encourage you to take the time you desire, answering any question or questions, to not feel rushed at any point in the conversation, and to not feel bound in any way to any specific question that I ask. Does that sound like a good plan?

Rita Rippetoe: Yeah. Fine.

Michelle Mueller: Okay, do you have any specific requests as we get started?

Rita Rippetoe: Can't think of any.

Michelle Mueller: Great. Well, thank you so much for accepting this oral history interview, and being part of this project. Let's start with where you grew up. In what context did you come of age? Did you have siblings or close childhood friends that were impactful? And what are some aspects that are significant about your upbringing?

Rita Rippetoe: Well, I was born in Susanville, California. But we left Susanville when I was about 2, and moved to Roseville, California. Started school there. I could already read when I went to school, so I got pretty bored [laughter] remembering that this was the day of...of look, say, instruction and reading readiness exercises that are ultimately boring.

Rita Rippetoe: I have one sister—she's, as we used to, very determinedly, say, a year and 13 days apart. We were so close in age and size and were dressed fairly the same that people would keep thinking we were twins. And we'd be like, "No, we're not twins!" [laughter] You know. My grandmother made all our clothes, and she would usually get one pattern and the same material in two different colors. So we weren't dressed exactly alike, but very similar. So, let's see. Oh. I went to elementary school through junior high in Roseville. My parents got divorced when I was about 10, and then, a little while later we moved to Los Angeles. During all this time my grandmother lived with us. My mother worked, and my grandmother took care of my sister and I, and did most of the housework and cooking, and so forth. And she didn't get along with my dad at all. And then went to school one year in Los Angeles. And then my mother got into a relationship with a Canadian who lived in British Columbia. And he was doing some business in Los Angeles, but then, when he returned to British Columbia, she decided to uproot and follow him.

Rita Rippetoe: So we packed all of everything that we could into suitcases and all put furniture in storage, and headed up to Vancouver...only to discover that the woman he had claimed was his sister and the children he claimed were his niece and nephew were instead his wife and his children. So that was a bit of an upset.

Rita Rippetoe: And then in the middle...so then we were going to school in Canada, which was interesting. Then my dad came up, and he had sued for full custody because of us leaving California, and he had to take the case to the Canadian courts.

Rita Rippetoe: But he...he lost the case, but in the course of meeting over it, he and my mom decided to get back together. And so then we ended up moving back to California, and I went to high school in Sacramento area—first at La Sierra, and then we moved to Folsom, to the officers' housing at Folsom State Prison.

Rita Rippetoe: And then graduated from Folsom High School. From there I went to University of California, Davis, and first year lived off campus because they had run short of student housing. But then, the second year, I became involved in an experimental co-ed dormitory called Hammarsskjöld House, and that's where I met Deborah Frankel that I'm married to now. We were roommates, and—but I also, I also met Gary Lynn Alcorn that I ended up marrying in my junior year.

Rita Rippetoe: And then, as soon as I graduated we moved to San Francisco because, you know, it was San Francisco! [laughter] Everyone wanted to move to The City. And but the second, the main reason that Gary wanted to move to San Francisco was that—oh, now I'm falling into the pronoun trap. I think it's easier if I use the male pronoun for before the transition, and then change to the female pronoun for later, because otherwise it just gets crazy and difficult. Anyway, he wanted to go to San Francisco because there was more availability of what was then called, you know, transsexual counseling. He wasn't really sure of identity at that point. It was, it was kind of more, almost more, presenting as a, as a split personality, in which a female persona that you call Ginger would come out for part of the time when you know, you had privacy and so forth.

Rita Rippetoe: But then, once he started, you know, getting contacts in the therapeutic community, there was something called the Pacific Center. I believe that was dealing with a lot of you know, homosexual and transsexual and other gender-related issues. At that time. There was a police officer who was...had sort of become the liaison between the San Francisco police department and the homosexual community in San Francisco and was trying to, to get to, you know less prejudicial treatment. And, of course, and this is all at a time when... This is 1970 and following years, and I think, I think that was before California changed the laws...I can't remember exactly when and then when the laws about homosexuality were changed in California; I think Illinois already had. I wasn't really keeping track. But Gary was able to be admitted to the Stanford University Medical School transsexual program. And that involved a lot of counseling. A lot of...they did instruction on, on how to, you know, speak in a higher register, to, you know, gesture and move and walk, and, and so forth, in female clothing and in more female-typical ways, so that, with the goal that that the patients would, you know, would be able to pass once they were, you know, once they were through the program, that they would be able to successfully integrate into society as women. And then—

Rita Rippetoe: I lost my train of thought.

Rita Rippetoe: Okay, so part of that process was to be able to spend a year or more dressing and living as a female before any surgery. At that, hormone treatments were started, but no surgical intervention was part of the program until after you had successfully done the program, and Gary was very fortunate that his parents, after speaking with with people in the program and with the police... What was the police officer's name? I think it was Elliot-something [Elliot Blackstone]. Anyhow. Yeah. They, you know, they became convinced that it was, you know, a medical problem, which concerned them, you know—different from being homosexual and they were willing to be supportive. And then, Gary wanted to stay in the same job because it was, it was a good, well-paying job. Retail clerk. Pretty strong union in San Francisco at that time.

Rita Rippetoe: And after talking with the union representative...and the union representative once again, you know, talking to these other authorities that they—the union—took the position, that, well, this is a medical problem, and you cannot fire our member for having a medical problem.

Rita Rippetoe: And so they all sat down with the, with the other employees at the, at the company they worked for which, it was a...drug store, you know, like “Pay Less” or something like that. I cannot remember the name of the company. It's gone out of business. It was. It was...I think it was based in Utah, because I know it was run by Mormons. They didn't have a liquor department in the store. But anyway...they sat down with all the workers and the...and, you know, explained the situation, and then, particularly the women working there were obviously concerned about the restroom issue and so forth. But then everybody agreed that this was okay. And so after a long weekend, you know, Gary, now...now Lynn—middle, you know...middle name as first name—went to work in women's clothing, and that was, you know, that was the beginning of the year of transition. In the meantime, I had gotten trained in a business machine repair, and had taken a position with Xerox working as a technician on copying machines.

Rita Rippetoe: And since my territory was in Oakland, we decided to rent a large house in Oakland, and share with Deborah. So we could afford a nicer place with three of us going in together on the rent. And so that, that's what we did.

Michelle Mueller: Well, it sounds like you and Deborah have been part of each other's lives, and maybe even family, for a very long time. Would you say that?

Rita Rippetoe: Oh, yes. I mean...as I say, we kept in contact after university. Although Deborah had left Davis and enrolled in Berkeley before I had graduated. We're the same age, in the same year. But she'd taken off in...in the meantime, ironically, the woman that Gary had been dating, who had been our other roommate, had dropped out because of an unplanned pregnancy.

Rita Rippetoe: And, and I'll tell you later how accidentally—it's sort of, inadvertently—met her daughter years later. Yeah. Actually, I'll go ahead and tell that, because you know, we all felt bad because she was a physics major, and we thought, “Oh, no, there goes a promising, you know, female scientific career. She got pregnant. Oh no. Well, that's the end of that!” Then heard several years later that, no, she'd gone back to university and completed her degree. And she actually—as I eventually learned, you know, through the miracles of the Internet—she had ended up working for the Fermi Institute and then us, back about 15 years ago, we were having these Pagan meetings in Sacramento and was chatting with someone, and somehow, somehow the Fermi Institute came

up, or something, or no growing up near there, and the woman I was talking to said, “Oh, yes, my mother worked there,” and I said, “Well, I wonder if she knows my friend, that was my college roommate,” and lo and behold, it was her! [laughter] So, you know, the tangled web.

Michelle Mueller: Small world.

Rita Rippetoe: Yeah. So anyway, I should go back and say that part of the requirement of the Stanford program was divorce. So we did the formalities of divorce. Yay no oppress, but continued living together. And then eventually, Lynn moved away to Santa Cruz to go to college in Santa Cruz and we split up, and I had met at one of the first...at the Summer Nemeton. So the summer solstice up in Ukiah on the Nemeton, which was an early Pagan group. I did a summer solstice, and Deborah had gotten connected with them through seeing the magazine that they put out three issues of. So anyway, she saw the magazine in the window of the women’s bookstore on College Avenue, and bought it. Made some contacts, and asked me if I wanted to go to this summer solstice. I thought, “Oh, sure! Why not? You know. You know, get out of the city, go up in the country, camp out, why not?” And so that was my very first overtly Pagan event.

Michelle Mueller: Was divorce required, legally—at the time of a gender transition—at that time, because of same-sex marriage laws?

Rita Rippetoe: Well. I’m not sure. I think it was mainly sort of a cover-their-ass move on the part of the Stanford, because they didn’t want any spouses suing for...whatever you could have sued for. And also, since they were under the assumption that their patients would be going out to form heterosexual relationships and have a probably rose-covered cottage and adopt some kids and be normal 1950s housewives.

Michelle Mueller: Very big assumptions.

Rita Rippetoe: Very, very yeah. And you know, it’s like, when people have one agenda and other people’s agendas don’t match it. And sort of everybody knows and starts telling the people in charge what they want to hear.

Rita Rippetoe: So of course nobody, nobody was telling the doctors and the psychologists, and all that: “No, I don’t think I’m going to be a heterosexual woman once you finish with all this.” You know, because they knew they didn’t want to hear it, and of course they didn’t want to endanger their chances. The patients did not want to endanger their chances of staying in the program. There was a lot of weird psychology going on because the surgeon, the main surgeon on the project, was Roman Catholic and didn’t really quite approve of the entire idea. But the rest of the team was like, “Well, you know, this is a medical thing for the...”—at that time, I believe the theory was that that there were too many feminizing hormones in the mother’s womb, and it kept the androgen from masculinizing the fetus’s brain. So the fetus’s body grew as male, but the brain switches to male had been switched over, and that accounted for the whole thing...I don’t know where that theory stands now. I haven’t kept track. I don’t know if that’s still considered a possibility or not. Anyhow...but so being oh, well, “This is a you know this is a medical thing, and then you know what you might call a birth defect.” He was, you know, he was willing to do the surgery, but he kind of salved his conscience by participating in a program in South America that provided free

hair lip and cleft palate repairs in poor villages, and I think that project is still on going. It's one of those things, because, you know, you got people out in a little village in the back and beyond. And you know, there's no doctors and no money. So these teams of surgeons from more, you know prosperous, countries go out and perform as many surgeries as they can in a season just going from village to village, anyway. That was was an interesting bit there, and...

Rita Rippetoe: So. Yes, the divorce was definitely required as part of the program, and I and I don't... I mean nobody...remember, nobody was even talking about same-sex marriage as a possibility in 1970. That that wasn't even on anybody's radar as a as a possibility, just, you know, just not being beat up by the police, not having the bars raided, and so forth, was, you know, the best that could be hoped for. It was a long time...

Michelle Mueller: I'm curious if there's anything you say, you feel like you've learned about partnership, you know. Just over...you've had very significant long-term relationships. You were a partner during a huge major gender transition. What are your kernels of wisdom when it comes to partnership?

Rita Rippetoe: Oh, woah—well, I was getting a lot of negative feedback from my family. They just thought the whole thing was terrible and wrong and crazy, and at one point my dad even told me that he had contemplated getting his brothers—of which he had six—together to confront Gary, and you know, basically kind of run him out of town. Southern family here. But that he reconsidered, *and good*, you know. You know that kind of total lack of understanding. I think the only one in my family who wasn't totally negative, was my grandmother, who was just like—although she never quite entirely got it, until just before her death—which was, “Well, I always liked Gary. He was a nice person.” And I'm like, “Okay!”

Michelle Mueller: Was that the grandmother who raised you and your sister?

Rita Rippetoe: Yeah, see, I never really knew my paternal grandmother. You know, we visited a few times, but she was never really part of my life. I never knew my maternal grandfather. Actually, actually, I never knew either grandfather. My paternal grandfather died when I was about 5, I think, and we were too young to be taken to the funeral, so I may have had some vague memories of him from before we left Susanville. And then my father's mother continued to live in Susanville, and we didn't make any visits out there, you know. Good, good distance from Roseville, and my mother's father had deserted at...when she was only a baby, so she never knew her father until...I think she was about 25 when she hunted him up and found out he was living in Oregon, and we actually all drove up there for a visit. So I had one visit with him, and...and he never stayed in contact afterwards, and we... We made the rather startling discovery that that he was actually a bigamist because he had *assumed* that my grandmother divorced him, and she had never bothered because she never intended to remarry. So so they kind of had to do a quick divorce and remarriage thing to, to square everything up.

Michelle Mueller: An accidental bigamist.

Rita Rippetoe: Yes, an accidental bigamist. So more tangled family politics. So, as I was saying, I was getting a lot of you know, negativity from my family of you know: “Why are you staying?”

etc. And I was, kinda you know, partly out of maybe stubbornness, and partly out of you know, “I’m married, we said, ‘for better or for worse,’ and you know, there’s a lot of to adjust to, but I’m going to do my best.”

Rita Rippetoe: So but yeah. But then at some point, it became obvious that Lynn needed to move on to establish a new identity that this this staying together—how is it going to work?

Rita Rippetoe: And I had already kind of started an affair with Bob. Known in the Pagan community as Rasty Bob. Bob R—. And he had...he had been at that summer solstice gathering. He had come up with...what was the name? It was...it was the Diamond Bar Coven. He and his then-wife were training with the Gardnerian coven in Southern California, and they’d all come up together for this festival. That’s how we met.

Rita Rippetoe: And he, he and his wife at the time had an open relationship. But then she was kind of moving away to emotionally, to, to yeah, reason with the High Priest and Priestess of the coven. So, and they, and they were getting divorced.

Rita Rippetoe: And then, after the divorce, he moved up to Northern California. We...and we moved in together, first in Oakland and then in Vallejo.

Michelle Mueller: As we speak about these different relationships, I wonder, you know, which, if any, sexual and gender identity labels you identify with, you know...polyamorous, lesbian, bisexual, queer? Do any of those terms feel like *you*?

Rita Rippetoe: I don’t think anybody was saying “polyamorous” back then. I know Bob talked about sort of the swingers in Southern California. But he objected to...he said there were some people that he felt were, were using Witchcraft as an excuse for swinging, and he didn’t...he didn’t care for that. He thought, “Well, you know, have it.”

Rita Rippetoe: You know, I’m not sure anybody used the term, “open relationship,” either. It was kind of vague. It was just like, well, we’re not exclusive. And, I don’t think people were quite as into labels. I mean, they were...there were definitely people who were clearly and exclusively lesbian. And there were obviously people who were, clearly and exclusively, male homosexuals. And there was a little, I think there was a little bit of awareness of bisexuals.

Rita Rippetoe: But you know it wasn’t like there was a community to identify with, and therefore need to adopt the label to fit into that. At, you know, at some points, I recall thinking, “Well, I guess if, if Lynn is a woman and we’re staying together, then I guess that sort of kind of makes me a lesbian,” even though at that time, Lynn was still physically male. And this is one thing that, in the various battles about women’s spaces these days, a lot of people don’t seem to realize that even when people are on hormones, they are...some—I won’t say all because I don’t know about all—but I know that some people, while taking the hormones, are still capable of penetrative sex. And you know, and I think...and I think that makes a difference if you’re talking about being in women’s safe spaces, and nobody seems to want to really talk about that.

Rita Rippetoe: But that's off the subject, because that wasn't. That wasn't a... you know...because there was less awareness that there might be, you know, that someone you saw on the bus might be a transsexual, people were less concerned about it, you know... I mean it's kind of weird because Christine Jorgensen in the '50s had a great deal of publicity. That was one of the first sort of publicly known transsexuals.

Rita Rippetoe: And, and of course people knew about drag queens. I mean San Francisco was...had the famous Finocchio's that there off of Broadway, where you know—take your-out-of-town friends! It was, it was fun to tell them that there was one real girl in the, in the cast and have them try to guess—which of course there weren't any—and they'd be like, "It's gotta be that one." "No, no, it's not that one." [laughter] You know, the way to, you know, tease your friends from Kansas City, or whatever.

Rita Rippetoe: At one point I was going to Glide Memorial Methodist Church down in the Tenderloin...Cecil Williams and "Quotations from Chairman Jesus" and everything...and of course some of the attendees, you know, were drag queens at the end of a long night, with their beard stubble coming through their makeup and their evening clothes looking rather, you know, taddy in the light of a Sunday morning, getting odd looks from the tourists who had come across from the Hilton across the street to go church like good Christians. You know, so people knew about all that stuff and that, and at that time—

Rita Rippetoe: This is before the Castro became the gay district. The gay district in San Francisco at that time was Polk Street. And I'm not sure when it kind of moved down to Castro. But there wasn't, you know, there wasn't really a community. I mean there was...there were gay bars and other, you know...but there wasn't the community that came later. So where were we? I've lost track of what question we were on.

Michelle Mueller: Not really tracking any specific question. Taking it all in. I can throw some big-picture questions at you, which I think will be helpful. So I have one, which is: When you were a child, what did you want to be? And did you become it?

Rita Rippetoe: Oh, let's see, when I was, when I was really young, I wanted to be a doctor. I think specifically it...let's see...that was around eighth grade. I wanted to be a heart surgeon, because this was when open-heart surgery first...this is in the '50s. And they, you know, on television, you're hearing about open-heart surgery, and I think they even had some films of it. You know, it's just such a, you know, thrilling wild, new thing that... And then, by the time I was in high school I decided I didn't really care that much for science. Kind of intellectual laziness, because all the, all the literary stuff came so easily to me that and, and math, I had to work at a little.

Rita Rippetoe: Ah, the heck this, had to actually do the homework. Boo. So I just went more towards, you know history and English/humanities type things that didn't involve mathematics.

Michelle Mueller: Let's talk about education and career more. I'm curious if you can speak about your college and your graduate education. What universities did you attend? And how did you choose them? How did you choose specific academic programs? Meaning your major and later graduate degrees.

Rita Rippetoe: Okay. Well, I would have liked to go to Berkeley, because that's where the action was. But that's also where all the communists were, according to my father, so I knew not to even ask, and Davis was close. And at that time, you know, if you had a...what was it—a B+ major?...you were pretty much guaranteed admission to the state university system. So...I applied to go to Davis. At first I was going to major in English, and then I thought, "Oh, I'm tired of reading books and writing papers about them." And I took a class in anthropology and just fell in love with anthropology. "Oh, wow! This is all kinds of humans everywhere. This is fascinating."

Rita Rippetoe: And so I completed the major in anthropology, but by that time I got you know, Gary and I had gotten involved and graduate school would have meant, you know, moving somewhere, you know, applying to graduate school. Also, I was just kind of tired of school, I mean, you know, when you've been doing basically the same thing for 16 years. [laughter] And so I just took...when we went to San Francisco, it was, you know, 1970. All the baby boomers had graduated, and every... Competition for jobs was just terrible. And I just took whatever I could get and kept thinking, "Well, what can I do next?" And then...and Deborah was kind of running into the same thing. She did a bit of waitressing and some other stuff, and we got to talking about well, that these college educations don't seem to be doing us any good. In fact, in some there are some jobs where you know, talking with other people in the same situation, they're like, "Oh, yeah, don't tell them you went to college. They'll say you're over-qualified."

Rita Rippetoe: And so Deborah came up with the idea: well, if you learn an actual skill, you know, an actual thing you can do, there's demand for that. And so she ended up taking training in electronics. And I'd looked around at different programs. And that's when I got into the program of business machine repair and got the job at Xerox. Well, as it turned out, I wasn't really very good at it.

Rita Rippetoe: I mean, and it's interesting, because some of the men that I worked with were naturals. I mean, it's people who think that any idiot can be a mechanic are idiots themselves, because there's people who just have a talent. And one way you could see this was Xerox had a had a setup where, if a technician figured out a new fix for something, they would write it up and publish it and send it out to, you know, to everyone and the technician would get credit for having solved this particular problem like, say, you had a machine where the customer wanted to feed an odd-sized paper, and you had to adjust the machine to take that odd size of paper and feed it evenly and print on it, that that sort of thing. And anyway, you know, so I really admired the people who were good at it. Usually I had someone to help me on anything complicated. But so so eventually I left that, and then that was after I, Bob and I had gotten together. And shortly after that I got pregnant, but it was an ectopic pregnancy.

Rita Rippetoe: And so I ended up in the hospital with that, and convalescing afterwards and then so I just settled down to take care of the house, and so forth. Until then I got pregnant again, and that was that was my oldest daughter, and then sorta...

Rita Rippetoe: After a while I decided that that Eris is the goddess of unplanned pregnancy.

Michelle Mueller: How did you reach that conclusion?

Rita Rippetoe: Well, she's the goddess of confusion, and so someone needs to be the goddess of unplanned pregnancy. So I nominated her for the job [laughter] since...yeah, the next two pregnancies were unplanned. My third pregnancy, my youngest daughter. I was still nursing her brother, which somewhat reduces the—you know, it's not a not a sure thing, and I knew that—I was also using...well, I had already had...I only had one Fallopian tube because one was lost in the ectopic pregnancy. I had been told that I had endometriosis which reduced my fertility by about 10%, according to the doctors. And I was using the cervical cap, you know, with contraceptive jelly, and I still got pregnant! [laughter]

Michelle Mueller: Statistically improbable.

Rita Rippetoe: Yes, well, I read once in a book about birth control and so forth, that there was actually on record a woman who became pregnant after a hysterectomy. It was a hysterectomy that did not remove the ovaries or Fallopian tubes, and the sperm managed to wander up there and find an egg, and the placenta attached to her intestines and got enough blood to...of course the baby had to be delivered by Cæsarian. But it just shows that if the gods are determined you're going to have a baby, there's nothing you can do! [laughter]

Michelle Mueller: I like that. It's a good interpretation.

Rita Rippetoe: So yeah, with Bob and I, it was just like kinda for a while there, you know, one baby after another. He worked in construction. He had very bad arthritis which had started when he was in his twenties, working as a surveyor and...and then he read an article about a doctor in Marin, who was using cocaine to treat his arthritis patients—which then got kind of slapped down—and said “Hmm!” And so we had a few...you know everybody back then, if you were on the Bohemian end of things, you knew at least somebody who dealt weed and could maybe tell you about someone who dealt other things. And so he started trying cocaine, and and it does help. I mean, he could put his socks on.

Rita Rippetoe: I mean he couldn't, you know he couldn't put his socks on. I put his socks on for him in the morning and took them off at night. But after he'd been using cocaine for a while... But of course, that involves you in all kinds of other problems.

Michelle Mueller: Of course.

Rita Rippetoe: Including paranoia. That's one of the worst side effects of cocaine use. And of course, how much of it is the actual drug, and how much of it is the fact that yes, it's illegal, so of course, you're looking at the window to see if there is...

Michelle Mueller: That's a great point.

Rita Rippetoe: Yeah. Yeah.

Rita Rippetoe: So that was why eventually his business fell apart. And it was like, we've got no money. And I kind of called my parents and said, "Help!" And they said, "Well, we'll...you know, come on over here with the kids, and we'll help you get an apartment."

Michelle Mueller: So how many kids were there?

Rita Rippetoe: Three. Robin, Roderick, and Rose. I didn't plan that, honest. I mean, not all that. The same initials. Actually, my son, we named Roderick Galen and I like Galen...so I didn't want to put Galen first, because that doesn't "Galen Roderick" doesn't roll off the tongue, and so we made it Roderick Galen. And so I was using Galen. Actually, his dad always called him Moose because he was 9 pounds in his first...Bob's reaction was, "Oh, my God, what a moose of a kid!"

Michelle Mueller: Oh my goodness.

Rita Rippetoe: But we stopped that when we got to Sacramento. We're going like, "We're not going to call him Moose anymore!"

Rita Rippetoe: And then, when he got a little older on his own, he put his foot down and said he was Roderick, so he's Roderick from now on.

Michelle Mueller: And so do you, do you have three children total now, or did you have any more?

Rita Rippetoe: Yes. Three children total.

Michelle Mueller: And then, how many grandchildren do you have?

Rita Rippetoe: Four. Robin has three: one by her first husband, and two by her second husband. So she has two sons and a daughter, but they're very spaced apart, because she had a few miscarriages in between. And so the middle grandson is almost 22, and his sister's coming up on 11. So 11 years between them. And my youngest daughter has the one son, and he's the one that lives in Illinois with his paternal aunt and her husband.

Michelle Mueller: And what are your relationships like today with your grown children and your grandchildren?

Rita Rippetoe: Well, I see Robin's three on a regular basis, because now they're all back at home. Robert joined the marines. So he was gone for six years. And he was going to switch to the army and get into special forces, but he blew out his knee and got discharged. So now he's going to go back to school. His brother is also still living at home. He's got some training and is working as an arborist.

Rita Rippetoe: And Megan's obviously's still at home, since she's only 10, and William is also 21. I learned...oh, I don't know why I have to like virtually pry information out of everybody...but eventually learned that he is on the autistic spectrum, and is still living with his aunt and uncle, and has a job at one of the little stores in Hayworth, which is, as I say, a small, formally just a small farm town but it's got a little bit of new housing that's mainly for commuters to the nearby

cities and you look around and it's like, it's not true that it's all corn in Illinois; there's soybeans, too!

Rita Rippetoe: And my middle grandson and I went back there 10 years ago for a visit. And that's the last time I saw William. 10 years ago.

Michelle Mueller: It's been a long time.

Rita Rippetoe: Yeah, yeah, you know. I write letters. He's not good at answering. You know. I don't know how much of that is... Young people don't write letters anymore. How much of it is the autism, etc. I mean, I didn't really notice anything when I visited before, but he was only 11 so... But usually I mean, they just seem like a quiet kid. But then my other grandson was kind of a quiet kid, too. Of course his other grandmother thinks he may be on the spectrum, too, but his therapist thinks it's more ADHD and depression.

Michelle Mueller: There's all kinds of different profiles.

Rita Rippetoe: Oh, yeah, yeah, I've got a nephew that I think... I bounce between bipolar and oh—I'm trying to remember the one that they have no cure for—borderline personality and just a pathological liar. What do labels matter if there's no cure for it anyhow?

Michelle Mueller: It's—it's a great question. I think. Sometimes...sometimes labels and diagnoses can help the people around a person and kind of understand attributes and needs. But you know.

Rita Rippetoe: Yeah.

Michelle Mueller: Some of it is...I won't get into assessments and diagnoses. I mean they can, they can be helpful. But, you know, yeah, even medical doctors have very different opinions on what a diagnosis means, you know, and it can be helpful for people...

Rita Rippetoe: Well, I know my daughter, my oldest daughter's second husband, was diagnosed with borderline personality disorder, and it really, you know it...he couldn't find a therapist who would take him on, because most of them just said, "Well, we don't have...we don't really have anything for you. You know. So there's no point wasting both our times if we don't have anything to help you." Okay, yeah.

Michelle Mueller: That sounds tragic.

Rita Rippetoe: Yeah, it does. Instead, he spends his time going to school and getting totally useless degrees. MFAs. Yeah. Creative writing and poetry. [laughter]

Michelle Mueller: Well, speaking of writing I wanted to ask you. I understand that you have interest in non-fiction and also what I would call occult-inspired literature, both as a reader and possibly an author, if I understand correctly.

Rita Rippetoe: Well. Oh, we didn't finish my education. Well, long, long gap after Xerox. Then. Then I did a...I was interested in getting into publishing, and I did this certificate in publishing through UC Extension. But then, looking for a job in publishing was like equally, I mean, I found that I was interviewing for jobs that I couldn't actually afford to take because they didn't pay enough to support three children in the Bay Area.

Rita Rippetoe: So then, so then I decided...well, everybody said, "You'd make a good teacher. You know so much." you know. Okay, so well, okay, that sounds very practical. And at that time, you know, there'd been sort of a slump in teaching, because all of us baby boomers, you know aged out of the school system and were not having children at the same rate that our parents have. But then there is the the sort of the second population pop in, and then in the '90s and *Time Magazine* and everybody, we're saying, "Oh, we need more teachers, because you know, the other generation that we are reaching retirement age. And then these kids are coming along. So we're going to need new teachers."

Rita Rippetoe: And so I thought, "Okay, this sounds right. I'll go get a teaching credential." And I went to National University, and I did all the coursework. But there were mysterious, weird things happening in the in the when I came to this student-teaching part of the course. The supervisor I was given had one full-time job and another what we now call "side gig," so she was not giving as much attention to supervising her people as I think she ought to have, and my placement was at Rancho Cordova School, which, was not real, supportive. And so then we're trying for a second placement. Also, I was having some health problems at the time.

Rita Rippetoe: and then when they tried for a second placement, the only thing they could come up with was something in Yolo County, and I was living in Orangeville. And I'm, like, "Well, I'm not driving the whole, you know, width of Sacramento County to work for free. I can't afford to do that."

Rita Rippetoe: And so then at that point I decide to apply for graduate school and went and started working on a masters in English at Sac State, or CSUS. And I completed that; my topic was detective fiction.

Rita Rippetoe: And then I thought, "Well, I'm on a roll here. I'll work toward a PhD and try college teaching instead." So I was admitted to University in Nevada Reno. And at first I was going to do my dissertation on contemporary Arthurian literature because one of the professors up there is, it was kind of a specialist in the field. Dr. Boardman. The specialist in the field of Arthurian literature. But when it came down to choosing...and I did all the required reading, and the comprehensive exam in Arthurian literature. And then when it came down to choosing a dissertation topic, we just couldn't fix on anything. And in the meantime I'd taken a couple of courses in detective fiction and had written a paper on Chandler's *Long Goodbye* that kind of became the core of my dissertation. So I'd switched to detective fiction and the then chairman of the department was my chair of my dissertation committee. And so, after I finally finished that, then I found a publisher and and did a little you know... Gotta take the academic jargon out! Not that I put very much academic jargon in, thank goodness, I missed the years of deconstructionism! [laughter] So I got that published by McFarland Press. So that's a book called *Booze and the Private Eye*.

Michelle Mueller: Congratulations!

Rita Rippetoe: Yeah, well, thank you.

Michelle Mueller: That's a really important achievement.

Rita Rippetoe: Yeah. So by that time, however, I had already come to the realization that college teaching wasn't for me, either, because this forcing information down unwilling throats is not fun or interesting or rewarding. And since...the vision of liberal arts education was already falling apart by that time. Most of the students seemed to be like, "What good is this going to do me? Why I gotta learn this? What point is there in reading Plato? Why do I want to read Shakespeare?" And yeah.

Michelle Mueller: So it sounds like the dream of academe was not panning out in the way that it had been imagined.

Rita Rippetoe: Everything was changing because... I mean, if you look at it in practical terms. While the vision of the humanities is something that everybody should be exposed to is something I still believe in, the vision of it as a full-time career for a large number of people is not an economically viable one when when the economy is in contraction.

Michelle Mueller: That's a very great point.

Rita Rippetoe: Yeah, and and basically we've been in in a form of contraction for because of resource depletion since the '70s, and we've papered it over with credit. And and sending, you know women out into the workforce and in in large numbers and a number of other things. This is all out of some of my peak oil reading, you know, basically when you start running out of resources, that...and also when your society is over-expanded into empire-building that something's gotta give. And you know what's giving is the living standard of the average person. I mean. And you know, you don't realize you're living standards decline because you have all these fun, expensive toys like laptop computers and the Internet, and an iPhone and everything. But when you realize that that you know, two people have to work to afford a house that, in 1950 only your dad *had* to work.

Michelle Mueller: Mm-hmm.

Rita Rippetoe: I mean, you know, it's a whole thing.

Michelle Mueller: Yeah. Single-income households are a thing of the past.

Rita Rippetoe: Yeah, exactly. Yeah, that that you could not just, you know, own a modest house, but also, a car, and be able to save enough for a a vacation. Maybe not every year. But you know, maybe you drive out to see the, you know, the relatives in Kansas, you know, every three or four years, or something, or take in Disneyland or something, anyway. So I ended up, after I had gone out to help my daughter, my youngest daughter, with her baby in Hawaii and followed her to

Colorado to continue to help out, because she and her husband were both in the military with insane schedules that were not covered by the base daycare. And so I end up staying a year and a half in Colorado. And then I ended up coming back to Sacramento, and that's when I got the job with Girl Scouts.

Rita Rippetoe: At the interview, they said, "What do you want this job? You have all this education." And I said, "Because I have to eat. I need a job." And so I stayed with the Girl Scouts until they reconfigured the office in a way that reduced my job to 20 hours a week. So I had a choice of either combining two 20-hour positions to make 40 hours or changing to a different department. It wasn't exactly a golden handshake but at least it's a green handshake.

Michelle Mueller: Mm-hmm.

Rita Rippetoe: So so so I went to, you know. Thought, "Well, okay, I would just go ahead and retire."

Michelle Mueller: Yeah.

Rita Rippetoe: And then I started working on my second book, which was an examination of the, of the novels of Jane Duncan, who was a Scottish author. She was born in Scotland in 1910, I think. Yeah, I think she was born in 1910, and she died in Jamaica in '78, and but she was published from around '58 to '78. She, like many writers, she basically written all her life, but never gotten serious about it until her husband became ill and the medical bills started piling up, and...and then she started, you know, "Well, I better take these stories I've written and actually type them up and submit them to a publisher."

Michelle Mueller: How did you choose that project?

Rita Rippetoe: Well, I can't even remember how, how I came across her work. I think it was at the Sacramento Library, and I was just kind of reading my way down the shelf. And whichever was the first one I read I thought, "Oh, I really like this author. I will see what else they have." And so every time she got a new book, I you know would find it and read it.

Rita Rippetoe: And I've always kind of thought of writing about it, because it seems so interesting. But I could really get a handle on it until it occurred to me that in in one of her books she says something about "I've seen..."—'cause they're semi-autobiographical—her main character says something like, "I've seen...I've seen the end of the old days in in the Highlands and now I'm seeing the end of the colonial system in Jamaica," which she renames, for in her book she calls this St. Jago.

Rita Rippetoe: She's writing about people that she actually knew. And did you know had to disguise a lot of things so she wouldn't offend people especially about the colonialism and the race issue, and the and she was with their justice the Caribbean Islands were...well, all of the colonies, you know the late '50s, everybody was after independence. It was after World War II. And okay. So I thought, well, that's that's kind of there's, you know, there's kind of post-colonialism there and then a number of her books were...what I felt was kind of in advance of her times on various

sexual issues like there were people who were I mean there were characters who had illegitimate children who were treated sympathetically. And then there was a character that at first she assumes is a homosexual, although it turns out that he's not. And then later, a character who actually is. And they're all treated, you know. You know, simply an understanding within the boundaries of the mores of the time. And so I thought, well, that's really interesting. And yet she's just kind of, you know, her works were never taken seriously. They were just, you know, just like novels, women's literature, et cetera. And I well, I think she's really dealing with issues that that that it's odd that the critics didn't seem to to treat with any seriousness. But and she was quite, of course, maybe being popular, you know, you know there's that whole thing where, if, if ordinary people like your books, then they can't be any good. A certain academic snobbishness. So anyway, that's why that what what I and my, you know, I gave a proposal to McFarland, and they said, "Okay, that that looks good. Let's see what you do." In the meantime, I've also been working on some novels.

Rita Rippetoe: I wrote a mystery, but it's too short. And I wrote a book that is too between genres. It has a fantasy element at its base. But the rest of it is, you know, it's not any, you know dragons or anything in between. So it doesn't fit in anybody's categories.

Michelle Mueller: So would you say you're currently still actively engaged in writing projects?

Rita Rippetoe: I, well, right now my main project is to try to finish editing the transcripts of some talks that Allyn Wolfe gave to students. God, they're so old now. These date back to the '90s and the...and Oakseer did the original transcripts. But I've been trying to clean them up and and make them, you know, more readable in terms of taking out the bathroom breaks in the chat about tea and the discursion about such-and-such, you know, so that they can be an informative resource. There's quite a bit in there on the history of the various Central Valley traditions.

Michelle Mueller: Well, that's an excellent segue, because I absolutely want for us to talk about Witchcraft and Paganism.

Rita Rippetoe: Ah okay. "How did you get into this?!"

Michelle Mueller: Yeah, I'll throw some questions at you, and you just pick and choose and tell the story you want to tell.

Michelle Mueller: But my questions are: How and when did you get involved? What drives you to practice as well as to participate in community today?

Rita Rippetoe: Yeah. Well, I already mentioned the summer solstice ritual put on by Nemeton. And then at the same time, Deborah had been getting involved with the New Reformed Orthodox Order of the Golden Dawn.

Rita Rippetoe: And then there were various open university projects going on in the Bay Area at the time, and I can't even remember the name of the, of the one in the East Bay. It was Purple Submarine over in San Francisco, but the one in the East Bay...I can't remember the name of it. And we decided to do a class on women's spirituality.

Rita Rippetoe: Because, you know, this is when everybody was reading Merlin Stone, and so forth. You know well, goddesses?! Who knew?! I should probably mention that I was the only religious one in my family, and dragged the rest of the family to church when I was a kid starting with the Methodist, and then I switched over to the Presbyterians because the Methodist Sunday School teacher was boring me to tears by repeating the same lesson because she was an elderly lady who kept forgetting where we'd left off.

Rita Rippetoe: She also disapproved of me hanging out in the minister's library, reading books. And then when we moved to LA, we didn't go to church down there. Got taken to an Evangelical church, by a school friend in Vancouver. And they were very much into the oh...oh...sort of the moment when you, when you know you're saved...and and people talk, and this, as far as I can see, this mostly happened to kids at church summer camp. But I hadn't been to church summer camp. And I was, you know. Was it because they were very much, you know... Salvation by faith, not works. Sing Bible verses instead of regular hymns. Baptism by total immersion. Holyburn Gospel Chapel. Anyway, I was just like sincerely into that. And, you know, like, you know praying to get the word, et cetera. And you know I don't know this. Yes, metaphorically speaking, I was sitting by the phone waiting for Jesus to ring, and he never did. So. So when I came back...

Michelle Mueller: So when did Witchcraft call? When did the Goddess call?

Rita Rippetoe: Well, let's see, we went to the summer thing, started the course, and women's spirituality was doing all the reading along that. The class of women's spirituality kind of started with about 30 people and simmered down to seven of us who eventually decided that we were a coven and called it Ursa Maior.

Michelle Mueller: Ooh. I like that.

Rita Rippetoe: And when the word went out about a meeting to try to form a larger organization of Witches, Deborah and I went because we felt that all-women covens needed to be represented, because nobody was even considering such a thing at the time. Well although she had been in contact with the Dianics in...Texas, I think they were...and the Dianics in Texas were not all-female groups, but they focused on Diana.

Michelle Mueller: I understand there are different lineages.

Rita Rippetoe: Yeah. Yeah. There were all-female Dianics like Z Budapest's Susan B. Anthony Coven Number One, and and various people, and and Ursa Maior met for about two years before sort of everybody going their separate ways by that time Bob and I were studying with—oh—the group that eventually became Silver Star Coven in NROGD. That was Allan Moonbloode and Claire P—, were the Priest and Priestess.

Rita Rippetoe: And Bob before, in addition to having started with the Gardnerian group, he and his and his wife had been involved with a Mohsian group that Bill and Helen Mohs had a group, and their focus was Venus and Bacchus, I believe. Now I never attended one of those rituals. I went with him to a meeting, but they, the actual coven members went into a separate room for the

ritual, and those of us who were not initiates, you know, stayed outside and chatted and...but he had some of that, and some of that was considered American traditionalist material. And he knew some other people down there that were doing...every year they did an autumn equinox ritual out in the desert near the Joshua Tree Monument. And that and they and Bran and Moria...and they eventually moved up to the Greenfield Ranch property, and and had one of the partitioned-off properties up there.

Michelle Mueller: And Greenfield Ranch—that's the same property that Church of All Worlds started Annwfn within. Is that correct?

Rita Rippetoe: Oh, well, it was yeah. Actually, that was Gwydion Pendderwen who started Annwfn. There were several different partitioned pieces of land that different people had in and were planning different things on. One was the piece of land that gee, I can't remember the name of it. It was Welsh for Speckle Hills.

Rita Rippetoe: Yeah, anyway, that...

Michelle Mueller: Yeah, I don't know other, named regions. That's new history to me. I know Annwfn, which I understand is a Celtic underworld.

Rita Rippetoe: Gwydion and Alison Harlow had been working together on the one piece of land. And then the and then the piece that he named Annwfn was after he had quit his day job, as it were, and moved up to the land.

Michelle Mueller: I see.

Rita Rippetoe: And that's where yeah, that's where that. And he started the Forever Forest projects to replant redwood trees and other native trees all over the land, because it, you know, it was...it was a big... It was originally a ranch, a Greenfield Ranch, and it and it had been logged off at some point early in the century and used as a cattle ranch. And then when it, you know, became uneconomic, and of course, and that was the time of the, you know, hippies going back to the land and a lot of the county, you know. They didn't want the place filling up with a bunch of hippie homesteads. So they passed zoning laws that prevented large parcels from being partitioned.

Rita Rippetoe: So a bunch of people went together to buy the entire ranch. And then just kind of spread out the map and walked around and made decisions and unofficially partitioned it among the various buyers. And so that's how it is set up. I don't know what the legal status is now with it belonging to the nonprofit and so forth. But that's how it all got started.

Michelle Mueller: I'd love to have a map.

Rita Rippetoe: What's that?

Michelle Mueller: I'd love to have a map.

Rita Rippetoe: Oh, yeah, I don't even know who would have custody of that. There were a number of people who lived up there at different times, but some I think some of them may... I've just lost track of most of those people. There's Bud, there's Bran and Moria that made the Nermies they were...you know that colorful plastic clay you can get. They would make these little figurines, and it sort of little caricatures, and little gnomie things or little sort of mythical animal looking things, and they call them Nermies, and they sell those at craft fairs, and that was, you know mostly how they made their living. But and they were, they were the American traditionalist folk, and I don't know if they ever led a coven or anything up there or not. Because I you know, I was only up there for festivals.

Michelle Mueller: It sounds like a lot of the pulls towards Witchcraft were, of course, spiritual but also very ideological and social. Would you say that that's correct?

Rita Rippetoe: Well, I mean from the feminist end, it was a lot about like having a spirituality that didn't denigrate the female. You know. Spirituality that said female bodies are good, and female feelings and emotions, and ways of knowing and being and doing are good, not inferior to the male, but maybe even better, [laughter] you know. And some women took that in the direction of of trying to form you know, all-women groups. There was the people who published *Woman Spirit Magazine* that I think grew out of...it seems to me like it grew out of another kind of hippie back-to-the-country publication, and those people were up in Oregon, and and Deborah and I and some other women who were part of our women's spirituality group went up to a women's spirituality festival up near Wolf Creek...one, oh gosh, it was a 4th of July weekend, so there was no camping on the way back, and the traffic was horrible but the... And you know other women, you know, were finding it through mixed Witchcraft groups, and you know, and of course find finding, finding things was a matter of a word of mouth, or seeing a a notice written on a on a you know index card on them bulletin board of a a bookstore somewhere, you know. Like I said, Deborah saw the *Nemeton Magazine* at the women's bookstore that used to be on College Avenue in Oakland. And you know, so you met one person, and you met another person through them, and of course, at that time NROOGD was doing the fairly regular public Sabbats, I mean, not public-public but word-of-mouth public and then...usually, if somebody was starting a study group, they would make an announcement that, during the sacred bullshit time, you know, say, I'm starting a study group in Oakland or San Francisco, or where it...and anyone who's interested, you know, I'll be in the corner. And so forth. There wasn't much I mean... There was also the Feri presence. Bob knew someone in LA, who had been an early trainee of Victor Anderson, and got an introduction to Victor Anderson through him, and so we made a few visits together to Victor and met Victor and Cora.

Rita Rippetoe: And of course...I can't remember how I met Gwydion. Maybe...I think it was when he was when he was doing the Welsh language classes, which didn't last very long, but he was trying to teach people Welsh. There was just a lot of overlap, and people being in in several different groups, and doing, you know, different things depending on their interest, and who they had contact with, and of course, always in terms of forming some of who you can get along with, and so forth. So we pretty much settled down into Silver Star.

Rita Rippetoe: And at one point Silver Star had members ranging all the way from Rohnert Park to Santa Cruz. And Bob and I were in Vallejo, and Allan and his wife Anna were in Berkeley.

Rita Rippetoe: And but then you had weird things like that...Gaia and Robin Goodfellow. Gaia was a member of Silver Star, but Robin was a member of a different coven, although he'd frequently visit Silver Star and Anna was in a different coven than Allan.

Rita Rippetoe: So and then eventually, I became... Eventually, Claire, our original High Priestess took a leave of absence and didn't come back. And we, you know, like, well, the High Priestess didn't come back, so the next person gets promoted. And so I became the High Priestess of Silver Star...until Bob and I split up and I moved to Sacramento. And I was even coming back for a while until basically things fell apart.

Rita Rippetoe: And then I got... When I told people I was moving to Sacramento, people told me several different people to look up in Sacramento, and so I visited a woman whose name and tradition escapes me now. And we talked for several hours one afternoon, but didn't really click. No, I can't even remember for sure...I think, what was she, Kabbalistic Wicca?...that that could have been somebody else, and then they I I also got an introduction to Duane Landziak, who is another Lord Gwydion. Can't throw a rock into a Pagan circle without hitting at least one Morgana and one Gwydion.

Rita Rippetoe: Anyway, he was Assembly of Wicca, and I later got to know several people who came out of his group. And I attended one study group thing at his group but didn't really click.

Rita Rippetoe: And then I got out of the blue a copy of *Red Garters*. I'm like, "What is this? And why is it being mailed to me?" So, you know, and *Red Garters* was the newsletter of the New Wiccan Church.

Rita Rippetoe: And so I found out that they had a coven-matching setup. And so I visited, I think I visited two different groups and ended up joining Winged Horse. That, of course, was Allyn Wolfe and Lady Kalisha.

Michelle Mueller: So I'm sorry. Did someone actually send you the newsletter? Or did someone send you red garters? [laughter]

Rita Rippetoe: Actually no, no, no. So somehow Allyn got my ad in the newsletter.

Michelle Mueller: I'm picturing you opening a box. And there's...garters!

Rita Rippetoe: Yeah, yeah, it was a newsletter Allyn had this thing about printing stuff on red paper, so you couldn't photocopy it. Of course that doesn't work anymore with the more...highly tuned photocopiers of today. But back then, if you you know, because of the spectrum of the...of the of the lights that are used to scan the and create the image. You know, if you...if something was printed in black on the dark red, you just got kind of a muddy unreadable thing.

Michelle Mueller: It sounds like there were a lot of entanglements in in the Pagan community back then, as there are now, and—

Rita Rippetoe: As there are now.

Michelle Mueller: —and it still informs your daily social life. Lots of entangled history with different individuals, in the Pagan scene.

Rita Rippetoe: ... Kingstone is one of the Central Valley traditions. Actually, it is kind of a it's a...it's basically a compound of the Silver Crescent and the Majestic and came out of sort of the southern end of the valley down around Modesto.

Michelle Mueller: Would you want to, maybe identify how these lineages that you're naming, how they kind of fit into the the big picture of the Wiccan/Pagan scene for individuals listening to this who don't know of these particular lineages?

Rita Rippetoe: Okay. The Central Valley lineages which later got lumped together as part of British Traditional Witchcraft, along with Gardnerian, Alexandrian, and the various hybrids thereof, all have enough similarities in in practice to probably have had pretty much a related origin, but nobody can quite trace everything. I mean, there's, there's several people working to try to trace those things. But of course you're handicapped by the, by the secrecy involved.

Rita Rippetoe: And of course, you know, Gardnerianism officially came to America by way of Buckland and the Long Island group. And then split into a couple other different lineages.

Rita Rippetoe: And there was certainly a period in which they were fairly unwilling to accept that the people in California were relatives because we didn't have "the lineage" to show that we were. But when you compare the, when you compare the written material, it's well, of course, it's the same language—look at it, virtually identical wording here, you know, somebody unknown brought it to California. So.

Michelle Mueller: And I understand how complicated and difficult it sometimes is to talk about it kind of on the on the fly because of secrecy and things that we have to think about. Wait. Wait a minute. Is that one a secret?! So I I appreciate you giving us a quick summary. It's helpful.

Rita Rippetoe: Yeah. And and Allyn was very devoted to trying to get the New Wiccan Church as an overall organization that would that would...that any of the of the sort of you know Wiccan lineages could be part of.

Rita Rippetoe: And it would be kind of not. You know. He hoped to have a lending library. He helped to have, you know, directly news letter, which did did happen for for many years, and and regular meetings and and all kinds of things. But you know, herding cats. And a lot of that has basically falling apart, although I...

Rita Rippetoe: I mean, they still have. I haven't been a member for ages now, but the organization still exists, and I know they're still doing things. I just don't know what.

Michelle Mueller: Do you know what year it was founded? Or maybe an even, just an approximation?

Rita Rippetoe: Sometime in the '70s. Yeah, I mean, I was, kinda like you know, I was sort of everything that I knew about was in the Bay Area, and you know, when I moved back over to Sacramento I was kinda like, "What? There's Witches in Sacramento, too? Who knew?" And of course there were not just the not just the NWC. But also the Assembly—the AOW people—Assembly of Wicca, and there were another group called the Gwythonics, who obviously had some Welsh stuff and some other groups that I didn't even know about.

Rita Rippetoe: So you know. So I was with Silver Star until it eventually fell apart. Well, Allyn and Kalisha divorced. So their coven split. And then I had moved to San Francisco. Oh wait first I moved to Nevada for college, but I was still coming down to meetings. And then then I had the the two years part the Hawaiian part in Colorado, and then I came back, and it was living in San Francisco. And no, no, I've got that reversed. First I was in Sacramento, then I went to Nevada. Then I moved to San Francisco. And then I was in Hawaii, in Colorado, and then came back to Sacramento. But by that time Silver Star had fallen part. And then I was eventually asked to join Semper Virens, which is a Gardnerian coven.

Rita Rippetoe: And for quite some time I kind of had a "Oh, that Gardnerian politics! I do not want to be part of all of that," because I remember at one point Deborah asks someone, "Which Gardnerian lineage can I join that that everyone else will accept?" "None." No one accepts all of them. So Semper Virens is California line.

Rita Rippetoe: And should I explain the difference on California line?

Michelle Mueller: Sure.

Rita Rippetoe: Okay. I mean, in Gardnerian lineages an initiation is supposed to always be male to female, female to male, and California Line admits the possibility of same-sex initiation.

Rita Rippetoe: No one's actually done any. But they admit the possibility.

Rita Rippetoe: So this, this is like beyond the pale from some points of view, although there's always been, consider the possibility that, if there's no priest available, that as the saying goes, that the priestess can "strap on the sword." But it's never been admitted that in the absence of a priestess, the priest can, as we jokingly say, "strap on the cup." But—although everyone knows that that Gardner independently initiated many of his priestesses. But "That was then and this is now. And you know, just because the founder did it doesn't mean it's okay to do it." Very strange.

Michelle Mueller: Mm. Yeah, and it really shows, you know, that bigotry—my word, not yours—but yeah, bigotry and politics are often kind of prioritized over, you know, the facts and the history.

Rita Rippetoe: I mean, when Gardner was was putting things together, you know that we're we're still back in a world in which homosexuality was, in the Western world at least uh universally criminal. He was already sort of crossing the line by being involved with nudism, which was, you know, sort of weird and off-putting to many people. And so.

Rita Rippetoe: And of course they already fighting against the stigma that you know that Witchcraft was generally bad evil and Christian devil worshipping perverse in every way. And so it's I think, you know, it's fairly understandable that he would not have wanted to touch that third rail of of welcoming, or, you know, admitting the permissibility of homosexuals.

Michelle Mueller: Are you alluding to...there's a theory that I've heard that, kind of taboos within the tradition against...same sex-initiation were really a reflection of...basically kind of minimizing legal challenges to a kind of an already minoritized religious practice. Is that...are you referring to that?

Rita Rippetoe: Yeah, yeah. I mean...

Michelle Mueller: ...that maybe something doesn't have to be tradition. It was, you know... There was a context that is separate from the magical aspects, perhaps.

Rita Rippetoe: Well, I...I mean one of the things that Jeffrey Russell pointed out in his *History of Witchcraft*, is that there is a there is a set of accusations that are made against many marginalized groups. I mean the Romans said it about the Christians. The Christians said it about Witches and other heretics, and so forth. "They meet in secret. They indulge in infanticide, cannibalism, and then they kick over the candle and indulge in wild orgies, in which, incest and homosexuality take place." So there's just this set of completely evil over-the-top acts that "those people" do. And that's why we know they're evil. And obviously, if you're trying to get away from that stereotype. Yeah, we don't...we don't curse people...we don't...we don't you know we don't deface the you know, Christian symbols. We're not, you know, we're not doing black masses, and and, you know, spitting on the cross, or anything like that, and and and so forth, so so that, I mean it all just fits together as something that you don't want to be associated with.

Rita Rippetoe: And you know, in British society at the time was. It's kind of like everybody knew that certain people were, but it still wasn't accepted. So you know, just reading the literature of the time, and also some American literature of the same time, you...

Rita Rippetoe: It's all very strange and and hard to kind of put yourself back into that. But you know, like, when I was in high school people...what was the thing? Oh, yes, if you, if you wore green on Friday, it meant you were queer. Nobody was quite clear on what queer meant.

Michelle Mueller: I'm wearing green. It's Friday. I am queer!

Rita Rippetoe: It's green on Friday, right, yeah! And there was...half my friends in high school were in the closet, and you know the rest of us didn't know. I mean, two of them were dating each other, as you know they were, you know, to cover up, and and others I didn't find out about until years later. And the...oh...there were definitely jokes about the two women PE teachers who lived together. But now, on the other hand, there was a third women PE teacher that everyone thought was a bit of...was perhaps a bit of a nympho, whatever that was because she, you see, the outlines of her leopard skin print, panty super white shorts.

Michelle Mueller: They call that slut-shaming today.

Rita Rippetoe: There, there you go. Slut-shaming, indeed. So you know, there was just a lot of speculation. And there was a theatre group in Folsom: the Folsom Opera House. And one of the people involved with that was as close to flaming as you could get in a small town in those days, wanted to paint...they had the place painted lavender and wanted to paint the fire extinguisher to match. No, you cannot camouflage the fire extinguisher! What are you thinking? Yeah. It was kind of like, yeah, we knew, but nobody really knew. It's strange. And of course, Gardner's specific statements on the subject, or that the... that was the problem that Templars got into because of being an all-male organization, that they did evil man-to-man and that caused their downfall. And of course, obviously that was one of the accusations. So once again, we have that set of accusations, you know, trample on the cross and these other things, and it all fits together.

Rita Rippetoe: So he was just trying to stay away from that that sort of thing, and and who knows what his actual personal feelings are, were on the subject. He was probably, like most English people at the time, and thought it was icky.

Michelle Mueller: We don't know.

Rita Rippetoe: Yeah, we don't know. We have no way of knowing other than what he said and wrote. And and I don't.

Rita Rippetoe: Yeah, yeah, we don't know.

Michelle Mueller: Well, thank you for accepting this interview and for contributing to the public record. I learned so much about your your writing, your family background, and got to learn more about the specific social entanglements that have defined your time in Craft. Are there questions that I haven't asked that you would like to speak to? Or is there is there any subject that you you want to take a moment to return to before we close?

Rita Rippetoe: Hmm, hmm. Let me think.

Rita Rippetoe: Let's see, we kind of covered the different groups that I've been in. And I mentioned that we were in a knit among the...Ursa Maior kinda wedged into the idea of COG...that there could be all-female covens, because all the other groups that were involved were were traditional mixed covens, and they were. And there were people going like, "Well, you've gotta be male and female, to raise the energy because you've got to have those two poles, and and how can you raise the energy if you don't?" And you know and it wasn't just prejudice. This it was that was the that was the...ideology isn't the word I'm looking for...

Michelle Mueller: The milieu.

Rita Rippetoe: That that well, that was that was the assumption that that the the way that magical energy was...was created was through the, you know... So it was an analogy to electricity. That you need the positive and the negative for the for the current to flow. You know. Oh. I've noticed that many, many things become...analogies to whatever the technology of the time. So like, we had the idea of our memories as being like a videotape or or or like a film, or later a video. And

now we have more vision of the brain as being like a computer with, you know, things stored in different places and all that.

Rita Rippetoe: And those, probably none of them really fit. But it's what's the technology of the time.

Michelle Mueller: That's a great observation.

Rita Rippetoe: So yeah, I mean, like, Bob joked at one point that if you want an emblem of power, why are we still using a sword as our emblem of masculine power on the altar? Why don't we have a 45 revolver there, because that's the emblem of masculine power now? Swords are passé so you need to think about what it is you symbolizing about the same, somehow. And I know that there were some women who didn't like to—within the the feminist spirituality end of things—who didn't like to use athames or swords or other knives, as symbols, they preferred to say, well, let's have something like scissors that are that are more the you know the female use of.

Michelle Mueller: Oh, interesting.

Rita Rippetoe: Yeah. And I'm like, well, you use knives in the kitchen. So in a way, they are male, but not not exclusively, of course.

Michelle Mueller: But there was something about intentionality and branding.

Rita Rippetoe: Yeah, yeah, I mean, a sword is obviously, if most of your warriors are men, of course, now we're finding out, and not all the warriors are man, because now we could do DNA on all those on all those graves. But still—

Michelle Mueller: And of course there are goddesses associated with the military, like Athena.

Rita Rippetoe: Yeah, yeah, and of course, she carries a spear which is equally masculine in its way. But, yeah, we tend to make these analogies based on our technology. And so that idea of the magical current is as requiring the two poles. And obviously, you know, one is positive and one is negative and guess which is negative, although, of course, negative isn't negative in electrical terms, it's just once again a metaphor. But it's kind of like...what's the word? "Sensitive." "Sensitive" has a specific physiological meaning. As in you know, "this is a sensitive member." In this case, you know your nerve, et cetera, but it's also been extended to personality. So, "she's really sensitive." And then, and then you get kind of the "Princess and the Pea" thing where, well, if you're more *sensitive*, you must be *better*. You know. [laughter] So the words get all these accretions of meanings. Anyway. That was that was, you know. So we stood up for the idea that "no, women can raise energy together." And and you know, all-women's covens have a role, and are equally Witches with mixed ones and and... So that's why why, that's why the the...not a statement of purpose but...one of the one of the founding documents was changed from "worship the goddess and the god" to "worship the goddess" and...

Michelle Mueller: So you *can* worship both. You can worship Goddess and God, and be a member; there can be groups that are Dianic and only worship the Goddess.

Rita Rippetoe: Just worship the Goddess and recognize the gods.

Michelle Mueller: And for the public record, you said “CoG,” and CoG is Covenant of the Goddess; so you’re talking about Covenant of the Goddess as an organization deciding to include different kinds of covens.

Rita Rippetoe: Yeah, these are the discussions. Yeah, this was going on at the very beginning, and it and it was being clearly set up that Covenant of the Goddess was to be... Witches not Pagans in general, because many of the people involved had been involved in the earlier effort of Nemeton, which was...Pagans in general, and there were just too many differences to to try to encompass those. Too many different kinds of groups. Now, I believe there is a Pagan Federation in England that’s been going well for several decades, but in California we decided it didn’t work and decided to just do...do CoG is more restrictive.

Michelle Mueller: Yeah, well, yeah.

Rita Rippetoe: And of course, as I said, the New Wiccan Church was even more restrictive and was only going to be British Traditional Witches.

Michelle Mueller: Yeah, there’s, you know, there’s needs for narrow and broad, and we don’t all have the same needs when it comes to our ecclesiastical structure. So it’s great that different different kinds of groups exist.

Rita Rippetoe: Just like different professions. I mean, you can have the American Medical Association for all doctors, and then the plastic surgeons form their own. And the obstetricians form their own.

Michelle Mueller: There you go. Yeah, they can all exist right?

Michelle Mueller: Well, Rita, thank you so much for taking the time to do this, and I will be in touch.

Rita Rippetoe: Okay, thank you.