

friendly, neighborhood witch?

HOW DOES A NICE Jewish girl from the quiet, tree-lined streets of Logan Square become a witch?

Morda, like so many who have been drawn to the occult, has two key reasons. As a child, she often felt she had special powers. ("If I concentrated, I could almost always win contests, or influence people to give me things.") Memories of those magic moments lingered into adulthood.

Also, traditional religion, Judaism, in her case, didn't satisfy her longing "to be in touch with something beyond."

At the University of Illinois in Champaign, she dabbled in Zen, followed the Duke University research into psychic phenomena and explored various religions. "Then one day," she said, "someone gave me some books on witchcraft. I realized this was for me, this was what I had always believed. My concept of God was a pagan concept."

Witchcraft, she quickly explains, has nothing to do with Satan worship or black masses or evil spells and potions. Those things, as any modern-day good witch will tell you, are aberrations blown up by the medieval inquisitions and adopted today "by young kids who don't know what they're doing," as Morda puts it.

HER COVEN, A TIGHTLY knit group of 12 witches, male and female, is one of several dozen in the Chicago area.

Morda's coven is an indication of witchcraft's appeal to young intellectuals. There are three with doctorate degrees and three with master's degrees, all in their 20s and 30s. Another member, a Unitarian minister with a doctorate in divinity, recently moved to California.

The coven gathers for monthly rituals in the basement recreation room of the three-flat Morda and her witch-husband recently bought with two other witch-couples. There is incense, an altar laden with wine, cakes and fruit, and music (Stravinsky's "Rites of Spring" and Orff's "Carmina Burana" are two coven favorites).

BLACK-ROBED COVEN members trace a circle with long handmade knives, dance, sing and chant prayers to their gods and goddesses of air, water, fire, earth and spirit. Then they consume the "eucharist" food and wine.

The ceremony is drawn from books by researchers into ancient pagan rituals.

Once one of Morda's three cats ate the eucharist while the ritual dances were proceeding. No one was too upset because, as she says, "witches have a special affinity for cats."

EXCEPT FOR THESE ceremonies, the coven's activities are quite similar to the prayer healing sessions flourishing in many Christian churches.

Members send out "thought patterns" (prayers) for various requests people bring to them: Heal the sick, find jobs for the jobless, get high draft numbers or draft deferments for young men ("I'd say we have a 100-per cent record on the draft," Morda says).

The covens of the Pagan Way use their powers only for good. Morda did try evil one time, but never again. "There was a woman who got me in trouble at work, and I gave her a case of bronchitis," she explained. "She was out for a month. I won't do that again, now that I know how powerful it is."

SHE IS CONSIDERED an expert healer in her coven, but probably her outstanding witch achievement was something she did for herself, not others.

"Last spring I decided I wanted to get married," she said. "I sent out a thought pattern and asked for two young men to choose from. I wanted someone interested in witchcraft, who didn't have much furniture so he could move into my apartment and who was in favor of women's liberation."

Within two days she met two young men. One was just right, and eventually they had a witch marriage and will live happily ever after.