

## INTERVIEW WITH RUTH BARRETT FOR THE WILD HUNT

June 12, 2016

### **1. Please describe how you specifically identify as a Pagan? What is your tradition?**

I have specifically identified as a pagan and witch. I am also an ordained Dianic HP with 40 years experience providing spiritual service to women and girls. Our practice is a feminist, goddess and female-centered ritual tradition that centers on female rites of passage.

### **2. Last fall and then again this week, you have been called out for using transphobic language or creating works that support transphobic ideas, such as the new anthology. What is your reaction to these claims and accusations?**

In today's political climate of intolerance for differing points of view, any mention of female anatomy and societal issues that specifically are about or affect women and girls, are called "transphobic," "exclusionary," and worse. People who have questions, concerns, or are simply confused around the issues of gender identity and sex biology, are often silenced through instant name calling, or by witnessing how those who speak up are being bullied or threatened. I am only one of many who have experienced this kind of treatment, and this has been going on for some time.

I don't think this is a positive course if we want a truly free society where values are demonstrated when diverse ideas or points of view are encouraged, critically examined, and respectfully debated. There are many of us, regardless of our positions on these issues, who cannot support the silencing and suppression of information that helps inform and contribute to a deeper understanding of these issues. A progressive society whose empathetic moral values of equality for all of its citizens has the capacity to ensure rights and safety without removing the rights to safety from other oppressed people within its care.

### **3. The anthology is focused on the topic of "female erasure." Can you explain, in a few sentences, what that is? And why is the anthology project important? How does it relate to your spirituality?**

*Female Erasure* is an anthology that celebrates female embodiment, while exposing the current trend of gender-identity politics as a continuation of female erasure as old as patriarchy itself. Transgender politics dismisses biological sex differences as irrelevant, while suppressing critical conceptual examinations of gender itself, ignoring the history of female class oppression, enforcement, male domination, sexual violence, personal suffering, and social and economic inequality.

Female erasure is being enacted through changing laws that have provided sex-based protections. Language that refers to women as a distinct class or that refers to female biology has been purposely removed or reframed to include biological males. Disregarding the fact that the excuse for the oppression of females is our biology, the issues around gender and gender identity have eclipsed the still unaddressed issues of sexism and its expressions of violence in the everyday lives of countless women and girls here in the United States and throughout the world.

This project relates to my spirituality in that I have provided spiritual service to thousands of women over the past forty year in the forms of teaching, personal, small group, and large public rituals. This service has included assisting women in the often painful process of coming into awareness about how male-centered cultural and religious views and institutions have been foundational in their very personal sexual, physical, and emotional abuse, and how patriarchal socialization powerfully influences their self-perception.

Bearing witness to the cracking of a woman's paradigm of female self-hatred, and supporting her coming to conscious awareness of this, has been both a wondrous and terrible honor. Once freed from internalized misogyny, even for an instant, there is no turning back. She can't un-know what she now understands has been done to her personally and to the female sex collectively. She begins to make different choices for her life, and becomes aware of how her own story is interwoven with those of countless other women and girls throughout time.

#### **4. Did you foresee the backlash when you launched the IndieGoGo campaign?**

Yes, of course. Especially in past decade where there has been backlash to the feminist goals that so many of us have dedicated our lives to.

#### **5. In the discussion of the erasure of biological womanhood, some of the pieces in the book appear to support the erasure of a viable and true trans-identity, such as the one by the doctor who regrets have helped people transition. Do you feel that the small population of transgender individuals, either men or women, threaten the social treatment of women and the movement for gender equality? If so, how? If not, explain.**

Everyone is entitled to their sense of identity. What often goes unexamined at a deeper level is the contextual influences and cultural norms (including enforced gender stereotypes) that informs consciously or unconsciously how a person arrives at their identity. This is explored within the anthology in many ways.

For me, equality for housing, employment, and physical safety is a basic human right. Equality and safety from male violence for transgender individuals and females has only been addressed by trans activists in either/or terms, and this is a problem. At issue is the elimination of sex-based protections that were hard won for women and girls, the right to privacy in our intimate spaces, the right to gather without males present, the defunding of resources that focus on female-specific services like battered women's shelters and rape crisis centers, and the dismantling of Title 1X. Female erasure is changing the words "pregnant woman" to "pregnant individual" in the Midwives Alliance of North America's core competencies document, and changing "mother" to "birthing parent." These are only a few examples.

While it is well-documented that physical and sexual violence against women and girls is on the rise globally, so-called progressives and the transgender lobbyists are acting to silence, disrupt, and legislate against our ability to name, gather and address the issues of our own oppression. This is female erasure.

Concerns about a very profitable and growing transgender medical industry targeting well meaning parents, vulnerable children and adolescents, with no other options discussed other than transitioning that results in sterilization and a lifetime of dependence on pharmaceuticals and with no long-term studies of the health impact, are silenced. In this industry young lesbians and gay boys can be “normalized” by transitioning them. The possibility that homophobia is playing out in this issue seems to be too taboo to discuss.

The anthology includes pieces with individual personal stories, whether it be a doctor, therapist, educator, and how the pressure of politics around this issue has limited how they must treat their patients, overriding their professional assessments. Stories from young de-transitioned women, or other gender non-conforming women, provide readers with an intimate window into their experiences, challenges, and struggles of gender, gender-identity, sex, and patriarchal conditioning.

**6. Cherry Hill Seminary was brought into the debate within the Pagan community. This resulted in your resignation as an instructor. Why did you resign? Will you be teaching anywhere else?**

Yes, I did voluntarily resign from the faculty of Cherry Hill Seminary after hearing about the hatred and vitriol directed at me spilling over onto Cherry Hill. I resigned because I believe very strongly in the mission of Cherry Hill Seminary and their academic commitment to diversity in their faculty and the free exchange of ideas. Rather than let my participation endanger the future of Cherry Hill Seminary, it made the most sense for me to respectfully remove myself.

While some doors have closed to me, I will continue to teach as I have been doing all along.

**7. When will the book be released?**

By or around Fall Equinox

**8. Do you have anything else that you'd like to add?**

This project would not have been necessary if information and personal experiences were not being censored, silenced, or suppressed. Those who have responded to the topic of female erasure with such vitriol only demonstrates the very point of why this anthology became necessary.

Our contributors want radical societal change - freedom from oppressive gender roles, not from our sex. We want a world free of the so-called gender stereotypes of “femininity” and “masculinity.” We want a world where the ideal of diversity is not abused to oppress and erase fifty-one percent of humanity. We want a world in which everyone’s biological reality is honored, our sacred bodies are celebrated, and where sex-based violence and enforced gender roles become obsolete.

Thank you for the opportunity to give this interview to The Wild Hunt.

In Her Service,  
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