MEET YOUR FATE AT THE CROSSROADS

At the crossroads, the gate to the web of fate opens and the spirit roads are available. The mouth of creation opens to the mill of stars and magic is made manifest.

Folk magic conjurer and root worker ORION FOXWOOD invites you to take a walk through his native Appalachia, through moonlit orchards and rural farms to the dark of the crossroads. From both the oral tradition of his own ancestors and the voices of the spirits themselves, Foxwood brings readers secrets of Southern magic including Spirit Sight, Conjuring, Faith Healing, Blessing, Cursing, Setting Magical Lights, and much, much more. This book is a unique and moving journey into the heart and soul of conjure and many of its powerful practices.

“A gem to be treasured.” —DOLORES ASHCROFT-NOWICKI, director of studies, Servants of the Light

“Orion Foxwood holds the beacon of light at the dark crossroads where magic and mystery meet.” —CHRISTOPHER FENCZAK, Founder of the Temple of Witchcraft and author of The Plant Spirit Familiar

“The Candle and the Crossroads serves the meat and potatoes of Southern Root Magic so deliciously, you’ll savor every morsel—and anxiously await a second helping!” —DOROTHY MORRISON, author of Utterly Wicked

“Foxwood imparts centuries of folk wisdom from Appalachian, African, and other sources in this powerful compendium of knowledge that will help you to transform your life and the lives of others.” —CHRISTIAN DAY, author of The Witches’ Book of the Dead


The CANDLE and the CROSSROADS
A Book of Appalachian Conjure and Southern Root Work

ORION FOXWOOD
Praise for
The Candle and the Crossroads

“Orion Foxwood holds the beacon of light at the dark crossroads where magic and mystery meet. I’ve been a guest at many of his workshops on conjure, folk magic and Witchcraft, and I’m delighted to see this book in print, sharing his knowledge and experiences. I’m sure, like me, you will find him simultaneously colorfully charismatic and deeply soulful, and soon, without realizing it, you and your magic will be changed for the better. That is the inspirational alchemy that Orion works on his students, readers and friends if you are open enough to listen, see and feel.”

—Christopher Penczak, founder of the Temple of Witchcraft and author of The Plant Spirit Spirit Familiar

“There are places in the world where magic abounds, where its ancient practices stem from the very soul of the people living there. The Appalachian area of America is such a place. Much has been written about it, little is really known and even less is understood. Here is the real thing, half autobiography and half training manual with fascinating snippets of information thrown in. It is the genuine Appalachian belief system written by one born and bred to it. I have had the joy of Orion’s friendship for many years and have worked with him on many
occasions. Here in his own words you will find the result of his early training. He says clearly that this is a ‘Way of Life’—one that if care is not taken will disappear and leave the world darker for its going. It is hard to give you more than just the barest flavor of the book here. Ancient practices still known and used today, information on herbs and spirit roads all written down by the loving hand of family memory. A gem to be treasured. Read it and you will be amazed at the richness that still exists in the heart of the Appalachians.”

—DOLORES ASHCROFT-NOWICKI, director of Studies
Servants of the Light

“Richly garnished with the knowledge and wisdom of personal experience, and offered in the conversational tone of a chat with an old friend, Orion Foxwood’s The Candle and the Crossroads serves the meat and potatoes of Southern Root Magic so deliciously, you’ll savor every morsel—and anxiously await a second helping!”

—DOROTHY MORRISON, author of Utterly Wicked

“The Candle and the Crossroads is a unique book. It offers us an insight into the world of Appalachian Conjure that provides not only techniques and practices, but also a cultural context for those practices. Orion Foxwood’s account of his life, and how he came by the knowledge and wisdom he shares, is every bit as important and informative as the techniques themselves. This book is one where the whole is much greater than the sum of its parts, laying bare as it does the heart and
soul of Southern Conjure. There is no doubt in my mind that Orion is sharing with us a great treasure, and that he is part and parcel of that treasure. Practitioners of all traditions can learn much from this book, whether it be the nuts and bolts of technique, or through comparison with their own path. I will certainly be recommending this book to my own students of the Crooked Path.”

—Peter Paddon, author of A Grimoire for Modern Cunningfolk, Visceral Magick and Enchantment: The Witch’s Art of Manipulation through Gesture, Gaze and Glamour

“Orion is the most eloquent magical teacher of our time and proves it with The Candle and the Crossroads. You are immersed in Orion’s teachings and come away enlightened and ready to doctor the root of your own self.”

—Jacki Smith, author of Coventry Magic and founder of Coventry Creations

“Orion writes from the heart. The Candle and the Crossroads is a very soulful book. He gives you a clear vision of the oral tradition from the Appalachian Mountains. I found his book very refreshing and I enjoyed reading it.”

—Starr Casas, rootworker and founder of www.oldstyleconjure.com

“The Candle and the Crossroads is a fascinating adventure into the spiritual path and work of Conjure as seen through the eyes of one of its modern practitioners, a soulful teacher of great depth and wisdom. Drawing on many years of experience, Orion Foxwood offers
the reader practical and powerful tools of blessing and transformation that have universal application while still being grounded in an original American path. This book is a crossroads itself, inviting you to connect with one of America’s own root spiritual traditions.”

—David Spangler, author of The Laws of Manifestation, Apprenticed to Spirit, and Subtle Worlds: An Explorer’s Field Notes

“Like Witchcraft, conjure is the magic of the people, that wisdom and power hidden within us all that is accessible to everyone regardless of economic status, and, like Witches, conjurers and rootworkers embrace this power as a vocation to help those in need. It works within the context of all religions for it is the spirit that flows through them all. Orion Foxwood imparts centuries of folk wisdom from Appalachian, African, and other sources in this powerful compendium of knowledge that will help you to transform your life and the lives of others.”

—Christian Day, author of The Witches’ Book of the Dead
The CANDLE and the CROSSROADS
The CANDLE and the CROSSROADS
A Book of Appalachian Conjure and Southern Root Work

ORION FOXWOOD

WEISER BOOKS
San Francisco, CA/Newburyport, MA
There is an age-old, soulful calling that comes through our spirit from the voice of magic. This voice is older than time, and it comes from a very deep place in our spirit and the ancestral echoes that flow like a river in our blood—a stream as old as the human species. It rises from an ancient place of memory; it can never be silenced or hushed. The callings of this voice rise inside us and speak prayers of spirit; names of power; and directives of vision when the storms of the human world rage the most. This voice becomes louder and stronger when it is most needed, when our freedom to live and prosper is challenged. This voice summons us to reach to our spirit, the Spirit, and the spirit world for unseen hands to tip the forces of life toward well-being of mind, soul, body, and spirit. Conjure is one such voice!

Conjure and root work have endured the horrors of slavery, the challenges of poverty, and the forces of racism and inequality. They have held in trust the unbreakable core of human spirit. The early ancestors of conjure and root work may have perished in body, but they have endured in spirit. It is the flame of their powerful spirit that passes to each true conjure and root worker. This spirit flame passes into the candles each of us light to
gather the blessings of the spirit world and God to our lives. When earnestly called at the crossroads of life or at the intersection of the seen and unseen spirit world, this spirit will greet us, impossible and miraculous.

To “Ole-Maker,” the helpful spirits, the ancestors of conjure, and to those persons who seek to doctor the root and conjure the spirit in a sacred way that is worthy and honoring of the blood, sweat, and tears of those who preserved these ways.
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Preface

I was born in 1963 with the “veil” (a localized term for the second sight) in the Shenandoah Valley in Virginia, an area that is rich in folklore, folktales, ghost stories, folk healing, and magic. Over the course of my life there and my travels in the American South, I was exposed to practices of Appalachian spirituality, second sight traditions, folk magic, and conjure. I also became familiar with southern and African-American root-doctoring traditions. Aspects of these are covered throughout this book. This is the source of my teachings and techniques.

Other than a few very brief quotes, the stories, spiritual and magical practices, and the folk wisdom in this book have been distilled from oral traditions in my family, culture, and subsequent sharing with other conjure workers. Some material also came directly through the guidance of God (the Source) and the spirits, the truest of teachers. What I have shared with you is from the traditions and practices of those who taught me conjure, spirit work, and root-doctoring specifically from the American southern and Appalachian oral traditions. They do not represent a universal or orthodox practice, as there is no such thing in the American South. This practice changes from geographic location to location, family to family, and sometimes even among ethnic groups. In brief, I offer to you the “soulful magic” of living tradition!
This book has been years in the making, and there are many beings—human (in and out of bodies) and other—who have contributed to me as a conjureman and to the life and teachings in this book. Thank you, and may all of the good spirits of life bless you with the seeking of your spirit.

I dedicate this book to:

God, Great Spirit, and the countless names for the Source, for you are everything about everything that I am and do. “May I see me the way you saw me when you made me.”

My blood mother Betty Jean and my sister Donna Gale for the gift of the veil and the courage to use it. There would be no me without you!

My beautiful beloved one, Aubrey Taylor-Smith, for endless love and support—your very birth is a blessing to my world!

Ms. Granny and Johnnie Rooster, the first spirits to guide me to conjure. You opened the door that has opened doors for so many others.

Marie Laveau, the nineteenth-century Queen of New Orleans Voodoo, for being an example of the power of conjure in the face of racial adversity. My altar lights burn for you!

My dear best friend, Jhim Midgett, for a list of things too long to mention.

Priestess Miriam Chamani, Queen Mother of the Voodoo Spiritual Temple in New Orleans, for the many years of love, friendship, and rich spiritual wisdom you have shared with me.
Bloody Mary, New Orleans Voodoo Queen, for your love, friendship, integrity, and outstanding guidance in the conjure and Voodoo practices of New Orleans.

My publisher family, Weiser Books, for the voice of spirit you are to the world. My amazing editors: Amber Guetebier and Marienne Hartwood.

My beloved friend Lady Ceres Moon Spinners, for your boundless love and wisdom.

My conjure-crossroads family: Momma Starr Casas, Susan Diamond, Auntie Sindy Todo, and Shimmering-Wolf for your love, wisdom, guidance, and friendship on the path of hoodoo, conjure, and root doctoring.

Cat Yronwode for your trailblazing work on hoodoo and conjure. I honor you!

Joseph, Michelle, Sophie, and doggy-Graymond for your love, support, and the sanctuary of your home while I was writing this book.

To the spirit of Coco Robicheaux, New Orleans conjureman and blues musician extraordinaire, for the opportunity to meet and become a friend to you just before you passed into spirit. You reminded us that each precious moment we share together is a gift from God!

To the conjurers who had the power and courage to prevail and give us all the wisdom of their lives. Your spiritual power guides us all through the veil of forgetfulness into the light of spiritual awakening!
Chapter 1

Magic and Spirit Sight in My Folk Culture and Personal Work: A View from Within

There is a field where matter, mind, and magic meet.
Meet me there and let’s make the magic that made the world.

—Orion Foxwood and Brigh

This invocation came through me during a session of turning my awareness inward toward the eternal stream of ancestral presence, essence, and universal rhythm that knows no end and is always beginning. Many cultures call this technique meditation. My mother called it “the knowing.” It is into this state of being that all conjurers go for inspiration, incarnation, evocation, and invocation. It dwells where the web of fate and the river of stars join in a dance of creation and revelation. To engage in these states of being, magic workers must part the perceived veil between the worlds and take the spirit of their seeking to that place where humanity and divinity meet—the
crossroads. At the crossroads, the gate to the web of fate opens and the spirit roads are available. The mouth of creation opens to the mill of stars and magic is made manifest. Place your feet firmly on the existence of your life in this world, for that is the magical dance floor. Reclaim your presence in this world as the head of the great serpentine path of magic. Its vertebrae are the steps you have walked before that lead you into this world at this time. Its winding ways draw the worlds into one egg. Join me on a walk from my first home to building the home within that knows no bounds—the journey to my spirit and into the spirit world. If the path of the conjurer calls to you, this will be a good crystal ball for viewing the path to walking in the spirit land. This book is about spirit work, spiritual wisdom, love and power, and direct partnership with healthy spirit forces. It is about bearing the candle flame of our inner spirit to the crossroads of transition and realignment with the very forces that are our source.

The Journey to My Spirit

When I moved from my family home and southern culture in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia to Maryland in the 1980s, I was on a quest for more people like me. I sought freedom to be out of the closet as a gay man and a magic worker, and more access to teachers and information on magical practices. I was beginning my voyage into the discovery of myself on many levels—a common theme for a young man, especially one (as my mom would say) who was “so damn different.” I had no idea what it would take for me to become what my spirit had chosen for this life walk. In retrospect, it is good that spirits born as humans (such as you and I) who are marked to be magic
 workers do not know the fine print and the implications of a
life devoted to magic. I think that if we did, we would surely
run for the metaphorical hills and hide beneath a cloth of
mediocrity.

The spirits that work with us are generous to shelter our
direct perception from the details of the work we are called to
do until life has carved out of us the ability to receive it, the
inner clarity to see it, and the skills to implement it. One thing
I know is that if you came into your body at birth marked for
magic, there is no way around it. You must not betray your
spirit’s voice and turn away from what I have found to be a
life of meaning and miracles. Dear reader, walk with me
through a century or so of pages into old magic, deep spirit,
wise ways, and paths of recovery, discovery, and sorcery that
work with and from the source and center. If what you read
speaks to what your spirit knows, then may those good spir-
ts who sit above you guide you on this journey into the root
of all things—the living spirit. May the wise ancestors place
your feet in right relationship with the directive of your spirit.
And may you know when to make magic and when to let magic
make you.

The Baby Steps

The kind of beginning described herein is the most impor-
tant first step for anyone who plans to walk the shadow roads
that lead in and out of the world of forms, forces, shapes, and
shapers. It is a journey to recover one’s own spirit. The spirit
within is the interface point between all forms of life—seen
and unseen—and spirit pathways. My journey began as all true
roads to the soul do: away from the familiar track of the voices
outside to a recovery of the knowing voice within—the one that inspired my birth. But first comes the tuning in to what we, without external contaminations, feel and sense about our core. Then comes the unbinding of illusions, fears, and consensus reality to make room for the re-weaving of self from the core of spirit. Indeed, it all started like the Fool card in the tarot—by stepping off the cliff of the familiar past onto a vague cloud of inner guidance and into a new and foreign land of opportunity and challenge.

In order to know the spirit world, you must first know and manage your spirit—a task more challenging than it may sound. Magic is about doctoring the root of our self, making spirit relationships and thereby getting into creation's magical mix as a worker in the field of spirit that feeds and sustains all life. Did I mention that root workers and conjurers are nosy by nature? We want to know how life operates. We are not satisfied to sit on the sidelines. We get in the kitchen when life is being cooked up. These forms of magic are about power. Healthy power in this context is about our ability to create our lives in partnership with the web of life. Magic is about the freedom of the spirit to grow healthily without the tyranny of outside forces attempting to silence its inner voice.

Stepping Out onto the Cloud

Like Moses in search of the Promised Land, I just knew that the big city offered me promise. It gave me options to reveal the pulse driving outward from within and a sort of invisibility cloak under which I could be me in all my unfolding facets. Indeed, it exposed me to teachers in the magical arts and opportunities for uniqueness to blossom. In the course of
that great adventure, I have studied and/or been initiated into Wiccan and Traditional Witchcraft lineages and New Orleans Voodoo practices, worked with Western Mystery practices, refined and deepened my Faery work, and expanded my conjure repertoire. I was on a search for truth that led me to new paths, such as witchcraft, and deeper into the magic of my cultural roots, conjure. Little did I know that ultimately magic starts from knowing the deep, abiding voice from within.

In many ways I felt like Dorothy in the classic film *The Wizard of Oz*—the thing I truly longed for most was home. And, like Dorothy, the power to get there was with (or in) me all along. What I did not understand was that home is an inside job. I was blessed to encounter and be taught by teachers who understood magic, spirituality, and mystical work. They knew the necessary elements of developing a “natural conjurer” (a person with blood-born spirit talents) and the skills needed for encountering and working in the spirit world in ways that leverage very potent effects. This is not to say that they were always loving, kind, or ethical. They were gifted . . . and they were human! I also did not realize what I already had within me from my cultural and familial magical practices. Sometimes we have to go away from ourselves to find ourselves. Without reservation, that is exactly how I came into the potency of my witchery and conjure.

My road to discovering my spiritual, mystical, and magical path has been one of revelation, retrieval, and integration. It has been a path of deep in-looking, sometimes earth-shattering change, and exchange with spirit beings in ways that left me permanently woven into the in-scape of our world and poised at the crossroads where human and other encounter, exchange, and reveal wisdoms only known by those brave
enough to walk between paths of light and shadow. This book will present some of my discoveries on the path of conjure (or spirit work, as it was called in my culture) as well as some practical insights, techniques, and practices.

The Foundations of My Magic

My work in the spirit world originated through my mother and sister as well as the culture in the foothills of Appalachia in West Virginia and outside of Winchester, Virginia. I was born with the veil, a subject I will discuss in later chapters. Over the course of my life in Appalachia, I was exposed to the practices of my mother, neighbors, and other people in the family and community who had many of the following gifts or skills:

- **Spirit sight**: The ability to perceive invisible beings and the spirit-paths

- **Working by the signs**: The ability to synchronize work such as farming, fertility of humans and animals, orcharding, and more with the influence of the zodiacal influences; or to interpret tokens or communication from the unseen spirit world also known as signs

- **Conjuring with spirits**: The ability to pray or otherwise call to otherworld beings such as God, angels, ancestral spirits, local nature spirits, crossroads beings, etc., for doing magical work

- **Faith healing**: The ability to induce physical, emotional, mental, or spiritual healing through direct contact and mediation of divine healing power

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• **Setting magical lights (candle magic):** The ability to use fire in candles (especially), hearth fires, and other flames to set spiritual light to petitions or prayers

• **Doctoring the root:** The ability to use herbs, roots, stones, or animal parts (bones, claws, fur, etc.) for magic or the clearing, cleansing, and blessing of the spirit of a person (also known as his or her root)

• **Praying and/or dreaming true:** The ability to bring the successful blessings of spirit/God to a person, place, or thing, as well as predictive or informative dreaming

• **Blessing or cursing:** The ability to bring spirit influences (helpful or harmful) to a situation or desire through any of the aforementioned abilities

In this book, I will discuss and share some techniques for honing these abilities and others.

All of the magical practices in my family and community were practical and tied to everyday life. The worker was both feared and revered. He or she was often consulted when all other interventions failed; the services were purchased under the cloak of night. These practices were not and are not a counter-culture, hobby, or spiritual path. They are a vocation, practice, and a paradigm, and have a definite role in society. Understanding this is important to comprehending the philosophical underpinnings of this book. The roots of my conjure are African slave and other ethnic practices mixed in with Christian belief, Native American practices, European Witchcraft, and Faery beliefs—and I am sure there are other elements that I have not identified.
Why This Book?

The fuel for writing this book was my concern that people who are, as my partner Aubrey calls it, “magically inclined,” read a lot but too often do very little in the way of applying the practice of magic, spirituality, and mysticism to improving the quality of their lives. In my experience, magic has too often become an intellectual pursuit to the exclusion of actual skills development and betterment of everyday life. This approach leaves the worker feeling filled with facts but void of fulfillment. My mother always said, “In the end, when we take our last breath in this life, it is likely that we will want to know if we were loved, if we loved, and if we were happy.” These practices should enhance the pursuit of life, liberty, and happiness—that includes inner peace, joy, prosperity, health, and a host of other blessings. These streams of spirit development, spirituality, mysticism, and magic are enlivened by living. You cannot think your way into magical potency, spiritual knowing, and mystical union. You have to consistently work the magic in order to have an established relationship with its workings.

Like so many who walk the magic roads, I have accumulated stacks of books, tons of crystals, temples full of statues, and enough herbs and oils to choke a dinosaur. Too often we look everywhere but in our country and family for solid magical practices. Yet this country is rich in magical lore, techniques, and practices. These practices are overlooked because they are too familiar or close, or they are seen as superstitious and not evolved. This last statement is inaccurate; folk magic is the mother of temple magic and formalized religion.
Ask yourself: is it wise to cast away the root of a plant for the use of its fruits? The fruits live for a season, but the roots live through the seasons. This book looks at the deep-rooted magic of the common folk. With that said, all of us are (to some degree) on a path to self-discovery, life fulfillment, and wholeness. As I have continued to grow in conjure, I have discovered that the cord that weaves wholeness of spirit is best woven with three threads: spirituality, mysticism, and magic. I will go deeper into these threads in the next chapter. Seeking magical work without spiritual development and mystical practices is dangerous because it lacks moral fiber, visionary guidance, wisdom, and a sound understanding of the shadowy and light forces at work within you. This book will discuss lore, beliefs, practices, and techniques for witchcraft and conjure rooted in these three threads and poised on a foundation of practicality and applicability.

This book is about the conjure way of life, its soul, and to the depth of what my friend Starr Cassis calls “Old Style Conjure.” My old-style conjure works with the Bible, the crossroads, spirits, stones, roots, baths, rivers, trees (living and dead), laying on of hands, sin-eating, prayer clothes, altars, setting lights (candles or lamps), and a host of other materials. It works with cloth from a workman’s shirt, coal from deep mines, thread from feed and seed bags, honey and liquor, and other materials found in everyday life. My conjure works with real power placed in everything by spirit. It does not visualize. It knows! God (or the Maker) is not distant—it is close and has spirits sent to us to help us. My conjure was taught to me by old people, poor people, spirited people, and families who trusted me and let me in on their cherished knowledge.
Magic as a Path to Freedom

For years, I have pondered the role of magic in the development of spirit in the human quest for knowing. Ultimately, spirituality, mysticism, and magic are approaches to relating one’s own spirit to the spirit of all life. As I have looked deeper into the practical and occult roles of magic, I have found that magic appears to be a partner with the nature of spiritual freedom, which I define as the right to hear the voice of our own spirit and to create a life that is satisfying and meaningful in a cultural and planetary context. Magic liberates the seeker from being force-fed a diet of adherence and allows him or her to directly engage, encounter, and exchange with the forces of creation and life from the inside in an aware and co-creative manner.

Magic makes its face known where emotional, physical, or spiritual oppression attempts to chain the spirit of humanity. Consider the legendary roles of magic in the exodus of the Jewish tribes from Egypt (i.e., the parting of the sea, turning a staff into a serpent, and so on), the use of Voodoo in the Haitian slave revolt of 1791, or the mythic slave revolt of the Italian people led by Aradia through her Dianic Witchcraft. Whether magic played a role in these events—or whether they even occurred at all—is not the point. The fact remains that magic appears in urban myths, mythic battles, fights against oppression, or rebuttal against enforced norms.

Magic is a fire that destroys the fetters that bind the spirit. It is a gift to life and humanity that allows us to consciously shape our lives through direct engagement with the spirit inside life and inside ourselves. I believe that magic, specifically the magical practices of the common folk, has always been and always will be associated with human freedom and the quest for a good life.
It All Began with the Veil

I was born in Winchester, Virginia, in 1963. Southern and Appalachian folk culture and beliefs were still very much a part of the ways of the poor folk—my folk. I have often semi-jokingly said that we were “po-people” because we could not afford the other “o-r” in the word poor. My mother lived by her inner-knowing, as did her mother and many of the male elders in the family and community. She consulted God on everything, or as she would say, “I take my spirit to the throne for heavenly direction.” She was born with what we call the veil—a placental sheath over the face of the baby indicating that they have the blessing. The blessing is the ability to see into the world of the spirit, and it shows up in different ways for each person. Today, one might think of the blessing, and its resulting gift called the knowing, as extrasensory perception (ESP), though we would have never used such a big term. It is no surprise that I was born with the veil, too, as was my beautiful sister, Donna.

My culture had mixed feelings about the veil. To some, it was seen as a blessing and a call to the pulpit to be a preacher of God’s word. For others, it was seen as a curse to be avoided because no good could come of it. In fact, my mom said that when she asked to see me after the birth, the nurses said I was okay, but “different.” They said I was born with white hair, pointed ears, and the veil—and they already had a preacher ready to pray the devil out of me. This was the equivalent to a form of exorcism. My mother was furious at their audacity and checked out early from the hospital. Needless to say, the exorcism failed.

My blessing began to open at the age of seven. This opening was premature; it happened when I was visited by the ghost of
my grandfather. He came to me gasping for air and hanging from a rope. I was terrified. I screamed, and my father grew angry, telling me to stop seeking attention and go to sleep. Finally, my mother said, “Ernie, it’s happening. His veil is lifting.” My mother took me to my grandfather’s house to attempt to settle me. Sadly, there he was, swinging from a rope in his barn. Publicly, there is still conjecture about whether he committed suicide or was murdered. Privately, we all knew he had been lynched because he loved a woman “from the otha side of the tracks.” With this token (spirit contact or sign), my life in the spirit world had begun, and there was no turning back.

As the years rolled along, my tokens expanded from spirits of the dead to local nature spirits, God, Jesus, angels, the man at the crossroads, and a host of otherworld beings (or as we called them, “side-winders”). I met snake handlers, faith healers, root doctors, sin-eaters, and other spirited people. Most of these workers considered themselves to be fine and upstanding Christian people. I loved going to church, and occasionally Jesus would show up. I often got in trouble for seeing him and asking about his mom. I even preached for a while as a youth minister and sang in a gospel trio (Goddess forbid) at local hymn sings. These are events where gospel singing groups visit churches in worship and praise. They conclude with a big picnic or a blessing in the graveyard on Decoration Day (aka Memorial Day Sunday). With all this said, there were troubles in my spirit and they were driving me out of the church.

If we are built in God’s image, why is his mother not discussed? Why are supposedly loving people so restrictive with God’s love? If we can be like Jesus, then why aren’t there more miracles performed? If the Psalms came from God’s word (the Bible) and some folks worked them in magic for a good life,
then why was this being called the devil’s work? Why do I feel God’s presence more in nature than in a church? How can little babies be born sinful when they are precious and innocent? Why does God hate gay people for loving their partners when God is love? Why are women, from whence all babies come, treated with such disrespect? Why do I have to wait for death to meet God and Jesus directly when I see and talk to them all the time? Why can’t a preacher teach me how to use my veil to serve God’s work? Why did preachers I know talk bad about the faith healing and two-headed preachers (who work with the spirits and angels, etc.) when they helped people in very real ways?

I found that the folks who practiced spirit work were helping people in measurable ways. It was restoring an experienced and informed faith that was often broken by blind faith and preachers who had no experience of a living God. Don’t get me wrong—many of these preachers were good people of faith, but they were without direct and tangible experience with God and his/her power. It seemed to me that one cannot bring God’s power and presence to the people unless he or she is living in it. My blasphemous curiosity and concerns for life and people (alive and dead), and my desire to be an agent for God’s will and spirit, caused me to knock on other doors. First, I looked at my feelings without the direction of other humans. I delved deeper into the “Mother Spirit” I felt when I was alone with nature. I went to the crossroads at night to meet the Dark Rider—a spirit that opens the spirit roads. I stopped waiting for the spirit world to find me. I sought it out, and find it I did . . . in its beauty and horror. But then, none of us learned how to walk without falling down.
The Role and Feel of Magic in My Folk Culture

We are in the midst of a wonderful revival of magical and mystical interest that started in the 1800s and continues to solidify the bridges between the worlds. Incredible movements and magical systems continue to enlighten us, such as the Golden Dawn, theosophy, spiritualism, Thelema, Wicca, and the New Age movement—the list goes on. These systems bring invaluable resources; however, there was magical bedrock already here, and too often I feel that that foundation is trivialized or forgotten. This bedrock is the folk magical practices. There are hundreds of streams of folk magic, but in this book I will only address the ones I have been shaped by in hopes that they will inspire you to look deeper. The folk ways re-sacredize our everyday life and place the spirit world right here . . . right now . . . as close as your breath.

The conjure practices I grew up with and continue to practice are practical. They deal with all levels of life—spirituality, love, material prosperity, justice, health, happiness, attractiveness, fertility, and management of your life and its spirit in all directions. It is not a religion. It is not a political expression. It is not a counterculture. It is a lifestyle. It is a skill, a craft, and an art form. It is respected as a form of doctoring, though it is not a medical practice. It is focused on doctoring your spirit and its relationship to the creator, ancestors, the good spirits, and forces one may see as luck or wellbeing. It can be used to harm someone, though I do not recommend this. It has centuries of results behind it, and myriad techniques and recipes within it. The role of the magic worker is counselor, advisor, luck bringer, healer of the spirit, and last chance for wholeness
when no one else can help. The roles of the conjurer are congruent with the practices of the old style witches who I also met and learned from. Therefore, it is nearly impossible for me to give a solid introduction to my conjure world without giving some brief information on my development as a witch as well.

Encountering Family and Folk Witches

Around 1980, I had my first encounters with what I call “old style” or “traditional” witches. They were a lovely older couple from Brentwood, Essex, England visiting their son in Winchester, Virginia. I was in my late teens, working as a busboy at a local restaurant. We met at the salad bar, which I was restocking. They did not wear any magical jewelry or look different from any other older people, so magic was not the first item in our chats—it was their request for more croutons. At that time, I was a backwoods boy with very little traveling under my young belt, so exotic English accents and life in a foreign land fascinated me. I mentioned root work and the crossroads. They said they did something similar in their family.

We became friends, and the couple visited their son many times over the two and a half years that we knew each other. This opened discussions on what they called turnings (spells), the little people (Faery beings), the magic mill (a form of magic working the power of the earth), bad-washers (people who did harmful magic), overlooking (the evil eye), and a host of other simple but potent practices. They told me that witchcraft is what some of their family members called it, but they preferred “hedgery” and cunning. There were no initiations—just techniques and minor (but profound) lore.
I lost contact with them when I moved to Maryland. My spirit says they have long since died, as they were easily in their mid-seventies when I met them.

Over the years since, I have met several family or folk witches. Consistently, I have found that their practices feel similar to the conjure practices of the South. They work with spirits of the dead, crossroads spirits, Faery beings, angels, and spells to affect our spirit and overall wellbeing. Both types of magic workers see spirits as living beings, independent of humanity. They see magic as flowing through both hands, meaning it can help or harm. However, both conjurers and witches have some of the most sound ethics I have seen. They tend to be direct in their concerns and potent in their convictions. A perfect example of this is my spirit grandmother in the old art of witchcraft, Lady Circe. She was a hereditary witch who incorporated Wiccan elements into her practices in the 1970s. Her magic and wisdom were direct and potent. She served the community on all levels, doing tarot for multiple generations, helping the homeless and the drug addicted, and often giving her last penny for the wellbeing of another person (human or animal).

Living a Life as a Spirit in a Spirited World

This chapter is an introduction into some of the practices (cultural and other) that have shaped the conjurer and witch that I am today. It is a mere introduction, because there is much more. Rather than continue with my experiences, I will share with you teachings, techniques, and workings in the chapters to come. I would be remiss if I did not bring your focus on a profound part of this work: you and I are spirits in a human
We are involved in a walk-through form, carrying our spirit and our ancestors to new experiences of healing, revelation, and understanding. We are bringing awareness to our consciousness and power to our presence with each step we take.

If you want to have a life that is deeply enriched and enriching by the paths I share in this book, then you have to engage life as a spirit in a spirit-filled world. Life neither begins nor ends with that which is experienced by our outer senses or perceivable by our current standards and instruments used in science. Our sciences may be able to approach the spirit world one day, but they must move from approaches that look through deduction and reduction. The spirit cannot be held outside of its connections to greater rhythms. It interpenetrates everything and is the source of our inspirations, thoughts, insights, feelings, behaviors, relationships, events, encounters, and every other experience that we can imagine. At every level of life is aliveness. In all states of aliveness is intelligence. In the spirit work, everything is a person except the original word and light that summoned forth life. It is beyond personages, but lives through them. The spirit world is teeming with life, and we are all a part of it. If you experience that now, while in form, then death loses its existence. As a conjurer and a witch, you walk with the spirits as one of them. Welcome to your true home! Welcome to walking the shadow roads of spirit!