San Jose State community members explain diverse witchcraft practices

Dance junior Andres Alas, who’s identified as a witch for two years, often uses his practice to support other people by interpreting their energy through Tarot card readings.

By Christina Casillas
VICTORIA EDWARDS


While many may envision an older woman hunched over a bubbling, bubbling cauldron when they hear the term “witch,” several San Jose State community members are breaking the preconceived witch-shaped mold.

English ’20 alumna Gabrielle LaFrank said she’s felt compelled to witchcraft since she concocted potions in her childhood home.

“It really began as what I thought were childhood games: playing witch and mixing spells out of stuff in the kitchen,” LaFrank said in a phone call. “As I grew older . . . I began doing that in different ways and it became little rituals, little ways of connecting with the natural world. It became more than pretend.”

LaFrank said as she’s been mindfully practicing for more than five years, she considers herself an eclectic and hereditary witch whose practice is influenced by nature.

Humanities lecturer Lee Gilmore described eclectic witchcraft as an individualized witchcraft practice.

“When people say they’re an eclectic witch, that usually means they use whatever works [for them],” said Gilmore, who specializes in the study of ritual and new religious movements, in a Zoom call. “[They] take a little bit of this and a little bit of that.”

LaFrank said while she was private about being a witch early in her practice, she’s recently become more open about her beliefs because of witchcraft’s rise in media, especially on TikTok or “WitchTok.”

WitchTok is a niche section of the video-sharing app that revolves around magic and witchcraft.

The hashtag, #witchtok, alone has amassed more than 19.8 billion views, according to an Oct. 14 USA Today article.

“As more people started talking about witchcraft recently, and it’s become a lot more popular in media, I also felt more open to talk about it and to explore and expand my own practice,” LaFrank said.

Varieties of witchcraft

Gilmore said a prevalent witchcraft religion is Wicca, which was founded in England by Gerald Gardner, that rose to popularity in the ‘50s and arrived in the U.S. in the ‘60s.

 “[Gardner] was a retired English guy who had been involved in various esoteric, spiritual traditions and took inspiration from those and basically invented Wicca as a religion,” Gilmore said. “And then he wrote a book about it. He popularized it. He pulled a little bit of Western esotericism, he pulled a little bit of Eastern spirituality and a little bit of his own, and a little bit of pre-Christian European religion.”

Witches are not limited to a single belief system, Gilmore said. “They may believe in all of these things, or they may believe in none of these things,” she said. “It’s not one-size-fits-all.”
The word witchcraft is used to mark a religious tradition as ‘other’, right, as something that is marked as other that is forbidden. It’s often a way of stigmatizing or stereotyping marginalized peoples...

Lee Gilmore

One of the biggest goals that I feel like I practice in my witchcraft is really tuning into my sense of self and how I can be really aware of others around me and the energies that come with that. I think a lot of people don’t necessarily realize, or it’s just not talked about enough, that energy transfer from people.

Andres Alas

In her eclectic practice, LaFrank said she integrates Wiccan Sabbaths, ancestral work elements and nature. Witch and Wiccan Sabbaths are seasonal celebrations that occur during summer and fall equinoxes and spring and winter solstices, according to the Harvard Pilgrim Project website. The Phaleric Project includes a team of religious researchers who study interfaith connections and religious diversity, according to its website.

“I think [Sabbaths] are really what kind of drove me, the sensuality of the craft and what I use,” LaFrank said. “So lately I’ve been using a lot of fall materials, things I find outside like branches, leaves, pane cones.”

She also said she integrates candles, incense and the moon into her practice. LaFrank described “ancient work” as remembering ancestors, which she said can be emotional but aids her with her spiritual energy.

“I want to make sure I’m doing everything respectfully, not only just out of respect [for their] spirits but because I break these people who passed on and it’s like a way of visting,” LaFrank said. “I love doing it. It’s very personal and it’s so beautiful.”

Spirituality versus religion

Gilmore said the understanding of spirituality and religion varies from person to person but some witchcraft refers to practices outside of normative religious institutions, including Christianity, as spirituality or spiritualism.

“I think that when people are rejecting a religious institution and seeking something else, they are still looking for something that is an awful lot like what we call religion,” Gilmore said. “They just don’t want to use that term and that label because of negative associations that people sometimes have and negative experiences that people have with some religious institutions.”

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“I want to make sure I’m doing ...
Snitches get stitches in fantasy sport

By Christine Stevens

Unless you’re a Harry Potter fan you’ve probably never heard of Quidditch. Luckily for the San Jose State Quidditch club team has been playing the fictional-based sport since 2014.

In the Harry Potter books and movies by J.K. Rowling, Quidditch is a popular sport played by witches and wizards riding broomsticks.

However, to present-day Quidditch is a mixed-gender contact sport with a unique set of rules from rugby, dodgball and tag, according to the official U.S. Quidditch website.

Quidditch is made up of seven athletes who play with “brooms” between their legs at all times and was invented as a coed sport in 2005. It’s played in over 39 countries around the world, according to the Commercial Pipe & Fitting Association.

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“Most of the people that are here are people that I’ve known since my first year, so we’ve all gotten to know each other pretty well,” Lopez said.

She said when she graduates she will know Quidditch was an actual sport and want to continue playing. Lopez said Quidditch is a fun experience and worth the effort to start using PVC pipes, but I know they stopped using actual brooms because the USQ thermalized them a safety hazard.

Unlike other sports, he said “That’s a tramuntant we usually do at the beginning of the year with Colby Bolek. And then from there no more on to regional or we have scrimmages with other teams in the Bay Area.” However, the USQ decides universal rules for Quidditch.

Although the USQ club has the seven-player minimum that is required to play, the team doesn’t have substitutes during matches that can last around 45 minutes to an hour. Lopez said every member during a match is either a chaser, beater or a snitch, just like the Harry Potter version of Quidditch.

A chaser is someone who scores goals, which are worth 10 points, with the quaffle by throwing or kicking the ball into the hoops, according to the U.S. Quidditch website.

The quaffle is a ball that only the keepers and chasers are allowed to use as the keepers guard the hoops from opposing chasers. There are also bells called bludgers and they are used by players called beaters to keep those trying to score in their goal.

The snitch is a runner dressed in yellow with a white tail attached to its shorts. Once all the players called seekers pull the snitch tail or one of the teams reach 70 points, the game is over. Catching a snitch is worth 30 points.

Lopez said the team follows the official Quidditch rulebook. “That’s a whole rulebook that they update every year and during gameplay there’s 5 different referees at a time just working, making sure everyone’s going well because there’s so much happening,” Lopez said.

Following the official rulebook also means adhering to safety regulations such as playing without actual brooms because the USQ thermalized them a safety hazard.

“I don’t know when they decided to start using PVC pipes, but I know they stopped using actual brooms because it was a safety hazard,” Lopez said.

A PVC pipe is a white, plastic pipe commonly used for plumbing, according to the Commercial Pipe & Fitting Association.

Safety guidelines are added or modified because Quidditch is a club sport that can be sometimes aggressive.

Lopez said his favorite thing about Quidditch is the people on the team. “Most of the people that are here are people that I’ve known since my first year, so we’ve all gotten to know each other pretty well,” Lopez said.

Sociology senior Joanna Traurig is a four-year Quidditch club team member and even traveled to Australia’s quidditch year to play Quidditch. “I ended up getting way better at Quidditch while I was in Australia,” she said.

and it was a really good experience,” Traurig said.

She said when the graduates will want to stay on the team because it’s a good way to meet new people who have common interests.

“Of the things I love most about Quidditch is that it’s fun,” Traurig said. “We’re running around flying a fictional broom and having fun.”

Fruzzetti shared the same sentiment and said being part of the Quidditch club was the main source of socialization which was the SSU student.

“The community was very inclusive and traveling was fun,” Fruzzetti said. “Going to tournaments and meeting other people. You have to kind of be an open-minded person to play Quidditch.”

Also he said not everyone in the club has to be a Harry Potter fan. “Some people come in as athletes, some come in as Harry Potter fans and it [all] kind of merges together,” Fruzzetti said.

Recreational management senior Elijah Franklin, who was captain of the Quidditch club his sophomore year and junior year but didn’t even know Quidditch was an actual sport until he heard about the club.

Despite that, he said he still feels like he had a fun experience.

“Playing up growing season and track and field, so I kind of stuck to a lot of traditional sports, but I think I had a good experience: just being the team, being a captain for a couple years, and just meeting different people,” Franklin said.

The Quidditch club team has open practices every Thursday from 5:30 p.m. to 7 p.m. on Tower Lawn.

Follow the Spartan Daily on Twitter @Quidditch ThuSport:

“Good game! You guys played well, I was proud of you.”

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Our office at DBH 215 is closed because of the pandemic.
Animal organs are the future of transplants

Christopher Nguyen
STAFF WRITER

Although the idea of using an animal’s organ in a human transplant surgery may seem repulsive, it should be seen as a scientific victory especially because it can give someone the chance to keep living.

A recent surgery was done in September that resulted in a brain-dead person successfully being given a genetically modified pig’s kidney, according to an Oct. 19 New York Times article.

Before you shake your head and rule out the idea all together, this isn’t the first time animals have been used in medicine.

Cows and coincidentally pigs have been used to make insulin for years. While processing animals to make insulin isn’t an organ replacement, it serves as an organ function to help save lives.

In recent development of artificial organs, a nationwide research project known as The Kidney Project has successfully demonstrated a functional prototype artificial kidney, according to a Sept. 9 USCIF School of Pharmacy article.

The Kidney Project’s goal is to create a small, surgically implanted and free-standing bioartificial kidney to treat kidney failure, according to its website.

While the development of the artificial kidney prototype is hopeful to help supplement the growing demands of obtaining kidneys, there’s no timetable for when it will be released to the public.

In the U.S., there are more than 100,831 people waiting for an organ transplant and every nine minutes another person will be added onto the transplant waiting list, according to the same webpage.

For this reason alone, genetically modified animal organs shouldn’t be disregarded and instead be used to help curb the demands of obtaining an organ.

While processing animals to make insulin isn’t an organ replacement, it serves as an organ function to help save lives.

The time to wait for artificial kidneys to come out may take too long given the vastness of the need, according to the same webpage.

More than 15% of hospitalized COVID-19 patients have acquired acute kidney injuries, in which many now require dialysis, according to a May 14, 2020 National Kidney Foundation article.

Dialysis is a treatment that removes wastes and extra fluid from a patient’s blood when their kidneys are no longer able to do so effectively, according to a National Kidney Foundation Dialysis webpage.

It would be foolish to disregard the use of genetically modified animal organs while the pandemic rages on and people continue to die.

The idea of using animal organs may freak people out but it shouldn’t be shunned. It has the potential to save the next patient in need of an organ, which could very well be you or someone you know someday.

For more information about genetically modified animal organs, visit the following websites:

- https://www.uscif.org/kidney-project/
- https://www.american-kidneyfoundation.org/dialysis
- https://www.nationalkidneyfoundation.org/dialysis

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