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Student perspectives on worship services from Instructor Jennifer Garvin-Sanchez's Religious Studies 108 Human Spirituality undergraduate course at Virginia Commonwealth University.

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# Chrysalis: “Shamanic Discovery”

by Lauren Chambers

On Friday November 20th, I attended a Shamanic journeying night. It was held at Chrysalis meeting space in Carytown. The facilitator was Polly Lazon, of Energy Arts, LLC. The session lasted about two hours, from 7:15pm to around 9:30pm.

A Shaman is a type of Native American spiritual leader. They lead rituals where participants can enter deep trance like states and find answers to their deepest questions. Polly told me she was lead to practice Shamanism twenty years ago through dreams. She saw herself as a native person, drumming and leading people in ritual. She soon discovered what Shamanism was and started practicing it. Now, she facilitates a group about once a month, which is open to the public and donation based. I found the group on meetup.com, and had been a member only online but had never attended a meeting, so having to do this paper was the perfect excuse to finally go, and I'm glad I did.

When I arrived at the space, it was a nice cozy meeting room next to the Crystal shop in Carytown. All together there were ten participants, mostly around forty to sixty years old. It was a fairly mixed race group, and one guy was even from Germany. In the center of the room was a tapestry spread out and on it were all sorts of things from nature. In the very center was a green gourd, surrounded by quartz crystals from Brazil, feathers of many types of birds, dried corn husks, rattles, drums, masks,

and chocolate bars, among other things. The ritual started off with everybody choosing either a drum or rattle, I chose a rattle. We made music for a few minutes, then set the instruments down while Polly lit four candles, to represent the four directions and to officially open the sacred circle space.

Polly then talked briefly about the four principles of Shamanism, which are sacredness, reciprocity, nurturing, and respect. She also told us that if we feel inclined at any time, we can say “A-ho”, which is Native for “thanks” or “it is so”. After this, we each took turns holding one of the candles and said our names out loud, and each person responded by repeating the person's name. Then two helpers from the circle went around with smudging sticks, wisping the smoke over each person one by one to clear their energies. This was done a second time but this time with chakka seed rattles. After everybody was cleared of their bad energies, the four corners of the earth were drummed in. This was done by turning to each of the four corners while Polly drummed. Then we all stood up and for a few minutes, we moved in a circle, making more music with drums and rattles.

Polly then gave some announcements. One was of a Shaman training happening beginning of 2016. The other was of two guest speakers they were hosting from Hawaii who are coming to talk about native people of the islands. I actually will probably attend the

guest speakers talk when they arrive. Next, the “journeying” began. We were instructed to lie down with our heads facing the inner circle. Another of Polly’s helpers facilitated the guided meditation while he drummed. The journeying was to have us find our spirit animal. As he drummed, he told us to picture ourselves going down a hole, and coming out the other side. There we would find our spirit animal. He guided us as to what to ask the spirit animal, such as “are you my spirit animal?”, and told us to merge with this animal and feel its energy. This lasted for about ten minutes, then we were told to come back up through the hole, and back into our bodies. Then the circle opened up to sharing our experiences. People met many animals, none the same. We had deer, lynx, wolves, grizzly bears, beaver, raven, etc. Mine was the cheetah. Round two, we layed back down and Polly led the meditation while drumming. This time we were instructed to visit a watering hole, and there our spirit animal would give us gifts to represent the earth, air, water, and fire. When we came sat back up, everybody shared their experiences, and once again, no two were alike. Some people were much more elaborate than others, while some were very simple. In mine, I met with a sea turtle. I was given a turtle egg to represent earth, a stalactite to represent water (my watering hole was inside a cave), and a phoenix to represent fire and air.

We officially closed the circle by blowing out the candles and thanking the four corners of the Earth. I enjoyed doing the guided meditations the most, but I feel that most of it was just mine, and other people’s, elaborate imaginations. For me, to truly find a guide that way, I feel it would work if one was in a deeper trance like state for a longer period of time. Both meditations happened very quickly.

The whole experience was very interesting, however, I wouldn’t say it was a truly authentic shamanic experience. However, I think for what it’s worth, the people who led it had a lot of knowledge about shamanism and did the ritual to the best of their knowledge and expertise. At the end, Polly spoke to me more, because I was new, which was nice. I spoke to some others as well, all very interesting people, on many different personal spiritual paths.

This was my first time trying anything Shaman-related, and while again, it was not a truly authentic experience, it is probably the closest I have and ever will come

to such. I’m glad I attended and will probably go again. •

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