

A Conversation with Mare Cromwell

(Interviewer) Thanks for sitting down with me today, Mare. I must say, developing this book sounds like an audacious task. What inspired you to put it together?

(Mare Cromwell) Thanks for having me. Well... this book came out of a time in my life when I was really soul-searching and looking for answers to help me find spiritual peace. I had left a very demanding career in the environmental field, and was intentionally slowing down to try to "heal". And I was talking with an elderly friend, rather joking with her, about getting God's phone number. I've always been one for weird ideas, I guess. One thing led to another, and before I knew it, I had bought a tape recorder and started talking with people.

(I) As you began interviewing different people, did you know that a book was in the making, or was this just a part of your spiritual journey?

(M) I started the whole process about seven years ago and I'm trying to remember exactly what I was thinking. I believe I thought about a book from the get-go, since I started discovering how novel and interesting people's responses to the questions were. But to be honest, I was never sure that I was going to see the book through to completion until the past year. There were many moments along the way when I felt that I'd never get the whole thing together, just as I thought at times that I'd never get my life together.

(I) Did the journey of writing and completing the book help you get your life "together"?

(M) Yes, I would say that the process of writing and completing the book did help me greatly, along with finding a spiritual teacher who is a Cherokee Shaman. She is actually one of the chapters in the book. She is a very gifted healer and she has helped me tremendously. I credit her with much of the peace that I feel today because of all that she has done for me and taught me.

(I) The subtitle of the book "Searching for Spirituality in America" seems to be a common thrust in this county since 9-11. Did you do any of the interviews after the tragedies? Do you address any of the issues surrounding 9-11?

(M) Yes, I did one more interview after 9-11 that was prompted by the events on that tragic day. I had thought I was done with interviewing for this book (and have enough extra interviews to fill a whole other book) but after 9-11, I realized that I had a gap of no Islamic people in my book. I knew that I needed to find an Islamic person from the Middle East who might shed some light on the cultural beliefs that led to 9-11, in addition to sharing some information about the Islamic faith. Fortuitously, a friend

connected me with an Afghani man in Philadelphia who is a Sufi mystic. Abdullah, the Afghani man would not say that he is a mystic, but I would. He is an incredibly spiritual man who touched me very deeply in his interview. It was strangely ironic that the events of 9-11 pushed me to seek out one of the most powerful interviews I did over the past seven years, but it did. Oh, by the way, Sufism is considered the mystical path within the Islamic faith.

To answer your second question, I feel like much of the book touches on various aspects of those issues: fundamentalism, organized religion, greed etc. But Abdullah did talk at length about Osama bin Ladin, and events in Afghanistan, and the true interpretation of Islamic beliefs, which are quite different from what Osama bin Laden would have us believe.

(I) That brings up the interesting idea of what spirituality means for different groups of people. What kinds of people, from a religious standpoint, are interviewed in the book, and is there a common definition or understanding as to what spirituality is?

(M) I would not say that there is a common definition or understanding of what spirituality is within the general populace. It is such a broad term for something difficult to describe. Personally, I would define it as “feeling the spirit of the divine within oneself.” When I did each interview, I tried to encourage people to talk about God or spirituality or religion and what their truth was. It’s interesting, your asking me that question prompts me to realize that I was trying to learn if they had developed any practice that helped them feel God, or divine bliss, or deep, deep sacred peace within themselves, and if so, how they did it.

When people talked about whether they had a spiritual practice that they followed, then I asked them to talk about that. It was always fascinating to learn what they did, whether it was a type of quiet listening to their inner wisdom, or playing ball with their daughters or singing. It seems that there are so many ways to feel the spirit or feel God. As for kinds of people, I interviewed Christians, Jews, agnostics, a Sufi Mystic, Cherokee Shaman, and even a few recovering Catholics similar to myself.

(I) What does the concept of having God’s Phone Number mean?

(M) This is a very big question. When I started the book, the concept of God’s Phone Number was just an entrée for me to encourage people to talk about who God was for them. As I found more people to talk to and also discovered my spiritual teacher, a Cherokee Shaman, I came to realize that have a “phone number to God” was actually as simple and as difficult as having a direct connection with God. And this connection was not something that you had overnight, but something that anyone can develop over time. After a while it really becomes like a phone number though, since you can actually started to receive wisdom back after “connecting.” This is quite profound. I “connect” every day now and have a conversation of sorts. There are times I don’t receive any wisdom back and other times that I get exactly the answer that I need to go

forth to solve my issues. Many times I “connect” to just tell God, and Earth Mother, that I love them and I am very grateful for what they have brought into my life.

(I) What do you mean by “connect”?

(M) Well “connecting” is really how I make my phone call to God everyday. Sometimes I do it all day long - if I’m having a bad day. It’s really quite simple. I just say: “Creator, Earth Father, this is your Earth daughter, Mare.” And then I’ll either say “I love you,” or “thanks, Pops”, or whatever is on my mind, in brief. And then I’ll say: “Creatress, Earth Mother, this is your Earth daughter, Mare.” And again, I’ll tell Her that I love Her or thanks for all that She has given me. In truth, it is because of Earth Mother that any of us have the bodies we have, the houses, the cars, I mean, the ability to be alive. It is rather amazing that Earth Mother has evolved to the point of giving humans the ability to live, think, create. So I feel rather grateful to Her a lot. I don’t worship Her, for she is only a part of the Creator. But this is Her planet that we live on.

(I) Well, this is most interesting. We need to wrap up here but are there any final thoughts that you would like to share?

(M) I would like to say one more thing concerning my book. What I have learned in the journey of creating this book, doing all the interviews, listening to diverse people from diverse religious and spiritual backgrounds is that there are many paths to God. Matthew Fox, the controversial Catholic Priest who was expelled from the Dominican Order for his Creation Spirituality work, has recently completed a book called One River, Many Wells. This speaks to that same concept. In doing all the interviews for this book, I tried hard to not be judgmental of anyone’s path. I only sought to learn if they truly felt a deep connection with God, and possibly Earth Mother. It is my sense that religion can take us part of the way to being “awake” and “connected” with God but spirituality is where we really try to feel God within us. It is far more than reading scriptures and following Commandments. And where I am now is in a place of truly believing that it is everyone’s God-given right to discover the sacred and truly experience God, and love Him. But we are the ones who have to take the steps to do it. God is just waiting for us. And so is Earth Mother, for She feels very forgotten and abused these days.

(I) Thank you. It has been a fascinating interview.

(M) Thank you. It’s been quite a journey. And I know it’s not over yet!