



Carl Weschcke

Carl Llewellyn Weschcke

Bringing Magick to the Masses

Who is Carl Weschcke? you may ask. Let me give you a clue: his full name is Carl L. (for Llewellyn) Weschcke. Now you may have a better idea, for Carl is the man who brought Paganism to the masses, through his leadership of Llewellyn Worldwide. If you are Pagan and have not heard of Llewellyn publications, you must have spent the last few decades stranded on an island in the Pacific with the passengers and crew of Oceanic Flight 815. Llewellyn has published a veritable A-to-Z list of well-known Pagan authors too exhausting to include here. Among the best-known of these include Dolores Ashcroft-Nowicki, Isaac Bonewits, Raymond Buckland, Z. Budapest, Dan & Pauline Campanelli, Scott Cunningham, John Michael Greer, Mary K. Greer, Raven Grimassi, Amber K, Sirona Knight, Donald Michael Kraig, Diana L. Paxson, Silver Ravenwolf, and Robin Wood. Carl's publishing career began when Paganism was spoken of in whispers, if at all, and believed to be an occult art known only to a few. Today, Llewellyn's titles dominate the magickal publishing world and are ubiquitous in bookstores both mainstream and magickal. We are pleased to present this exclusive interview with an (heretofore) unsung hero of the Pagan Renaissance.

You have led the largest Pagan publishing company for more than fifty years. This is an amazing story, but let's start at the beginning: when did you first become familiar with Wicca?

That's a tough stretch for the memory! First, when I first heard about Witchcraft there was no "Wicca" – that was not yet a common word for "The Craft." Who hadn't heard about Witchcraft as a kid, or as an adult? OK, it wasn't what we think as Witchcraft/Wicca today, but it was there if you could look beneath the surface.

It was magic that interested me as a kid, and the occultism I read in my grandfather's library. In 1940, William Seabrook wrote *Witchcraft: Its Power in the World Today*. I'm not sure of the year I bought it, but it was in the early forties I'm sure. Seabrook was a successful popular writer writing autobiographical travel books; he knew Crowley and other occultists and he interviewed people claiming to be vampires and werewolves, wrote about voodoo and sex magic, hoodoo and Appalachian folk magic.

Of course, what 'Willie' wrote about was framed in the minor sensationalist language popular for magazine writers in the forties and fifties. And he did write a lot of that too. Sometime in the early forties I found a magazine at a friend's with an article on Willie and his wife Marjorie experimenting with sensory deprivation to induce clairvoyance. Marjorie was shown wearing a full head leather mask covering eyes and nose, leaving her to breath and speak with her mouth.

Those experiments are also described in the Witchcraft book, but in the book he also mentions encountering a 'Witch's Cradle' in rural France and describes it thus: "Suspended by heavy chains from the ceiling was a life-sized contrivance of wood, with blackened leather straps – as perverse a device as twisted human ingenuity ever invented. I knew its name and use from old engravings in books dealing with the obscure sadistic-masochistic elements in medieval sorcery. It was a witch's cradle." He indicated that it was related to sensory deprivation.

How did you actually become personally involved in Wicca? You became rather well-known as a Witch, didn't you?

I was interested in becoming clairvoyant, and hoped that there was a way that was more appealing than the life-long yogic practices described in my grandfather's books. Wearing a blindfold didn't do a thing, however, and I went on to work with candles with better success.

In 1949, Gerald Gardner, writing as "Scire. O.T.O. 4 = 7," published his novel *High Magic's Aid* in which he describes the initiation of a Witch in a manner now familiar to many of us. He describes the old Gods of Love and Laughter and Peace and Content, and the dread lords of the Outer Spaces, and the passwords, "Perfect Love and Perfect Trust."

Reading Gerald's book, I finally felt at home. I bought more of Gardner's books and even wrote to him — and he kindly answered me. In our correspondence I asked him what he knew about the 'perverse' Witch's Cradle. He responded that he knew about it and sensory deprivation for clairvoyance and out-of-body travel, but there was nothing perverse about it. He went on to say that he couldn't tell me more because of his oaths, but that he could refer me to others that could. Thus I encountered several more British correspondents.

At this same time, I was studying everything Crowley and Dion Fortune wrote, and was a mail order student of the Society of the Inner Light, through which I later met Gareth Knight. Most of my work was Kabalistic, but also very diverse: I devoured the books of Manly Hall, Rudolf Steiner, Blavatsky, Besant, Leadbeater, and others. I was also a mail-order student of AMORC Rosicrucians.

It wasn't until, decades later, when I published Ray Buckland and Lady Sheba, that I came back to Witchcraft. I was initiated by Lady Sheba along with several others who became our coveners.

Later, under my direction, Llewellyn sponsored the Gnosticon Festivals, which included public Wiccan ceremonies (including my handfasting) and we attracted Wiccans from the Twin Cities, Chicago, Madison and Cincinnati. Wicca was becoming more well-known, and I did a half-hour documentary for local television and responded to numerous requests for radio, television, magazine and newspaper interviews. There was a lot of that public "service" work, and it eventually became too much to handle along with business and family, so I declined further invitations and requests: by then many other groups were organizing to give Wicca a positive public face, and I concentrated on the business side of publishing for the Pagan community.

How did you decide to become a publisher?

Books were always a major part of my life, and "occult" even more so. Even in pre-school, my grandfather's Theosophical books were fascinating. That interest continued and after college I embarked on more intense study of Steiner, Bailey, Crowley, astrology, and Dion Fortune.



Carl's interest in ESP is exemplified by the cover story of Llewellyn's astrological magazine *MinuteScope* in 1964.

Even though I worked in the pharmaceutical industry, I took graduate courses in philosophy at the University of Minnesota, and some point, developed the fantasy of being a book publisher and printed up some stationary for "The Baron's Press" — "Baron" having been a high-school nickname.

I never gave up the dream of being a publisher and when, in 1959, I saw a classified advertisement offering a small astrological publishing company for sale, I responded. The original owner, George Llewellyn, had run the business for over fifty years and passed away in 1954. The current owner, Richard Juline, was a printer who did a fine job of running Llewellyn but whose heart was really in printing. I flew to Los Angeles and negotiated the purchase of Llewellyn.

What were the first things you did with Llewellyn as the new owner?

Llewellyn had long been in the business of selling both its own titles and those of other publishers via mail order. One of my first decisions was to add to the mail order catalog; eventually we distributed every English language astrological and occult book that we could find! We also continued publishing Llewellyn's own titles. The first new title published under my leadership was *Vocational Guidance by Astrology* by Charles Luntz, a natural extension of Llewellyn's main niche in astrological titles.

My next publishing project was to contact Dion Fortune's group and propose to re-publish several of her out-of-print titles. I was put in contact with the society's librarian, Basil Wilby — who eventually adopted the pseudonym of Gareth Knight — and we negotiated right to publish *The Secrets of Dr. Taverner*.

Soon we began to publish more occult works such as published Buckland's *Witchcraft from the Inside* and *Practical Candle Burning*, and Lady Sheba's *Book of Shadows* and *Grimoire*. At the same time we published a lot of Crowley and

Regardie, and then books by Jonn Mumford, Lou Culling, Noel Tyl, Judy Hippkind, Denning & Phillips' five volume *The Magical Philosophy* and much more.

Our model was to continue with our core Astrology titles while we added new occult subjects: Witchcraft and Wicca, Magick, Palmistry, our first Tarot deck (Aleister Crowley's *Thoth* Tarot Deck) and associated disciplines like Palmistry, Graphology and Tantra. We also published titles in the Paranormal field, published *Gnostica* Magazine and held the *Gnosticon* conventions as an extension of our retail store in downtown Minneapolis.

Were there other U.S. book publishers in the occult market when you entered it?

No, we were pretty much on our own. Some credit us with starting the New Age in publishing, but it really was the times themselves. We were pioneers in this market, and we worked hard, and we believed — and still believe — in what we are doing.

I like to stick with the term "New Age" because to me the books we publish are all about spiritual growth and transformation. Some subjects, like astrology and yoga are, of course, ancient, but they've been renewed. Occultism is no longer "hidden" away and magick is no longer practiced only in secret, elitist orders. Today this movement encompasses disciplines from Jungian psychology to quantum physics; it's mysticism unveiled and spirituality born again.

Is it true that for a time the Llewellyn headquarters were located in a haunted mansion?

Yes, it's true: our Summit Avenue headquarters were indeed haunted, something I knew before we bought the property. The director of the Art School — which previously occupied the residence — informed me of several instances of manifestation. It was the general belief of the faculty that two entities they named Martha and George occupied the house. I was thrilled! Our business eventually outgrew that house and we had to move on, but it was a great favorite of mine.

How do you define Paganism? Wicca?

I don't like precise definitions of magic and spirituality. Such categorizations are popular in academia and in bookstores, but there are no hard lines between any of the metaphysical subjects. Tarot is divination, Kabbalah, a meditative practice, and a spiritual journey, all rolled into one. Magick is all these things plus herbalism, numerology, song and dance, and certainly includes elements of shamanism.

Paganism is a movement of Nature spirituality. I say that Pagans can also be Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, and more. Paganism should not be defined as non-Christian, or anti-Christian, even though Paganism may be thus defined (and denounced) by Christian churches. That's their problem, not ours. Pagans simply find more inspiration and love in Nature than in the confining walls of Sunday churches.

Although I'm not fond of structured definitions, I do distinguish between Wicca and Witchcraft. I think of Witchcraft as a broader subject than Wicca. Witchcraft is eclectic, as is all modern occult and metaphysical practice. It encompasses practices of herbalism, divination, Tarot, Astrology, healing, astral projection, chanting, and more — even channelling.

For me — and I only speak for myself — Wicca is a true, modern Nature Religion. I practice Wicca as I look outside my office window and see the trees swaying in a gentle breeze, as I listen to the sound of the waterfall and the song of birds. I practice Wicca when I talk to my granddaughter, and when I recognize that I need to lose weight and do something about it. I am Wiccan in all that I try to do without benefit of seminary study or IRS approval. I am Wiccan every day of the week and every hour of the day. I am Wiccan because I see beauty in this world and because I seek to add beauty to my environment.

Carl L. Weschcke — a personal view

A fellow Virgo, Carl has always been an inspiration to me. He is one of the few men I truly admire and I view him as of a bit of a father figure.

Carl's grandfather was vice-president of the American Theosophical Society and this may have had much to do with why Carl, born into a Roman Catholic family, developed a lifelong interest in metaphysics. In 1960 he purchased Llewellyn Publications, an old astrological publishing house, and within two decades was issuing up to fifty new titles a year. Carl has built the company into the world's leading New Age publisher.

I became acquainted with Carl in 1969, when I submitted my book *Witchcraft From the Inside* to Llewellyn for publication. That was to be the start of a forty-year association with Carl and his company.

In the early days I often attended the famous Gnosticon festivals and parties held at the Summit Avenue house that was Carl's impressive home for many years. I have seen his son Gabriel grow from a baby into a capable publisher in his own right. Carl is a man of ideas, as full of innovative thoughts as when he first started publishing more than fifty years ago. Carl will never really grow old, and that's an achievement I heartily applaud.
RAYMOND BUCKLAND. ▲

I am Wiccan because I try to act with awareness and responsibility and knowledge in whatever I do. Wicca is finding our source within Nature, and seeing Nature as the whole that is. Nature is not just those trees outside my window, but in the whole Universe that is both visible and invisible to my limited perception. I recognize that there is life and consciousness everywhere.

Wicca is the magic of the new sciences of quantum physics and the new healing of intentional living. What is Wicca? It's Love. And to be Wiccan is to Love. Can you define "Love?" No. You experience it. Wicca is not something to be defined but to be experienced. It is experience itself. Love is experience. I love, and I open myself to love.

Moving on to the subject of Pagan publishing, can you tell me how you choose books to publish?

My first question of a potential title (besides it being well-written) is: will this book reach an audience? This isn't just a commercial question (though it can be interpreted that way) but a spiritual one: I have always felt it important to reach more people. If we have something important to offer, then isn't it worthwhile to reach out and offer it?

We are sometimes criticized for publishing too many books for beginners, the so-called "fluffy bunnies." But we live in a society composed of people from many backgrounds, of varying levels of education and intelligence. Are we to limit Wicca to only those who are from a single "approved" background? Are these critics saying there's too many "beginners" in the world? Do they want to close the doors so that only the present believers are left?

We live in fast-changing times, and people's interests and reference points change. For beginners in particular, books need to be written in the current vernacular with references that can be easily comprehended. What if there was only one "approved" (by whom?) beginner book? Would that single book appeal to everyone potentially interested in learning about the Craft? Would that single book speak the language of current interest and references for everyone? Would only one single book ever be sufficient?

I've noticed a lot of talk in the community (especially on the Web) about "where are the Advanced Wicca books?" Would you care to comment?

Recently, I asked a related question to the community via the Llewellyn Online Journal: "What do Wiccans and Pagans want in advanced books?"



I am Wiccan because I see beauty in this world and because I seek to add beauty to my environment. To be Wiccan is to Love. Wicca is not to be defined, but to be experienced.

I received nearly two hundred responses, many with great suggestions. I ended up having an extended correspondence with about fifty of those responders. We exploring their ideas further, developed themes, and in several cases I encouraged them to *write* the very books they were asking for. Out of that exchange we already have several manuscripts that I consider very exciting. One, in particular, was of great interest because it opened up a totally new field (to me) of African Spiritism called "Polo." Working with that author, we came up with a proposal for an introductory book, and then we hope to follow that with one or more advanced books showing the evolution of African Spiritist religions and practices. (I hasten to explain that this is not Santeria or Candombe or other derivative religious practices but the core behind many of them, unaffected by Catholicism.)

Other advanced titles forthcoming include at least two rune books, one on chaos magick, several new approaches to folk magic and others on Pagan practices within particular nationalities. One of those of particular interest to me is on Russian folk magic. Certainly one of the challenges we encounter is the question of what any of us mean when we use that word, "advanced." For some it is about the differences to be experienced within the traditional delineations of first, second and third degrees of Gardnerian Wicca and its derivatives.

For others it is a request for academic quality and style. Several requests were for autobiographies of the better-known Wiccan and Pagan leaders. But, I don't think we have fully comprehended what "advanced" in contrast to "beginners" or "introductory" means — or, within that context, what "intermediate" might mean.

For example, do Frater U.D.'s *High Magic I* and *High Magic II* qualify as advanced? Many respondents expressed no interest in Ceremonial Magick, even though Gardner in at least one published incident identified himself as an O.T.O. initiate. I have a very eclectic approach involving my own Wiccan beliefs. Advanced books for Wiccan's and Pagans? To me, it's not a question of "beginners" or "advanced" — such thinking limits one to believing that there is only one "authorized" path, and that one has to learn practices in a specific order.

To me, all knowledge that helps us to expand human awareness — that gives us ways to organize our observations and provides us with the means to greater self-understanding and personal development — is “advanced.” Some of these methods are as old as astrology, the Kabbalah, the casting of Runes, techniques to alter consciousness, etc., but all of these are *living* practices that grow and adapt.

The greatest source of Wisdom is deep inside each person, within our own Divine Selves. Don't just listen to me, don't listen to the Reverend whoever or the Grand poo-pah of whatever. Learn the techniques of knowledge yourself, learn to organize your knowledge, learn to expand your awareness to include psychic skills and spiritual sources, train your mind, and become “more than you are.”

Anything you would care to leave us with in parting?

It is everyone's responsibility to grow and gain wisdom. Stop depending only on others to tell you what's true, what's correct, how to vote, how to spend your money, where to live, where to travel, when to do this, when to do that, who to love, who to hate and the whole litany of instructions others seek to impose on you.

You have only one true commandment to follow, and that is to grow and become more than you are. I am an optimist, but also a realist. We face considerable challenges at this moment, and they will not be easily resolved.

But, I believe we will muddle our way through and I expect most of us will be around to welcome in the year 2013 and we will see a gradual and better resolution of these challenges than ever before. There is no separation between the world community and the magical community — except that the magical community, because of our greater access to knowledge — has more responsibility for “saving the world.” I hope to do my part. ▲

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Tips for Aspiring Writers

I'm not a writing coach, but I can offer a few ideas about how to get published:

1. This might seem obvious, but you'd be surprised how many folks don't understand it: Write a good book. Take writing classes and learn how to write, hire an editor or a writing coach to look over your manuscript. Don't presume that because just you think you have a good idea and can type that you can write a book.
2. Read our guidelines, be familiar with the type of books we publish, use spelling and grammar checkers. Please!
3. Don't tell us that you are ready for Oprah.
4. Don't do a “me-too” book. Just because Lady Double X wrote a book on Celtic Myth doesn't mean that you should write one, too.
5. This one is a pet peeve of mine: Don't plagiarize. All too many writers today are lifting material directly from the Web or from other books (sometimes even ones we published!) without attribution. We have a full time person now whose job it is to chase down pirates and plagiarizers. It's a very sad state of affairs.
6. Don't write what you don't know.
7. Don't presume that because you've taken a photograph that you own the publication rights. Get releases from your subjects.
8. If you are quoting live people, get written releases and permissions for exact quotes.
9. Be sure to give credit where credit is due and include permissions with your submission.
10. Don't assume you will get rich by writing a best-seller. We do have a few authors with multiple books who earn a comfortable living, but it takes awhile.

Those were mostly the Thou-Shalt-Nots. Now, let's have some enthusiasm:

1. Writing is a great adventure. Enjoy! (If you don't like what you are writing, no one else will, either.)
2. Write on what you want to learn more about. Discovery and research is a vital part of good writing.
3. Be prepared to read what you've written with a critical eye and to re-write it more than once. It will get better, especially if you allow time in between for your thoughts to mature. Ideally, when you read what you've written you should feel amazed at how good it is — and then realize it probably isn't *that* good.
4. Practice writing fiction. Learn to let the characters in your short of novel tell their own story. If you can write fiction that is enjoyable to read, you will be able to write non-fiction that is enjoyable to read, too.
5. Plan on doing a lot of self-promotion, mostly at your own expense. If you're good at it, you will be successful. That sounds redundant, but it isn't. Writing is a unique pursuit. There are many career fields in which one can be good at something and still be neither successful nor happy. A good writer can be all three. I can think of only a few forms of self-employment that can be as rewarding as writing, and I am speaking beyond the monetary rewards. CARL WESCHCKE. ▲