



BOOK REVIEW

By Peggy Forde

As a teenager in the 1970s, my friends and I would practice

"witchcraft" – casting

"spells" to attract the boys we liked, or to strike down teachers who we didn't like! As a university student, we read Tarot cards, hoping to learn what lay ahead of us as we moved into our adult lives. I got into yoga and meditation as a way to deal with heartbreak and began an on and off practice that became part of my pursuit of a healthy lifestyle. However, I never abandoned the faith that I was born into, even though I may not have attended worship on a regular basis for periods of time.

Those of you who have read the United Church Observer (now Broadview) might have read columns on spirituality by Anne Bokma. If you have, you will know that she left her fundamentalist Christian church as a young adult and, as a consequence, became estranged from her family. Reading her columns, one also knows that she never abandoned the need to live "spiritually".

Bokma has written a book about her pursuit of a "more spiritual life". **My Year of Living Spiritually** documents her attempt to understand a variety of spiritual practices including witchcraft, Tarot and yoga/meditation over the course of a year. She takes us on a trip (quite literally when she experiments with magic mushrooms) and I quite enjoyed "the ride".

Many of us have enjoyed walks in the woods, occasionally feeling the presence of a higher spirit which we might call God. Bokma takes it a step further and joins a guided "Forest Bathing" expedition which is designed to "calm the mind, lift the soul and decrease blood pressure". She also climbs a tree and visits Walden Pond to pay homage to

Henry David Thoreau, the grandfather of the simplicity movement.

Some of us have participated in retreats, where we have studied scripture, learned about other faiths and bonded with our fellow participants. Bokma retreats to a flotation chamber to achieve perfect sensory deprivation and once she gets past all the noise in her head, begins to lose track of time and space, a condition akin to meditation. She also books a couple of nights in a "treehouse" AirBnB where she can enjoy the peace and solitude that is rare when one is immersed in a busy family life. Allowing herself these times of "apartness", she gathers insight into her personal spiritual life.

After she left the church of her youth, and with a young family, Bokma joined the United Church but eventually found that she just wasn't believing. Still wishing to belong to a church community, she found her way to the Unitarians, which further estranged her from her mother, especially. She found a community of like-minded people where she felt comfortable. To me, it sounds a lot like the United Church but without God and Jesus!

In the final chapters, Bokma confronts death, relating her experiences with the deaths of her father and step-father. She hosts a Death Over Dinner gathering for a group of women which becomes almost a therapy session!

Exploring gratitude brings a surprising result—reconciliation with her mother. The "happy ending" we all wish for at the end of a good story.

Bokma's style is down to earth and conversational. I felt like I was having coffee with her and having a chat about our different faith journeys. I sometimes found myself thinking about some of my own spiritual practices.

I highly recommend this book to anyone who has ever wondered what it feels like to receive a Reiki treatment or to have your Chakras aligned, or wondered why and how the Spiritual But Not Religious celebrate Christmas and other Christian holidays. If you have ever questioned your faith or wondered why people turn away from organized religion, you will enjoy this book!