

A decorative banner with a scalloped edge, containing the author's name. Above the banner are several clear, faceted crystals and green leaves with small white flowers. The background is a soft, watercolor-style sky in shades of blue and purple.

Anne Bokma

# My Year

*From Woo-Woo to Wonderful*

# of Living

*One Woman's Secular Quest for a More Soulful Life*

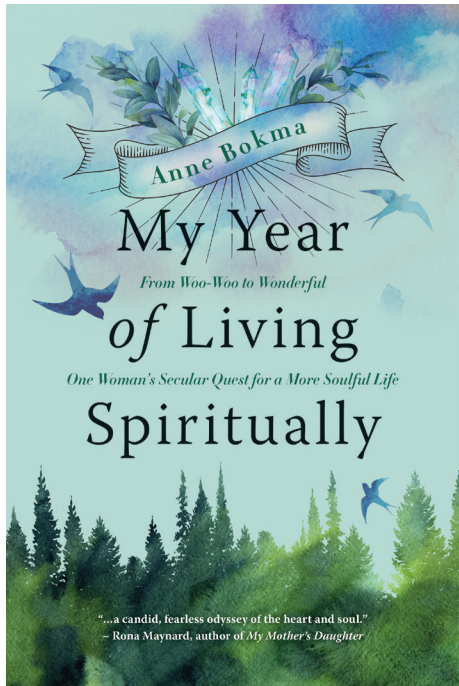
# Spiritually

# PRESS KIT





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# My Year of Living Spiritually

*From Woo-woo to Wonderful—One Woman's Secular Quest for a More Soulful Life*

ANNE BOKMA



*The year the author sang in choirs, danced with witches, picked out her coffin, tried magic mushrooms and learned to be more grateful*

*Part seeker's memoir, part spiritual travelogue, this is a book for anyone looking to uncover—or recover—their spiritual self.*

IN 2017, ANNE BOKMA EMBARKED ON A QUEST TO BECOME A more spiritual person. After leaving the fundamentalist religion of her youth, she became one of the 80 million North Americans who consider themselves "spiritual-but-not-religious," the fastest growing "faith" category.

In mid-life she found herself addicted to busyness, drinking too much, hooked on social media, dreading the empty nest and still struggling with alienation from her ultra-religious family. In response, she set out on a year-long whirlwind adventure to immerse herself in a variety of sacred practices—each of which proved to be illuminating in unexpected ways—to try to develop her own definition of what it means to be spiritual.

In *My Year of Living Spiritually*, Bokma documents a diverse range of soulful first-person experiences—from taking a dip in Thoreau's Walden Pond, to trying magic mushrooms for the first time, to enrolling in a week-long witch camp—in an entertaining and enlightening way that will compel readers (non-believers and believers alike) to try a few spiritual practices of their own. Along the way she reconsiders key relationships in her life and begins to experience the greater depth of meaning, connection, gratitude, simplicity and inner peace that we all long for. Readers will find it an inspiring roadmap for their own spiritual journeys.

**ANNE BOKMA** is a nationally recognized award-winning freelance journalist who specializes in writing on spiritual topics. She was the "Spiritual But Secular" columnist for the *United Church Observer* (now *Broadview*) before writing her popular *My Year of Living Spiritually* blog for the magazine. Her articles have appeared in many of Canada's leading national magazines and newspapers. She is a dynamic public speaker and the founder of the popular 6-Minute Memoir "Speed Storytelling For a Cause" charity event. She lives in Hamilton, ON.

My Year of Living Spiritually  
*From Woo-woo to Wonderful—One Woman's Secular Quest for a More Soulful Life*  
by Anne Bokma

SPIRITUALITY / MEMOIR

\$24.95 • PAPER • 6" X 9" • 272 PAGES  
12 B&W PHOTOGRAPHS  
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PUB DATE: October 26, 2019

For more information, or to schedule  
an interview with Anne Bokma,  
please contact:

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Photo by Lucy Mahoney

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**ANNE BOKMA** was born a sinner. At least that's what she was raised to believe. When she left the strict fundamentalist Christian church of her youth, she was told by the elders and her own family that she would burn in hell. For years she felt lost in a spiritual wilderness.

In mid-life Bokma found herself addicted to busyness, drinking too much, hooked on social media, dreading the empty nest and still struggling with alienation from her ultra-religious family. In response, she embarks on a quest to become a more spiritual person and experiments with a wide variety of spiritual practices—each of which proves to be illuminating in unexpected ways. The experience also causes her to reconsider some significant relationships in her life.

Bokma is an internationally recognized journalist with a specialty in spiritual writing. Her work has been honored with awards from the Canadian Association of Journalists, the North American Travel Journalists Association, the Canadian Church Press and the U.S. Associated Church Press. A leading expert on North America's 80-million strong "spiritual-but-not-religious" demographic, Bokma was the award-winning "Spiritual But Secular" columnist for the *United Church Observer* (now *Broadview*) for four years before writing her popular *My Year of Living Spiritually* blog for the magazine.

She is the founder of the 6-Minute Memoir "Speed Storytelling For a Cause," a quarterly event which raises funds for local charities in her hometown of Hamilton, Ontario. She is also known for leading the only organized indoor protest against Bill Cosby during his final tour, a protest that made international headlines.

Anne Bokma lives in Hamilton ON.

Visit <https://www.annebokma.com/> for more information.



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# A SPIRITUAL MENU



*Author Anne Bokma samples from a smorgasbord of spiritual practices for her book *My Year of Living Spiritually: From Woo-Woo to Wonderful—One Woman's Secular Quest for a More Soulful Life*.*

The "spiritual-but-not-religious" number 80 million North Americans and are the fastest growing "faith" group. Rather than devoting themselves to organizational conformity and digging deeply into a single religion, they prefer to sample from a wide variety of practices from the spiritual smorgasbord.

"Who doesn't love a big buffet?" asks Anne Bokma –  
Below is a selection of 23 spiritual practices she engaged in during her experimental year:

1. Pilgrimage: A dip in Thoreau's iconic Walden Pond – *A transcendentalist baptism*
2. Observing Lent: 40 days booze-free – *High on dry*
3. Yoga: Ashtanga & goat yoga – *Frolicking with fuzzy creatures trumps the warrior pose*
4. Solitude: A treehouse time-out – *Getting comfortable with silence*
5. Chakra balancing: A session with a shaman – *Clearing the blockages—a spiritual enema*
6. Witch camp: Casting a circle & raising a cone of power – *A muggle goes undercover*
7. Protest: The Women's March on Washington – *Divine defiance*
8. Psychedelic psilocybin: Taking a little trip – *Mom on 'shrooms—a magical mystery tour*
9. Forest therapy: A dose of phytoncide, nature's serotonin – *Going out on a limb by talking to trees*



10. Death awareness: Hosting a death dinner, choosing a coffin, picking a burial plot – *A foray through the valley of the shadow*
11. Unplugging: Cutting back on screen time – *Ta-ta to Twitter, nixing Netflix*
12. Psychic encounters: A visit to Lily Dale, North America's oldest spiritual community – *A medium offers a message from beyond the grave*
13. Creating a home altar: Making room for sacred space – *Shopping for Buddha bling*
14. Singing: Making music at the side of the deathbed & on the edge of The Atlantic – *Finding my voice*
15. Float tank: Saltwater immersion – *Delightful drifting*
16. Holotropic breathwork: Heavy breathing as spiritual therapy – *Who knew hyperventilating could lead to an ecstatic experience?*
17. Church: Pulled to the pew – *At home among the Unitarians*
18. Tarot: Drawing the Devil and the Death cards – *A tool for divine direction?*
19. Gratitude: A daily check-in with the Happy Tapper app – *Thank you, thank you very much*
20. Reiki: The magic touch – *A bizarre visit from "soul guides"*
21. Simplicity: Getting my house in order with Marie Kondo – *Tidying brings transformation*
22. Past life regression: Back to the past – *Born again. And again. And again*
23. Tattoo me: A bird on my shoulder – *Marked for life*





# A conversation with author Anne Bokma

## *My Year of Living Spiritually: One Woman's Secular Quest for a More Soulful Life*



### *What's the premise of your book?*

In 2017, I embarked on a 12-month quest to become a more spiritual person. Raised in a strict fundamentalist Christian home, I left my religion many years ago but felt something was missing from my life. My spiritual self was flagging and I wanted to revive my soul. I embarked on a holy host of spiritual practices to try and do just that.



### *What are some of the spiritual practices you tried?*

There were the standard ones—singing in a choir, starting a gratitude practice, observing Lent and going on a pilgrimage. Some were more unconventional—I spent a week at a witch camp, took magic mushrooms for the first time, hosted a death dinner and picked out my coffin, climbed into a tank for a float therapy session, did past life regression therapy and something called holotropic breathwork, a form of rapid-fire breathing that induces visions. I also booked myself into a remote treehouse as an experiment in solitude, tried forest therapy and goat yoga, learned to read tarot, joined the Women's March on Washington and diligently followed all of Marie Kondo's "magic tidying" advice to declutter my home as an exercise in simplicity. (I considered adding tantric sex to the list but after 30 years of marriage neither my husband nor I had the stamina for it.) Each of these practices proved to be illuminating in unexpected ways.



### *Was there anything in particular that compelled you to dive into this year of experiences and to turn them into a book now?*

Midlife hit with a wallop. At 55, suddenly everything seemed entirely predictable, from the grey roots on my head to the plantar fasciitis in my feet. In the past year I've attended four funerals. I know there are more days behind me than ahead, and I want those days to count. And yet I was addicted to busyness, drinking too much, hooked on social media, dreading the prospect of the empty nest and still struggling with the alienation from my ultra-religious family. I felt lost in a spiritual wilderness.



***What were some of your most memorable spiritual experiences?***

Swimming in Henry David Thoreau’s iconic Walden Pond, a place of incredible natural beauty and transcendentalist history, felt like a baptism of sorts. Giving up alcohol for the 40 days of Lent was the kickstart I needed to curtail my consumption. Singing in a deathbed choir brought me closer to death and suffering than I’d ever been and was profoundly moving. My treehouse timeout made me realize I could enjoy my own company, something I hadn’t been able to do much before. Taking magic mushrooms proved to be a peak experience—right up there with childbirth.



***You grew up in a strict fundamentalist home and have been estranged from your family for long periods of time. How did this inform your spiritual journey?***

I was born into an obscure fundamentalist Dutch religious sect and raised with the notion that I was one of God’s chosen people. We prayed and read the Bible at every meal, attended church twice on Sundays and I had a private school Christian education. When I left this religion, I was told by the church and my parents that I would go to hell. Leaving the church was easy but hurting my family—especially my mother, whom I’d been very close to— was hard. The origin of the word “religion” comes from the Latin word, “ligare,” which means to bind. In my case, religion had the opposite effect. It separated me from my family and was a great unravelling. There are many former fundamentalists like myself who are torn between the desire to be true to ourselves and the need to be accepted by our families. We are turned off religion but still want a spiritual life.



***You describe yourself as “spiritual-but-not-religious” and point out that traditional religion isn’t working for a lot of people. What’s the difference between spirituality and religion?***

Only one in five Canadians attends religious services regularly and almost 10,000 religious spaces—a third of all faith-owned buildings—are expected to close in Canada in the next decade. Meanwhile, the “spiritual-but-not-religious” (SBNR for short) are creating a major shift in the religious landscape. Almost 80 million North Americans are SBNR and represent the fastest growing “faith” group in the west. Religion is about looking to a higher power for answers, spirituality is about looking within. The SBNR are rejecting traditional religious rituals for their own customized spiritual practices. They don’t believe you need God to be good.



***How did this year of spiritual experimentation change you?***

I don’t claim to be a paragon of spiritual enlightenment—I don’t wake each day at dawn to the sound of a singing bowl and spend an hour meditating. But experimenting with a couple of dozen spiritual practices has brought greater joy and meaning to my life. I sing more and go on social media less. I spend more time in solitude and in nature. I’m a lot more grateful. I got my house in order. This year offered answers about how to live more attentively and authentically in the world. It made me consider what it means to be a good daughter, a good wife, a good mother, a good person. It also resulted in significant changes in a couple of major relationships. It meant forgiveness—not just of others, but of myself. I was damaged by religion but healed by spirituality.

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