

CONFESSIONS OF A BONE WOMAN

BY LUCINDA BAKKEN WHITE

As the happy child of a single parent, I loved to spend my days outdoors, running, jumping, climbing trees, and collecting the treasures I would find on my adventures. When I was 11, my mother remarried, and I was put on the path to becoming a yuppie, with no time to indulge my free-spirited, nature-loving roots. Under pressure to perform, I worked hard to achieve material success, but over time I could feel the drudgery of my daily routines and external expectations sucking the life-force out of me.

On my 40th birthday I felt the call of the wild and my life unexpectedly shifted. While visiting my friend's ranch in Montana, I saw an ancient shard of buffalo bone sticking out of a rock face and was compelled to unearth it from the sediments of time. Enlivened by that experience, I began to spend more time in nature. Whenever I wandered, I came across random animal bones and was inspired to bring them home. I turned to bookstores, libraries, and wildlife documentaries to learn more about bone identification, wild animal behavior, the causes of death, and the symbolic meaning behind my finds. Working with deceased animals and their bones has been an intuitive journey for which there was no roadmap. It's a spiritual experience that breathes new life into me while giving their lives a renewed purpose.

The day finally came when my love affair with bones was in need of a studio; as it happened, our new ranch had a barn, and our house had a storage area beneath it, allowing me to separate my studio into two spaces. Unfortunately, my relationship with bones was in sharp contrast to my opulent lifestyle, so my studio and bone art was kept a secret out of my fear of being perceived as strange or macabre. >



Photo by Scott Kline

The room under our house has been perfect for curing animals, all of which are ethically sourced. It has screened-in areas that allow for proper ventilation and also serve to keep out the bugs, scavengers, and detritivores. I think of this space as the “Underworld” — a place to bless the animals and the final stage of life with which our society has yet to make peace. *Fur, flesh, bone, claw, tooth, and sinew — I feel graced by their presence in all the phases of transformation.* Once the bones are clean, I take them to my barn and arrange them for display.

When I first set up this studio, I had no plans or goals. The experience was sacred and joyful. No one I knew was working with

animal bones or parts, so it felt uncharted, as though there were no rules, and I relished the freedom. The first thing I hung on the wall was a 5-foot-tall elk skull with antlers that our ranch manager had removed from a barbed wire fence in Montana and driven to California for me. I imagined the antlers as giant antennas, connecting my barn to the spiritual realm and the animal kingdom at large. Next, I brought in a rectangular recycled teak table surrounded by 12 high-back chairs, each draped with a sheepskin ethically sourced from a nomadic shepherd in Poland. The table is the larger of my two altars; on it are gemstones arranged in patterns of sacred geometry and candles that honor each of the four directions: earth, air, water, fire. >



**MY 3 FAVORITE
STUDIO BOOKS**

“Animal-Speak: The Spiritual & Magical Powers of Creatures Great and Small”
by Ted Andrews
(Llewellyn Publications, 2002)

“Women Who Run With the Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype”
by Clarissa Pinkola Estés
(Ballantine Books, 1996)

“Bone Builder’s Notebook”
by Lee Post
(self-published)



Touring the barn is a mystical journey. Everywhere you look there are things to see, and you'll never see it all. Snake skins, deer antlers, fox skulls, a rabbit head staff, pelts, and paintings ... it is truly a feast for the eyes. Turning your attention upward, a fully articulated coyote skeleton seems to be galloping through the air across the cathedral ceilings. A black crow, its wide wings stretched as though in flight, stands out against the colorful array of dried flowers hanging from the rafters.

The barn studio is a sanctuary, a natural history museum, and a symbol of my heart. *When I finally realized that the animals had lured me back to the curious, spontaneous, and joyful nature I had as a child, I no longer felt embarrassed about my creative work.* Now I welcome people into my barn's mystery to play in the nooks and crannies, and allow the animals to inspire their imagination.

Lucinda Bakken White is an Authentic Wildness Guide, an expert in the process of self-discovery and personal transformation, and the author of "Confessions of a Bone Woman: Realizing Authentic Wildness in a Civilized World" (Wild Woman Books, 2018). Through private coaching, public speaking, and her writings, she teaches how to be authentically wild in a civilized world. You can learn more at authenticwildness.com.

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In my studio ...



... I feel empowered. I built this studio from the ground up. It started as a 6' x 12' cargo trailer and slowly but surely morphed into a creative space. Being one of the biggest projects I've taken on size-wise and financially, it was quite intimidating at first. It reminds me each day that I can conquer the impossible if I put my head down and get to work. My goal was to create a space that felt open and inviting. Each morning I head out to the studio with a cup of coffee in hand, throw open all the doors, and sit at my bench. Having a space that allows me to feel the spring breeze or smell the rain after a summer storm consistently influences my designs. It's a space where I can be one with my surroundings. Being able to take my studio with me anywhere is beneficial as well — wherever I feel inspired, I have the means to create!

— MIRANDA PAUL (@MIRANDAPAUL)