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This is Tide to the Moon, the ever-evolving podcast of stories and reflections on life and living connected to nature. My name is Kate Lawtence and I am your host.

This episode is coming out on the new moon on 30 May at 9.30pm.
This lunar cycle will include Winter Solstice on June 21 (or if you are in the northern hemisphere it is the summer solstice,)

and so I have decided to do a trinity of connected episodes for this month,

The series is about and tells the story of Joan of Arc, or a version of this well known story that I crafted and performed a few years ago.

The theme that I explore through the story of Jan of Arc is that of faith.
The winter solstice is a time of descent and darkness, and in ancient times faith was needed to believe that the sun and the light would return from the nadir of night that is the shortest day of the year.

In this first episode I'll introduce the context and how I came to tell this story and we'll hear the first part one of the Story of Joan of arc

In the next episode which will come out on the full moon, a week before the solstice, I will finish telling the story of Joan of Arc and in the third episode will be on June 29 for the new moon. I will share my thoughts and reflection on the story, the impact it has had on me and why I continue to be drawn back to the story of Jan of Arc

So here goes with part one:

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Before I declared myself to be an audio producer, I was an oral storyteller.

I have crafted and told countless stories, ranging from folktales to personal stories and much in between.

The pinnacle of my years solely focussed on in-person oral storytelling was a show I developed called Fantastical Feminist Folktales.

It was a collection of five or six stories, most of them folktales I had adapted or re crafted, all with strong female protagonists and all of them with messages that deeply resonated with my values.

Given I loved all the stories I will no doubt bring them into this podcast at some point or other.

For now I want to talk about the only true story in the performance.

When this idea of creating a show as a collection of folktales with strong female characters came, I already had a number of shorter folktales I'd crafted and told.

For sure I would tighten and polish them for a proper show, but I wanted a new story, for the creative challenge of it, and because I didn't have enough material, and I wanted to try my hand at an historical story, a true story, and I had an idea that a story from the time of the witch hunts because this period of history was the hard edge of institutional violence against women and the impact still reverberates down the centuries.

I expected to find pagans, women who still held reverence for the Old Ways, the healers and herbalists, midwives and witches.

I had a chat with my good storytelling friend Jackie and she suggested a few people including Joan of Arc

All I knew of Joan of Arc was a very vague memory from primary school of her riding a horse ahead of an army, and maybe she was naked too...

(Turns out that was lady Godiva who rode through the streets naked to protest the tax her husband had imposed on his tenants.

So leaving lady Godiva behind some cursory research told me Joan was burnt at the stake, so far so good.

But as I read on I was disappointed to find she was a deeply Christian woman, killed by the church and 500 years later made a saint by the same church?

Dam, no pagan proselytising to be had with this story.

But there is something about faith that I revere and draw upon in my own life, that I know is not held in monopoly by the Churches.

I was intrigued enough to stay open and respect her faith
And pragmatic enough - her story was already well known and well told and I would be able to lean on the work of those before me to craft the story.

So as they say, without further ado, here is part one of the Story of Joan of Arc

'I was 13 when I first heard a voice from God for my help and guidance.

When I first heard the voice I was frightened. I was in the garden it was high summer, and the voice came from the right, from the church.

By the time I was 17, two to three times a week the voice would say to me

'You must go to France, you must go to France. You must lay the seige at Orleans. You must go to Robert de Baudricourt at Vaucouleurs. He will arrange safe travel for you. '

So said Joan of Arc in 1431 at her trial for witchcraft and heresy.

She was 19 years old

And she's referring to a time, two years earlier, when she was 17 years old.

At that time, France was in its darkest hour.

For 75 years the English had been invading the country, seeking to conquer it and claim the French crown.

For the last 20 years, the French themselves had disintegrated into Civil War.

There were the Burgundians, who had aligned with the English led by the Duke of Burgundy, and there were the Armagnacs led by the Duke of Orleans.

The French royal family itself had splintered.

In 1420, when Joan was nine, the Queen of France had signed the Treaty of Troyes with the English. And under that treaty her daughter, would marry the King of England, and their heir would inherit both the French and the English crowns.

That same treaty disinherited the Queen's son, Charles, and he was with the Armagnac camp.

Now France is geographically divided across the middle in a great arc, by the River Loire. And at the time when Joan is 17, most of the territory north of the River Loire, including Paris, is held by the English and the Burgundians.

And most of the territory south of the River Loire was held by the Armagnacs. And Charles, who is also known as The Dauphin, has his royal court south of the River at Chinon.

A few months before Joan's 17th birthday the English lay siege to the city of Orleans.

Orleans sits on the River Loire at the most northern point of that arc of the River Loire

And the thinking is that if Orleans falls to the English, the gateway to an invasion of the south of France, would lay open.

So Charles the Dauphin is like a rat in a trap.

He is considering moving his court further south, maybe even going into exile.

His coffers are empty and his soldiers are completely demoralised, they have been beaten time and time again

.

Now Joan comes from a tiny village called Domremy, that's sits up in the far north east of France, a pocket of Armagnac territory, completely surrounded by Burgundian territory.

And in her home village she's considered as good and kind, charming, maybe charismatic, but boringly pious.

But she conceals a

steely determination.

A strong and resolute voice.

A clearly focused eye.

And an unshakable faith in her God, her mission and her role.

And so she sets off to the nearest town where there's a Captain, which is Voucolours and there she seeks an audience with Robert De Baudricourt the captain, to convince him to support her mission

And her mission, as guided by the voices she hears from God, is to see France rid of the English and to have Charles crowned the rightful King of France.

Robert de Baudricourt meets her and says

“take that woman back to her father and tell him to have her beaten.”

Joan does not return to her father to be beaten,

and a few days later she comes back to De Baudricourt,

but by this stage because of the clarity of her vision and her strength of character she is starting to garner support in Vaucouleurs and 6 men say we'll go with her in the long trek to Chinon, to the Royal Court.

and so eventually Robert De Baudricourt is persuaded to support her mission to attend the royal court.

Joan's hair is cut short, she dons men's clothing, she learns to ride a horse and then her and the six armed men she's just met, set off on the 500 km trek, across mostly enemy territory,

It's a miracle in itself that they make it

but they finally arrive at the Royal Court of Charles The Dauphin in Chinon.

Now At the Royal court, they know this girl is coming.

And their only question is, is she divinely guided or is she a dupe of the devil.

And so they meet her and they can't tell so Charles decides to send her further south to Poitiers (Pwa te ay)

where all the religious clergy, theologians and learned men are gathered and there they check her virginity of course (its already been checked on Chinon, and is checked many times in the short course of her public life)

And for three weeks she is interrogated and they find she is good and pious and that there is no sign of evil in her

But they want a sign from God to show that she is truly guided by him, so they decide to set a test, and the test is that she will be allowed to lead a siege of Orleans.

And so she goes back to Chinon and over a number of weeks she is fitted for her own armour and she has a banner made.

A banner that she will carry at the head of the army going into battle

It's a big white banner and she has the words Jesus Maria painted at the top, and there's a picture of Jesus and there's two angels, one behind each of his shoulders and he's sitting in judgement on the world.

And she chooses a symbol for herself and she chooses the fleurs-de-lis, the French flower and has that painted on the banner.

And so she spent a few weeks learning to walk with the weight of the armour and learning to ride with it on and carrying the banner while she's riding.

And then her and army set off to Orleans

Now Orleans was under siege by The English and the Burgundians but they didn't have enough troops to have a fully surround the walled town, and so it is fairly easy to get Joan into Orleans,

She arrives in there with supplies and six of her entourage

But for some confusion of reasons, the army stay on the other side of the river and after Joan goes into the town they about face and go back to the last staging ground where they'd spent the previous night.

So Joan arrives into Orleans to a hero's welcome. They line the streets to catch a glimpse of the woman sent by God sent by Charles their rightful King to save Orleans, they reach their hands out to touch her and she is ready to fight

But the leaders of Orleans say "It's great that you're here, you've raised our spirits and you've brought us food we were hungry, but you've only brought six more soldiers and we're not in much better position than we were before.'

And Joan "I have been sent here on a mission from God. I have been sent by the Dauphin, the rightful King of France. I need an army. Send for the army. How can I do God's will without an army?'

So they sent for the army.

While she's waiting she decides to send a letter to the English. It will be wrapped around an arrow and fired across the river to where they are. She doesn't write it because she's illiterate, but she dictates it and the this what that letter says in part:

"King of England, and you Duke of Bedford, who call yourself the regent of the kingdom of France, submit yourselves to the King of heaven.

Restore to the Maid is sent here by God, the keys of all the fine towns that you have taken and violated in France.

And if you refuse to listen, I will raise a war cry greater than France has heard in a thousand years. "

The English fall about themselves laughing. This is hilarious.

They send a message back saying "You're a trollop, go back to herding cattle."

She is having none of it. She storms up to the ramparts and she bellows at them across the River Loire:

"Duke of Bedford and all you English men. Return to your God-given country. Or I, Joan the maid will come there and kill every last one of you without mercy. "

They didn't pay her any attention at all.

So the Armangan army comes back into Orleans, the preparations are made and they are ready to fight.

and at the break of dawn they head into battle

And Joan leads the charge with her banner held high and she rallies them:

'In the name of God and in the name of France fight!

Fight for your country!

Fight to restore France and Orleans to God's order,

fight to rid France of the English.'

And those Armagnac forces are filled with a faith and a fighting fervour they have never felt before and they surge forward

And the English see her as well and they wonder Has God has deserted us? and they falter,

But late on the first day Joan is injured in the shoulder,

she lays in a ditch and the Armagnacs are confused, they don't know what to do, they hesitate

And the English and Burgundians seize the moment and they push back..

But then Joan stands yells above the battle

“In the name of God fight, fight for France, fight.”

And they push again and they surge again and the English forces are full of self doubt and the armaganganc forces are full of courage.

And within four days, the siege of Orleans is over. And the English have retreated.

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Next episode we will complete the story of Joan of Arc

OUTRO

Thanks for listening to ‘Tide to the Moon’.

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And if you have any ideas, suggestions, requests, comments or feedback, I would love to hear from you.

You can find the show notes and contact details at storyground.com.au

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This podcast is a production of Story Ground, and me, Kate Lawrence and is made on the traditional lands of the Gunum Willam Balluk, at the foot of Mt Macedon, 65 km north west of Melbourne, Australia.