

# Transcript for the podcast Tide to the Moon

## Episode 5: Samhain

'Mamma, why do we celebrate Christmas?'

'Well... it was Jesus' birthday and some people believe...'

"Do you believe that?"

"Well.... I believe Jesus was a good person and had some great wisdom about how to live, but I don't believe..."

'So why do we celebrate Christmas?'

"Well..."

MUSIC

In the face of these innocent inquiries from my daughter, i could see Apart from getting together with family, these celebrations feel hollow and hypocritical

They hold no deeper meaning or connection for me than if we'd been honouring the opening of a local sausage factory,

I thrash around a bit more in the soup of celebratory, parental hypocrisy, and not for the first time try my best to convey that integrity is important, and yet we also live lies.

My conscience pricked by my child's questions, I feel compelled to see where I can find congruity, alignment of values and action, and following footsteps worn smooth over the ages,

I start searching for ways to create holidays and rituals that are meaningful to me so I can look my children in the eye and share a deeper understanding of life through stories, rituals and celebrations.

MUSIC

Welcome to Tide to the Moon coming to you on the first new moon after the Autumn Equinox. The new moon appeared at 6.38am on the 1st of May. My name is Kate Lawrence and I am you're host.

The 1st of May in Pagan traditions is one of the cross quarter days, along with Feb 1, Aug 1 and Nove it is celebrated as the halfway mark between the Equinox and the Solstice.

This is a little strange because May 1 and none of the other dates, are actually half way between the equinox and solstice, and by using a calendar date, these days stand in contrast to the equinoxes and solstices which are celebrated as the physical event happens in the Earth's cycle of around the sun, not according to the Gregorian Calendar on the first day of the month

Maybe the pagan's were having a bet each way?

In the northern hemisphere pagan celebrations for the first of May or May Day are associated with rites of spring - dancing around a maypole and courtship rituals.

The corresponding day here in the southern hemisphere is 1 November which is associated with Halloween, and the idea that the veil between the worlds is thinner.

Like many Pagan days, the celebration was subsumed by the Christian church - Nov 1 is All Saints Day to celebrate saints and Nov 2 is All Souls Day to honour the dead.

In the ancient Celtic traditions the day is called Samhain and marks the end of the harvest period, the end of the lighter half of the year and the descent into winter.

There was feasting on the harvest and great revelry.

It was also a time for organising and settling important business matters. Debts were repaid and trials for serious crimes were conducted and justice delivered.

Importantly Samhain marked the end of one year and the beginning of the next, and so represented a time of transition, a time without time and so the human realm was no longer bound by the rules of the physical world,

The family's ancestors were honoured and invited home whilst harmful spirits were warded off.

In some ways it is a reflection of our death denying, death defying culture that halloween now is an absurd ghoulish sickeningly sugar coated children's festival. Our terror, unwillingness and inability to look death in the eye, to honour and accept it as the greatest mystery and greatest inevitability of life leads us to make a mockery of it.

This is not necessarily our fault but in our modern culture death is rendered invisible. Only a few generations ago we would have seen people die, had them die in our homes, prepared bodies for burial and been deeply connected to the physicality of death and by extension to ponder its mysteries.

There are ancient cross cultural practices for contemplating death, to remember that you will die, in order to live well -

Buddhists are advised to meditate in cemeteries, and sit next to dead bodies and remind themselves that this is the fate of their body.

Christians have a practice known as memento mori where a person is encouraged to have a physical article of death, a memento, such as a skull, in close proximity, as a reminder.

I've added some links in the show notes if you want to explore some of these ideas further.

## MUSIC

In my searching to find integrity with my children and our celebratory rituals, I read a book which wisely suggested taking a leaf out of the Christian approach and adopt and adapt what already exists, don't try to paddle upstream and invent something new but work with the flow of what is here.

In Australia at this time of year, we have the ANZAC day national holiday on the 25th April, which commemorates the World War one battle at Gallipoli.

And I could see a path from that day, to a more expansive day, that would honour and celebrate the ancestors and the dead. So I plotted and planned and dragged my mother and sister into some death day rituals.

We did apple bobbing in buckets of water, tree planting and we named and honour the ancestors. I drew my mother out to tell stories of her childhood and her parents and grandparents and found children's books about death and dying to read to my children.

My mother and sister were troopers going along with it all, but they took this role a little too literally as both of them felt this pull in our celebrations to name and honour the Anzac day connections.

Initially I was resentful, I have a complex mix of thoughts and feelings about commemorating war and my vision for this day was to contemplate death and to honour the ancestors broadly, not war and a very specific subset of ancestors.

Then I reminded myself to let go and flow with what was here, and allow my mother and sister to find whatever was meaningful for them,

but the next year when it happened again and their focus on the ANZAC aspect increased so that was really all they talked of, I swung back to resistance.

This was not what I was wanting or trying to do and I couldn't seem to get them to understand my purpose.

So the year after I kept the rituals within my immediate family. We went to the local cemetery instead, I made rock cakes and we left them at random graves.

Yes really.

And we did this for a few years but....I felt so self conscious, contrived, stilted.

I am sure this was just from lack of familiarity but it is very difficult to create a tradition in a vacuum, alone, without community and reminders, other to take the yoke when commitment slides, so eventually the event such as it was, slipped away.

But I still cherish the idea and feel a call to set aside a day to honour the ancestors and contemplate the idea of death which will come to all of us.

I imagine a communal day that invites us to remember our ancestors and those recently gone, reminds us of our own death and allow a collective grieving.

Maybe this is too much for one day to hold.

Perhaps I need a practise of remembering death that is more frequent, and indeed at various times over the years I have contemplated more deeply and regularly my own death.

So dear listener, what practices have you explored, what rituals do you observe, what would you like to be inspired to do?

Tide to the Moon has a facebook page, and now I've create a private facebook group, and I would love it if you joined and we started a conversation about any and all of these ideas for life and death

## Music

To be perfectly frank, until I had children of my own, I had only a vague and passing interest in my ancestors, my family history, but as I looked at my small children and saw the next generation stretching into the future, I came to ponder the line behind me, my forebears.

Around this time I was helping my cousin on my father's side organise an extended family reunion and I began to dig around and follow threads of connection to my Dad's family. I was astounded to find that most of it had played out within a stone's throw from where I grew up in Moonee Ponds.

Surprised because my dad grew up in in the eastern suburbs and it was only my Dad who had returned to live on this ancestral territory, and he hadn't told us much about it

As I followed the trails that went further and further back, I found a young woman, my great grandmother, whose father was a minister of the Baptist church in Newmarket in the late 19th century.

So one day I went for a drive and found the unassuming church, tucked away in an ordinary suburban street of Newmarket, shaded by the broad leaves of plane trees that lined the street.

As I sat in my car under a tree, I imagined her walking the street, standing on the steps of the church, furtively farting under her petticoats, as she spoke to a parishioner, and I was struck by a strange sense of ownership. She was my ancestor, and could not be other, and I belonged to her and she could not change that either.

It was as if while I was bobbing around in the sea of life, not knowing which way to go, there was a literal lifeline, a thread of connection that said I belonged no matter what.

There was none of the struggles, complexity and frustration that can dog my relationships with my living relatives, just an unconditional connection and belonging that felt like an immutable wholeness, a longed for accepted place in the world.

## MUSIC

Thanks for listening to 'Tide to the Moon'.

If you like this podcast please rate and review us on itunes or wherever you listen, and tell other people about it.

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

You can find the shownotes and contact details at [storyground.com.au](http://storyground.com.au)

Theme music by Danya from Audio Jungle.

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.