

# An Interview with Renaissance Woman Jeanne Adwani ~ Tarot Storyteller, Craftswoman, Poet and Hair Healer

Photography by Linda Lawson  
Interviewed by Bill Zirinsky

*(Jeanne Adwani is a Tarot Reader and Storyteller, craftswoman, artist, poet and "hair healer". She is an Ann Arbor original – lively, idiosyncratic, colorful and adventurously creative. She has been connected to Crazy Wisdom for more than 20 years --- we've carried her fiber art jewelry and her handmade line of craft Goddesses, and her mixed media artwork. She's led Tarot classes at Crazy Wisdom, and been a Tarot Reader in our Tea Room. Plus, for many years she worked as a hair stylist across the street from the old Crazy Wisdom on North Fourth Avenue, and it was in that capacity she became the in-house "hair healer" to a number of our staff people and their significant others. What follows is an interview done with Jeanne this fall.)*

Bill Zirinsky: Jeanne, I think of you as one of Ann Arbor's renaissance women. You are many things ---a wise woman, a craftswoman and artist and jewelry designer, a Tarot teacher and reader, a writer and poet, a tattoo aficionado, and a hair healer. Let's start off with your telling us about your background with the Tarot.

Jeanne Adwani: Thanks, Bill, for all those compliments. I'm honored that you give notice to me in that way. Let's see...I held my first deck of cards in 1970. Intrigued by

I have a great love for color, texture and fiber. I love mixing mediums and putting words/stories to my work. I am attracted to most things that represent woman in powerful, magical ways...

magic and the occult as a child and not knowing what that really meant, I was first fascinated by palmistry in my teens. The idea that everyone's hands are like a snowflake, unique and one of kind--- that idea absolutely held me captive and I stared at as many hands as I could, especially mine. I bought every book I could on it ... which were pretty 'old school' approaches to Chirolgy, the study of palmistry. I knew no one who shared my enthusiasm, only the truly curious ventured into my passion, and those that thought I was a fun, interesting girl with a strange 'hobby'.

Tarot card books sat next to the Palmistry books, alongside the Astrology books. They all became my interest, my fascination. Tho' palmistry is my first love, tarot cards, their pictures and stories, were really inviting me more deeply into their realm. I read that if you slept with a different card under your pillow you would get to know the cards better. Ya ... well I did that. And that didn't really work. I really didn't believe the 'fortune telling' aspect of any of these 'occult sciences', not for not wanting to, I soooo did want to believe that something could tell me my future. The reason that they held my fascination and desire to understand them was more that people believed that they could do that and something about them frightened people. This deck of cards with pictures and stories scared people. I wanted to understand that, I wasn't feeling the fear. I was loving the archetypes, the story telling aspects of them, tho' back then I might not have spoken to that as I do now.

What I know in 35 years of Tarot indulgence is that they are cards that speak the language/story of elements, and numbers. They hold to archetypes that we all see every-day; that we all experience within ourselves every moment, i.e. the sage, the innocent, the warrior, the trickster, the

champion ... Tarot cards call upon my wisdom, your wisdom, at very elemental levels and give an opportunity to consider a different wisdom in a different context when you need to call that deep wisdom to the table of your life. Tarot cards are a 'leap of faith' -- a moment of inner trust -- that graciously offer an invitation to my own ancient wisdom to come forward and have a few wise things to say to me. Questions, big and small, give rise to this opportunity; by my shuffling and the pulling of a card/s, I lay before me pictures and numbers that can, if I choose, stimulate my spiritual, creative self to shift and see another possibility that, maybe, I hadn't thought of, to place on the altar of my life.

Tarot cards are a beautiful tool for deepening inner wisdom and trusting that we are indeed powerful beings.

Bill Zirinsky: And are you still teaching the Tarot, and doing Tarot readings?

Jeanne Adwani: I have taught spring and fall sessions at Crazy Wisdom for many years. I will be teaching again this spring. I love doing readings. My technique is not traditional. (surprise) I don't tell you your future. I invite you to consider what question/s you might bring to your own inner 'wisdom' that the tarot cards and I can assist you in opening yourself to. What might you consider, shift, tell another story for or about yourself; that you deny, avoid, ignore...in your life right now? What might you need to illuminate in your life, that needs your attention...right now? How are you flowing (water)? What are you doing (earth)? What feeds your passion, or needs to be seen (fire)? Tarot can be a spiritual practice that opens and expands your consciousness; it comforts your soul. It is another Path to inner wisdom.

Bill Zirinsky: How does the Tarot influence your own life?

Jeanne Adwani: As I have spoken in my previous answer, it is a tool to invite divine Wisdom into my life. Sometimes that Wisdom is as simple as letting go of my inner critic, (not so simple really). I am reminded by the Tarot of the magic and wonder of life's elements and how I impact them and they impact me.

BZ: When you were teaching a class in Tarot at Crazy Wisdom last year, you spoke of how you were working to teach people to use the Tarot as a story-telling vehicle. Tell us about that.

Jeanne Adwani: I am of the belief that we all live in our own mythology all the time. We are elemental beings that gather the fire, the water, the earth, and the breath of our



**Jeanne Adwani**

"My spiritual community in Missouri, Diana's Grove, speaks to 'playing for the song'. I interpret that as living life as if it is a song that must be sung."

lives; we mix them up to create the rhythm, the pulse, that sustains us. I know that I make up stories about the world around me all the time, every time my eyes and my mind engages with 'other'. I know that I make up stories about myself that are not always kind and generous. I have stories about myself that do not serve my life to its highest good. What I know about this is that I'm a good storyteller and that every story I make up might not be all that needs to be revealed to me. I may have taken on the story my family gave me about myself. I may have made up something because I wanted love and didn't get it so that story is the only true story I have embraced. Since I make up stories about myself, imagine how clever I am about the story I make up about you. Unless you tell me your story, your truth, I'm likely making up something to fill in the blanks. We are all highly creative storytellers thinking we know what is the truth. A truth told from one's limited point of view.

With that said, using tarot cards as a story telling tool is a way to make up another story, consider another point of view, that might serve life better. Let the 'leap of faith' do its work and produce a series of cards that can give



another possibility to restore (re-story) my sense of worth and value.

So, my teaching invites the student to begin to really know and notice the stories that they have about their world. In that noticing, what might you do to change the stories that limit you? Tarot cards are a language of elements, numbers, and archetypes that combine in multi-sensorial ways. I teach that language. To know how the earth of you is affected by the fire of you; to connect with the breath of you, when you are drowning in your emotions. What happens when you give wind to your passion and you soar? Who in you wishes to speak, the Priestess in you, the Magician, the Lovers? The archetypes that portray us in these stories have a voice of wisdom that waits to be interpreted. I teach my students the many ways these voices might be, wish to be, can be dreamt into being.

BZ: I know that you support yourself these days largely doing work with people's hair. Some call what you do a "hair stylist" but you have, in your own inimitable style, labeled yourself a "hair healer". What is a hair healer, and in what sense are you a hair healer?

Jeanne Adwani: Hair artist, healer, stylist... I claim them all. When I first starting calling myself a 'hair healer' I was acutely aware of how intimate my job as a Hair artist is. Not only do we share intimate space together for an hour or so, while I change your appearance, fluff and polish you; you share very personal life stories with me. I

own wisdom to change the story to one of health and well being.

BZ: Tell us more about the life of a hair healer. Each day people talk to you about their lives. Is there a book

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in this --- you know, there was a book that came out last year about the lives of waitresses. Give us a sense of the intricate flow of your daily work, if you can.

Jeanne Adwani: Actually, I have been writing a book about "how to breakup with your hairdresser". A little tongue n' cheek sorta thing. I do hope that I really get to finish it one of these days soon. I have a lot of personal research on the subject.

The flow of my daily work is usually very satisfying and pretty darn fun. It's all one on one. So everything is up close and personal. I believe life needs lots of laughing. I make sure that that fills a lot of my day and your time with me.

BZ: Over the years, at Crazy Wisdom, we have carried beautiful jewelry which you make, and beautiful little goddesses, and fiber art objects. Can you talk about your life as a craftswoman, and about your work? And the kinds of pieces you have tended to focus on?

Jeanne Adwani: I definitely am a craftswoman. I have a great love for color, texture and fiber. I love mixing mediums and putting words/stories to my work. I am attracted to most things that represent woman in powerful, magical ways. I like thinking that I can mix the unlikely with the unusual and with that alchemist's hope and longing, create something glorious and magical. I like to see that happen within myself and within others.

For a long time I thought of myself as an 'outsider' kind of artist. I made up everything I ever did with no formal training. As usual, doing everything the hard way. There is something satisfying about finding my way through and into the process of making art. I will always need to be able to physically manifest some sort of something. I have been indulging completely in the craft of writing, which doesn't give itself to making art objects. It's very mental, and emotional for me, so I need time to create some physical objects to feel that earthy element in me working. I have been taking classes at Hollanders in the art and craft of book-making, papermaking, pop-ups etc.. It is in keeping with my poetry and stories that are flowing out of me these days. I even taught a class there in Mask making; casting your face and you making a 'story' on the external surface of yourself. Who might you be and how might you see your self? I will be doing that again in the fall of this year. Keep a look out for me there. It's magical.

BZ: More recently, Jeanne, you've been showing me poetry you've been writing, and essays, and now you're in a screenwriting class. This has come as a surprise to me, since I always associated you with your artwork, your crafts. What's up with this new direction, with this shift in your mode of self-expression?

Adwani: I have to write. It's a rite of passage for me. I have many stories in me that need telling. So...I'm a gonna tell 'em! I finished a series of 12 poems inspired by a class I taught last fall using the Tarot cards and the wheel of Astrology. I have them in a small book that I will be sharing in a limited edition at Crazy Wisdom, and (I hope) selling and giving a poetry reading or two.

The screenwriting class is incredibly challenging. I have to look at story telling in a very compressed, highly visual way, and transcribe that in a specific format. I have a movie that I'd love to finish and see what happens with it. It's called T's Compass. I'm hopeful.

BZ: It sounds like there is really a great richness to the flow of the stories that your hair healing clients tell you

each day. In a given day, you must hear about deep sadness and illness, and new babies being born, and marriages about to take place, and others dissolving, and young women coming out, and middle-aged men losing their jobs, and so on... all in 30 minute increments, and all told to you in perhaps a more lively way than those very same people would tell their stories to their therapists, if perhaps they see therapists... what about your writing about the richness of your daily work life as a hair healer?

Adwani: I am blessed to have people who trust me in ways that let them feel safe in sharing some of their stories with me. It's a therapeutic relationship for both of us. I get a great deal from these sharings. As

an extrovert, I embrace my deeper self by observing and being in the presence of others. Asking questions, and understanding the psychology/behavior of others gives me a wiser knowing of my own relationship to people, life, and myself. We are all amazing beings with rich inner stories. There certainly are stories to be writing about what people share with me. I have a couple I have in rough draft now. I could really 'work' the hair healer theme in my writing...

BZ: I've always thought of you as a natural performance artist. You always dress with great flair, with great color, and you combine your fabrics and materials in original ways. At an earlier time in your life, were you involved in costume or fabric design, or the clothing/fashion world? Clothes have been an important part of your performance art, and your self-expression, yes?

Adwani: Hmm... well, I do like my colorful clothes. No, I'm not a designer in that way...My mother was. She made all her clothes or altered the ones she bought, because she was a tiny woman and had a hard time finding things to fit her. She became masterful at it. She taught it when I was a little girl. People raved about the amazing things she would make. Of course, she made some of my clothes when I was little. I loved that until I reached a certain age and wanted to choose my own style; she was disappointed by that. She transitioned 2 and half years ago, I still have in my closet the last thing she made for me about 20 years ago. I can't throw it away. I will have it till I die. Her husband --my 'popzee' -- has several of her masterpieces in the closet. Also, she made jewelry. I have

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a few of her lovely pieces. My mother was a real craftswoman.

BZ: At some point in your life, you were very into tattoos, way ahead of the curve on that. What have they been about for you?

Adwani: Ah yes, those... If you want to talk collecting stories -- I am a living, walking piece of literary art. My skin holds many stories; some joyful, some sad, some are a mystery unfolding. Some stories have a life of their own and all you can do is give yourself to yourself to be a part of the wonder of the journey. This is part of my journey in this life, ongoing and full of possibility.

My first tattoo came on a road trip to San Francisco in 1972. A gaggle of us girls seeking fun. I met some cute guy and he wanted a tattoo at the famous Lyle Tuttle's Tattoo parlor. I went along, I was stoned, awed and transformed. I had no intention, nor had it occurred to me to get one. I left with a moon and star on the inside of my left wrist ... so my external story began.

I grew up with serious skin allergies. It was unpleasant living under my skin. All the itching and bleeding, sitting in a bath of oatmeal once to twice a week to heal and soothe the incredible, non-stop stress of dealing with it. I'd wear cotton gloves to sleep in so that I wouldn't itch my self with my nail. Many mornings I would wake to

Pears. Nov 6, 2006

Luscious  
Poised for the taken  
Held in time  
Waiting  
For the caress of your  
Hand to lift me to your  
Hungry waiting mouth.

I am ripe!  
Timeless is the shiver of me.  
The quiver of me.  
My desire is to give my fruit  
to your  
Lips?

Teeth that will break the  
skin of me  
Release my moist desire,  
free me from this suspended  
moment.  
Close my life to your lips.

Taste me.  
Enjoy me.  
Open to the core of me.  
Spill my seeds  
on the fertile earth.  
Give me back to rise  
again.

'hold space' for people to relax and be themselves. I am a friend and confidante. I consider that a very sacred position to be in. I feel honored that people give me such trust. It is alllll ways difficult when a person stops being part of my clientele, and I am left to making a story up about what happened or not. It challenges my sense of worth and well being and I take to my own self healing, shifting the negative story to a positive one. Another example of that mythologizing that drives me to the Tarot cards and my



Interview with Jeanne Adwani (continued)

clawed arms and holes through the fingertips of the gloves from my itching in my sleep. And, the embarrassment of being in 3rd to 6th grade and going to school with long sleeves all year, bleeding on my clothes ... blah blah blah ... This is one of my most unpleasant stories. I tell this story because... I get to make my skin beautiful now.

I found a new appreciation for my body via having tattoos. My mother never liked them. That was always hard for me. My tattoos were our most difficult conversations over the years.

Tattoos are an amazing art form. They are beautiful to me. I have stood in awe before some of the masterpieces of tattoo art. Big Wow. I have no idea what done-having-them means. I don't know when a story needs telling on my body till I know. I do not have a favorite, tho' some I

Hair artist, healer, stylist... I claim them all.

love more than others. The one I designed in memorial to my mother after she passed away two and a half years ago rates very high and precious to me. And yes... they hurt. The first question most people ask: "Do they hurt?" A needle going about 1500 times a minute pushing ink below the surface of your skin Hurts. "Then why do you do that?" I might answer that question.

BZ: You used to go to the Renaissance Festival every year... tell us about that.

Adwani: The Michigan Renaissance Festival happens in Holly, Michigan during the months of August and Sept. I worked as a Palmist there for 9 seasons. I dressed up as a Gypsy, whenchy sort of woman, draped in fabric of bright colors, hoping that I might have looked this way during the Renaissance era. I would take prints of people's hands and proceed to give them a 'reading', an interpretation of what I saw in the line in their hands. Once again, I did not offer a future read. As you may remember, I don't do that. I called it a practical read, an energetic read that looks to the flow of your life and body. Since I tell the story of Earth, Wind, Water, and Fire, I would speak that language to the 'seeker'. I learned a particular type of palmistry from a man in England when I lived there in the early 80's, Chinese Palmistry, which made sense to me. The lifeline is Fire, the heart line Water, the head line Air, the line up the center of the hand is Earth. All the mounds and fingertips have elemental qualities, as do those many lines that trace the palm. I would speak to how these elements moved in the person via how I notice them in her or his hand. What elements were strongest, weakest, what elements crossed each other, created conflict, or flow? I should teach elemental palmistry at Crazy Wisdom. It's fascinating and you always have something to read... your own hand...

BZ: What's it like for you to be so uncontainably creative and out to have fun, so young at heart, and a wise woman to boot, and now to find yourself at the ripe age of 60?

Adwani: I'm sure I am 'uncontainable'. That isn't always in my best interest. And life is not always fun! The creative force in me is strong. It's a compelling drive that keeps my life ever curious and full of wonder. I believe that curiosity drives me -- about people, about everything. I look around at the world, inside and out, and everything is someone's creation, my creation... What I think finds itself on the shelf of life. What you think finds itself next to me. Sometimes that is in physical form and sometimes it is what sits and brews within our consciousness and/or our bodies. Thoughts become what people imagine them to be. Thoughts are stories and I decide sometimes unwittingly that they are a flat truth and can not be anything else other than what I see or believe them to be.

Perception is very one-sided. To shift that contained thought process and find a flow that is more in keeping with supporting the positive, beauty of life and the living of it, I find the creative process the Way, the Path to my deepest self and the place I can give back to my world and

make it a better place. It is my way of embracing my power and sharing. It is finding the sacred in my life.

I am of the belief that we are all extraordinarily creative powerful beings and can make the world a wondrous and healthy place. What I believe and think matters every moment. It is allll energy. I ask myself often, "How do I want my energy to flow right now?" How can my thoughts heal the planet, my relationship, my fear -- right now? I pray I can live everyday with a little more mindfulness and love and the gratitude of being a part of the creative force in life.

BZ: How long have you lived in the Ann Arbor area. What do you think of Ann Arbor these days?

Adwani: I moved here in the summer of '85, from London, England. I had lived there for 5 years and a set of interesting circumstances seduced me back to the States. That didn't work out and I was in need of cash and moved to A2 to gather some money so I could return to England. I'm a Michigan girl, and my family was having a reunion that summer. Between that and getting caught in the flow of Ann Arbor, I stayed. A very abridged tale of it all.

Ann Arbor is one of those cloistered places on the planet. A relatively small, self contained, seductive place that holds you in its clutches because it has so many offerings to such a diverse community. The university certainly brings in much of what becomes our culture here. An international community brings international intellect to a small Midwestern town. A seat of learning always brings amazing creative minds to mingle, inspire, and cajole each other. It can't help but happen. Having the beauty of the land and waterways that surrounds us invites the nature lover to explore and be active within minutes of the city. What's not to like about that?

For me, Ann Arbor tries to maintain its uniqueness, and exclusivity, at the expense of keeping some of those exquisitely creative, not so financially prosperous types from being able to live here. That kind of color and diversity gets pushed out of town, away from the core of Ann Arbor, where they need to be. Ann Arbor prices out the galleries and the independents from having a business here. Ann Arbor speaks to the arts and the value of having them, etc etc ... and really it is nearly impossible to sell local art and have a consistent venue that supports us. There are very few of us that can and do make a living on our art.

BZ: What's on your mind politically these days, Jeanne?

For me, Ann Arbor tries to maintain its uniqueness, and exclusivity, at the expense of keeping some of those exquisitely creative, not so financially prosperous types from being able to live here.

Adwani: Ah geez, Bill. I pray for peace and try to be the peace and joy I wish to see. Some days are better than others.

I can barely utter my feelings about the global situation without my heart aching. I will never understand cruelty to any living thing. I hope the Earth does a polar shift and shakes us up and off before we hurt Her beyond our ability to live in health on and with Her. My golden rule is... Be kind. That is my politics. Kindness. And of course forgiveness, when my kindness rides the edge of ... not so kind.



Title: Love.. Love... what gentle madness is love?

Jeanne Adwani's description of the artwork above:

Altered book and mixed media including photo print on linen, embroidery, vintage pill box, necklace, and handkerchief. Unpictured are pyrolyphic words that surround the outside of the shadowbox frame.

"For me.. this piece speaks to the vulnerability of Love; the joy and madness that this vulnerability can take you on as you test the waters of trust and honesty. The pill box is a place to give your fears till you are ready to open it and speak to it; share them safely. The black jeweled necklace is the dark beauty that this journey of love can take you on, not so much because it is dark in a negative way, more that it is the shadows that we hide in when faced with the challenge of being open and willing to let someone we love see our vulnerable self."

BZ: What's up with your romantic life these days, Jeanne?

Adwani: I am partnered to Diane for eight years. Everyday/moment is an opportunity to figure the amazing wonder of being in relationship. It's a major challenge. It's the place where I really get to find out how authentic I'm willing to be.

BZ: What do you want to be when you grow up?

Adwani: I want to be a navigator through outer space, a galactic diplomat, finding and meeting other life forms and bringing them to Infinity's Table of Kindness. A roundtable of creative beings sharing and integrating their differences and likeness; where communication is the way to deeply understand each other and accept each other; a place where we all celebrate the best of ourselves and find creative ways to soothe the worst.

On this planet, at this time... I want to be a writer. I want my writings to provoke, entertain, help shift consciousness. I want to be someone who shares kindness, joy and play as a spiritual practice.

BZ: Thank you, Jeanne.

Jeanne Adwani: Thanks, Bill.