



# becoming wild

A CONVERSATION WITH CHRIS MADDOX

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I met Chris Maddox under a November new moon. A group of us were twenty minutes late to the Wild Woman Circle she was leading in Millerton (wrong directions, poor street lighting) and were terrified to interrupt the small group of apparently meditating ladies. I was about to make a run for it when Chris ushered us in, hugging each of us and saying “You’re not late. You’re here at the perfect moment. This is the perfect moment.” It was disorienting, in a nice way.

Chris comes from a Houston-based Marine family and her positive energy derives from the root; her great-great-grandmother and great-aunt were both healers. Two years ago, Chris quit her day job to create The Wild Woman Project, which aims to “help Budding Visionary Women align with their true voice so they can express and lead with authenticity and power.” Now 29, she offers moon circles, trainings, workshops and a one-on-one 40-day transformation.

## Stepping into the circle

I’m a conflicted mix of true believer in sisterhood and authenticity and ornery skeptic, a woman left to steep in New York City for a little too long. After agreeing to go to the circle with a friend, I had tried to eliminate all variables from the situation. What was the itinerary? Should I wear yoga pants? Could I pay the \$15 suggested donation by check? I was positively fretting about the logistics of finding my inner goddess.

While the program varies by leader, circles generally light a candle, acknowledging that you are in a sacred space, set ground rules, talk about the month’s astrological theme, visualize, meditate, share experiences, set intentions and end with a wild heart meditation. Simple as it sounds, I left feeling truly changed; energetic, inspired and open. Chris belly laughs a lot. She swears. She makes phrases that would generally alarm me – “soak in true heart energy,” for instance – seem completely normal. When I interviewed Chris a few weeks after our first meeting, I felt I was speaking with a woman who was completely herself, without reserve.

## How did The Wild Woman Project start?

I was a full-time yoga teacher and had been part of the Vagina Monologues and V-DAY movement [to end violence against women] for four or five years. In early 2011, someone recommended that I read the book *The Women Who Run With the Wolves*. I remember reading the first page in the Time Warner Building’s Borders and electricity just running through my body. It’s all about the wild woman archetype. I was leading a circle of women and the phrase “The Wild Woman Project” kept coming to me. I bought the URL without knowing what I was going to do with it.

In the circle I was leading, we had seen our intentions come to fruition over the years. We just saw crazy stuff. Our friendships had gotten so deep and we knew it was real. These circles are at the heart of what is now The Wild Woman Project;

the vision is to see these circles expand all over the world. We just launched January 1, 2012 and are in Canada, Trinidad, Australia, and all over the US.

## So The Wild Woman Project is a one-woman show with volunteer support?

I’m really lucky that so many people have offered to do a video or graphic design work for it. I’m just now getting settled into the entrepreneur aspect of it; I see my calendar and know when I need to be speaking about the next thing, I do the video editing, I run the website. Eventually, the dream is to give some of that away, but it’s a mom and mom shop.

## You recently moved to West Stockbridge after a decade in New York. What has the change felt like?

New York is so vibrant and creative, but I’ve found a new dimension of myself in the quiet. I enjoy being in a cycle, living in a place where it’s dark at 4:30 pm in the winter and how different that is from the vibrant summer. Learning from nature is a huge part of the project; the Entire Moon Cycle, from New to Full to New again, mirrors every creative cycle within us. Being up here is really, really sweet.

## You say that wildness is “your truest, most authentic voice, who you really are.” What are social and cultural barriers to women recognizing their own wildness?

Advertising. Women our age are out-earning our male counterparts; we’re a big ticket in terms of



consumption. We're constantly being told that we need some product to make us whole, that we need this lipstick or that bag or this surgery. That's dangerous because it's everywhere; we have to be very careful about what we consume. When I see an advertisement on Hulu, I literally mute it and look away until the show comes back.

The mythology that we cannot trust each other is also tough. We're seeing change in this arena, but the stories that we're told about competition between women get internalized. There's a lot of healing to be done around sisterhood.

**What do you do off the clock? Do you feel pressure to be a sensei all the time or do you ever watch *The Real Housewives*?**

I think there's a balance. With all this talk of wildness, there's still discipline that's required to keep your mental space clear. I've studied yoga for a long time and I've started recently pretty seriously studying Sufism. They're practices; you have to show up every day, even if it's just a little bit. I totally watch *Parks and Rec* and drink wine and I'll have a cigarette now and then. Whatever the brand of the Wild Woman Project, I love that it's very free. My dad recently said to me "you're not as enlightened as you think you are!" I said, "I don't claim to be enlightened, I claim wildness, so I'm good." It's important as a student and teacher to be constantly breaking down that idea of specialness.

**What are some of the most moving moments that you've seen within a circle?**

I've seen women who were participants in circles become circle leaders and how it's really helped them to blossom. It opens up areas of their life that were unexpected – getting into psychology and going on to be a therapist, harnessing their creativity, having a new photography business. A woman told me last night that she had sent an intention in our October circle to start to sing again, and the very next day a person walked into her office where she does a graphic design job and asked, "Do you sing?" Now she's singing with a choir.

There are a million examples; seeing partners show up, seeing new opportunities that seem to fall from the sky once they say it out loud. Part of it is really getting deep enough within yourself to find what it is that you want to create and then stating it in public. It makes it real. The way we hold it is powerful too, but part of it is just getting into that space.

**If you meet someone at a cocktail party, how do you put the project into terms they can understand right away?**

I say I teach people how to lead their own women's circles in their communities. I don't push hard. Of course I want every person in the world to thrive in a circle, but do I definitely know that's right for



Top image: Chris Maddox (depicted center) and her wild women playing around. Photo by Maki Hirose. Bottom left: Chris in the heart of her wild woman circle. Photo by Melissa Batchelor Warnke. Bottom right: The circle where the wild women of Millerton gather. Photo by Melissa Batchelor Warnke. Opposite page: Chris and two of her fellow wild women enjoy the outdoors. Photo by Maki Hirose.

every person? Not necessarily. There are forces at play that are mysterious and beyond pitching. Hazrat Inayat Khan, a Sufi teacher who came over to harmonize the West, taught not to wake someone who is asleep. They'll unfold. They'll wake when they need to wake.

When someone shows up to a circle and we create a truly non-judgmental space, some part of us comes forward; it's like our soul. There's something that clicks in the beginning of the circle where people say, oh wait, I have permission. There are amazing women everywhere but there is something really special about the women of Millerton. They go deep and they're very respectful of each other. I trust that even if everyone in Millerton doesn't come to this circle, the fact that ten women are coming all the time means that they're lit up. And the way that they're living is going to touch other people and ripple out.

**What kind of personal sacrifices have you had to make to get The Wild Woman Project off the ground?**

Financially, it hasn't been super easy. It's getting much better, but there was a real learning curve. I left New York City one year in and part of it was because I realized I couldn't just be hustling to

pay my rent or I wasn't going to have any energy for this. Simplifying my life has been such a good teacher; I learned how much crap I was consuming. Though I guess some people would think of it as a sacrifice, leaving New York was a huge blessing. I honestly feel so fortunate every single day to feel like I have something so exciting to do. On the morning of January 1, 2012, I was in Los Angeles and I remember crying out of joy and going, "Oh God I am finally doing what I'm supposed to be doing. Thank God." There's so much pressure about finding it and I never felt like I quite got on top of it. There were all these pieces that sort of fulfilled me but then I was missing another part. The Wild Woman Project is an amalgam of everything that I loved and had any talent at. It feels like a huge gift. ●

*Learn more about The Wild Woman Project at [www.thewildwomanproject.com](http://www.thewildwomanproject.com) or email [chris@thewildwomanproject.com](mailto:chris@thewildwomanproject.com).*