

# FAQs – The Northwest Fall Equinox Festival

By Spyder

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I know, as avid supporters of the Northwest Fall Equinox Festival, there are some things about the festival and its organization that you are not privy to, and are asked to take these things on blind faith. Sometimes, not being aware of certain things can lead to assumption, and sometimes assumption leads to difficult experiences for yourselves and sometimes, our staff members. Now, I could assure you that “everything happens for a reason”, and some of you will take me at my word. However, myself being a person that better understands and retains information if I know the “why?” behind it, I can respect that viewpoint, and therefore am taking the time to compose this article. My goal in this composition is to respond to some common questions, make some of the rules we have easier to follow because you will know their reasoning, and hopefully improve the festival experience for all involved. So, without further delay:

Question #1 – “Why were you suddenly able to lower the ticket price from \$120 to \$80? Were you overcharging us all these years?”

Answer #1 – No. When we noticed fewer people were attending the festival, we asked why. The response was that the economy had taken a turn for the worst, and fewer people could afford to attend. With assistance from our good friend and consultant Michael Agee, we scrutinized our budget. Our budget is now severely trimmed, very tight, with no wiggle room, and it required many sacrifices on the part of ourselves as well as our attendees (I will address

this further in ensuing sections). But it enabled us to lower ticket prices by approximately 30% in order to enable attendance by those that have been affected by the poor economy.

Question #2 – “Why is there a registration deadline?/I know I’m late, but can you just do me this one favor?/You’re a non-profit, you need my money, of course you’ll take my late registration/I’ll just pay you at the gate.”

Answer #2 – Now that Open Ways is online and not mailed, festival funds are only needed to pay for festival itself and the minimal cost of doing business expenses throughout the year (printer ink, paper, our annual non-profit registration, etc.... it’s not much). So basically, your festival funds pay for your festival. The registration deadline is about 2 weeks before festival. Once I tally the numbers, I must tell our kitchen coordinator how many mouths must be fed so that food can be ordered. The kitchen coordinator needs your money in the bank account to reserve this order. The ritual crew needs to know how many people are coming so they can be sure to provide enough supplies needed for you to enjoy ritual, as well as having enough festival medallions at the gate. Our treasurer must write a check to the park on Sunday of the festival to pay your site fee, which is why the money must be in the bank previous to festival and why an undeposited check on site does us no good. At one time, I was kinder and allowed late registrations. In 2010, we even allowed registration at the gate. Big mistake! Over ONE-THIRD of our attendees that year registered after the deadline or at the gate. Some of you might remember that we ran out of food that year. We had to send someone on an emergency run to the store to buy more food! Some of you were quite upset by this. I bit my lip as some of you threw negative energy at our kitchen crew and our kitchen coordinator. This was not fair. They didn’t know to buy food for the extra mouths because they did not register by

deadline. This was not the fault of the kitchen crew or the Nine Houses of Gaia board; this was fault of ONE-THIRD of the attendees of that festival. With witnessing situations like this, and realizing that every other event that I attend as a paying attendee has hard deadlines, not arbitrary ones, I have realized I have to go against my “better” nature by being a hard-ass and refusing late registrations. It’s only fair to those that are conscientious enough to respect the deadline.

Question #3 – “NWFEF kitchen used to cater to all dietary needs. How come that is no longer the case?”

Answer #3 – I refer you to Answer #1 regarding budget cuts. Catering to everyone’s special diets was grossly inflating the kitchen expenses, and honestly, it was a bit stressful for the kitchen crew to try to juggle. We even spoke to a handful of people we knew to have alternative dietary needs and asked them if they would prefer that we maintain the \$120 ticket price to have this accommodation continue, or if they would rather have a reduced ticket price and be willing to supplement their diet as needed of their own accord (which several admitted they were used to doing in other aspects of life anyway). The resounding response was for a reduced ticket price, and as most of you know, that is our current policy.

Question #4 – “It’s almost deadline for registration and I don’t have the money for registration/I won’t have the money until I’m at festival or after festival/eep! I’m broke, what do I do?”

Answer #4 – Unfortunately, I don’t have the ability to make money appear out of nowhere (or else I wouldn’t have all these student loans, lol!) Also, I’m not in control of your finances, you are. But here are some suggestions that I have made to others, so I share them with you now:

1) Budget yourself. Some of you come to this every year, so it shouldn't come as a yearly surprise that you need to come up with the funds by a certain date (review: 2 weeks prior to festival) to attend. Here is an example: You need to pay for 1 adult entry into NWFEF. Let's set the goal to pay by August. If you start in November, and put aside \$10 per month, by August you will have your entire registration fee ready to drop in the mail. 2) Some people leave themselves a Google calendar reminder to pay their registration out of their tax returns in the Spring. 3) If you don't trust yourself to do option 1, if you can't stash your money and not dip into it during the year (I had someone confess to this inability), did you know that your lovely Registration Goddess will help you with a payment plan? Contact me at [nwfef@ninehouses.org](mailto:nwfef@ninehouses.org) to set it up. We will determine what your final registration total will be (is it just you? You and family members? Do you want t-shirts as well?), then we will determine your income frequency (do you get paid once a month? Once every two weeks?). Once we have that all determined, we can run the numbers and figure out how much out of each paycheck you need to send in. You can easily put this expense in with your other bills and send payment to me in the predetermined amount in increments. This is extra work for me, but I don't mind, considering the alternative option seems to be panic attacks for you at time of registration deadline, and subsequently, for me as well. 4) If you are a person that seems to be consistently and constantly broke, consider signing up for a crew spot. You get a half-priced ticket (\$40), and the bonding that occurs from being on staff is definitely a positive experience. Inquire early in the year, however, as these spots get filled quickly. Email me at [nwfef@ninehouses.org](mailto:nwfef@ninehouses.org) and share with me what sort of work you would like to do for NWFEF and I will connect you with the appropriate crew head.

Question #5 – So, when is the deadline for registration anyway?

Answer #5 –

Registration Opens -- February

Registration Closes -- Two weeks before festival (I tell you to have it postmarked the

Monday before registration closes, so it gets here on time. You're welcome! 😊)

If your registration is received after the Thursday two weeks prior to festival, know that what you are doing is asking your Registration Goddess to put you on a wait-list. Should there be any cancellations that you can fill, your Registration Goddess will notify you and your check/money order will be deposited. If there are no cancellations, your check will either be returned to you or shredded (the Registration Goddess will ask your preference) and you will have to try again (earlier) next year.

Question #6 – “I emailed the Registration Goddess 8 hours ago, why have I not received a response?” (yes, this really happens)

Answer #6 – when emailing the Registration Goddess, please allow 3-5 days for a response to registration-related questions, 5-7 days for questions that require me to check in and get responses from other crew heads, and for questions for which our site coordinator has to contact the park.... Let's just say invoking a God/Goddess known for their patience is not a bad idea. Please never think that I am slacking or ignoring you. That is NEVER the case. (Those that know me and know how hard I work for this community will know this to be true. Those that don't know me, ask a friend.) Emailing another board member doesn't work because they more than likely can't help you if your concern needs to be addressed by my department. Plus, it feels like you are trying to either “go around me” or “tell on me” which just feels downright

disrespectful and rude, especially considering what is probably really happening is I am behind the scenes busting my butt to take care of you. Also, especially during the months of July/August/September, there are typically 40 emails just like yours that are just as important as yours, and I am answering them in the order they came in, as fast as I possibly can. Also, some of you know me personally and know my personal email/Facebook/phone number. Please don't contact me through my personal contacts. I have a system for keeping the huge amount of work I do organized, and part of that is knowing that when I sit down to do work for the festival, it's all in the email box for [nwfef@ninehouses.org](mailto:nwfef@ninehouses.org), not my personal email, not my Facebook messages. Chances are, if you submit something to my personal contacts, you are misfiling yourself and your festival need will be lost in the shuffle and unsatisfied. We have had issues in the past where the festival email address was malfunctioning. In cases such as that, please contact the administrator of our Facebook page, or kindly submit notification of the issue to either [editor@ninehouses.org](mailto:editor@ninehouses.org) or [emedia@ninehouses.org](mailto:emedia@ninehouses.org). There is no need to utilize all of these contacts at once, just pick one and use it.

Question #7 – “Why are there so many darn rules? (no RV's onsite, no driving on the grass, only 30 structures in Fairy Field, tent camping only in Fairy Field, no candles, no firedancing, etc.)

Answer #7 – A majority of “no's” handed out by myself pre-fest and by myself and the rest of the board onsite are a result of park rules. Please note, I said park rules, not anything that was decided/enacted by The Nine Houses of Gaia, but definitely rules that we must enforce in order to maintain a good relationship with Silver Falls State Park and ensure that we will be welcomed back for years to come. Some of you might remember that, back in 2010, we tried out a different site with fewer rules. The response from the community was that you wanted

Silver Falls back. In recent years, Silver Falls has been named a historic site, which means, yep you guessed it, more rules. It is a beautiful site, and some of us that have been coming to this festival for many years have a sentimental attachment to the site. But in order to keep having our festival at this site, there are many rules that must be adhered to, and we need your understanding and cooperation in doing that.

Question #8 – “I have been coming to this festival for many years, I don’t even bother to read the festival packet or the info sheet that comes with my registration form.”

Answer #8 – This statement usually follows an exchange of me answering a series of questions from a long-time attendee. Questions that are answered in one of those two documents, and I point that out to them. Often I have trouble coming up with words to respond to this statement because they are usually an elder of mine, and “duh!” doesn’t feel quite appropriate. So, here is the eloquent answer: I review the info sheet yearly, and update it as needed. The festival packet is reviewed with a fine-toothed comb by myself and my fellow packet-editor. We spend many hours on this, with multiple proofreading sessions. This is the best way for us to get a lot of information out to a lot of people all at once. This is our communication to you, so you can be knowledgeable and ensure that you will have a positive festival experience. This year, in your emailed registration confirmations, I advised you to check both of these documents for answers to your questions, because in past years, 85% of the emailed questions I got were answered in one of those two documents. I would like to extend a big thank you (!) to those of you that took my advice, as there was a noticeable decrease in those types of questions. I read both of these documents multiple times each year and I’ve been going to this

festival for 14 years. I'm asking you to honor the work that goes into them and the desire on our parts to make sure you are well-equipped for festival. I'm asking you to just read it once.

Question #9 – Well, this is more of an observation than a question. On occasion, I have unfortunately bore witness to the poor treatment of crew heads and their crews. I am saddened to report overhearing one year that someone thought they were entitled to dispense such treatment because those that work to make this festival successful are paid to be there and therefore, apparently paid to take abuse and negativity.

Answer #9 – Even if any of us or our crews were well-paid to do this for you, NO ONE deserves to be treated poorly. But maybe knowing this will help even the score in the minds that think such terrible things: NO ONE gets paid to perform a service at this festival. NO ONE gets into this festival free. ALL STAFF, board members and otherwise, still PAY to be there. We all pay our site fees. So, not only are these people VOLUNTEERING out of the kindness of their hearts, they are paying to be volunteers. They do get a reduced ticket price to compensate for the fact that while you are enjoying a workshop, shopping at the vendors, or socializing, they are cooking, checking people in at the gate, hauling wood, etc., but yes, they pay to be there too. I understand that energy is high at these types of events, and occasionally people get frustrated. But, the next time that happens, please take a deep breath, remember that we are all in this together, and we are all equals. If you have a problem or concern, approach with understanding and a willingness to find solutions, and you will be met with the same.

Question #10 – “I remember when I used to show up at festival, everything was already set up and it was truly like walking into another world. Now, when I show up, temples are still being



built, the kitchen is still being arranged, decorations are still being put up, etc. And things are being broken down and packed before we even leave on Sunday! What's up with that?"

Answer #10 – Once upon a time, we had these things called crew days. We had Wednesday for crew to get everything set up, and we had Monday to tear everything down and pack it away.

With our re-budgeting (reference Answer #1), we have eliminated the crew days. Crew gets on site just a few hours before you do, and we get one hour after you leave on Sunday to vacate the premises. If this really bothers you, please send a check in the amount of \$1600 (\$800 per crew day), payable to The Nine Houses of Gaia, to PO Box 33182, Portland, OR 97292, and we will purchase the extra crew days to ensure that the space is a virtual Pagan Wonderland for you from Thursday through Sunday.

Question #11 – “How come we can't line our cars up outside the gate early on Thursday like we used to?"

Answer #11 – This also has to do with the lack of the Wednesday crew day. In the past, we would check in the night before fest, our site coordinator would do the walk-through with the park ranger, and our large supply truck would arrive Wednesday night as well. With the absence of the Wednesday crew day, walk-through with the ranger now occurs at noon on Thursday, and the supply truck cannot come onsite until that is completed. If there are a bunch of vehicles parked on the side of that very narrow road, it impedes traffic for both the rangers and our supply truck. This is why we ask you to not begin lining up until 2pm. If this really bothers you, please send a check in the amount of \$800, payable to The Nine Houses of Gaia, to PO Box 33182, Portland, OR 97292, and we will be more than happy to rent the Wednesday

prior to festival so that the rangers and truck will already be dealt with, and you can line up early on Thursday to your heart's content.

Question #12 – “Why can't I come on site before 4pm on Thursday?/But I'm waiting in line and I HAVE to go to the bathroom! Why can't I just come in early to go potty?/ok, gate keeper, you saw I was about to wet myself and finally conceded to let me go onsite to go potty. Why are you sending an escort/security guard with me?”

Answer #12 – The short answer is that our liability insurance on you does not kick in until 4 pm on Thursday. The supplemental answer is that those few hours before gate opening are very busy and chaotic for our crew, and you being under foot does no service to you or them. The “bad-apple-ruins-the-bunch” answer is that one time we kindly let someone go onsite to go to the bathroom and they never came back. We later found out that they tried to get advantage on the “first come first served” policy on cabins by sneaking off after using the bathroom and hunkering down in a cabin they wanted until the rest of their party joined them after 4pm. Bad form, my friends, bad form.

Question #13 – “Required Volunteerism? What's that?”

Answer #13 – We ask (reference your festival packet) that each attendee volunteer two hours of their time onsite to help out. There are a couple of reasons for this. First of all, this festival belongs to ALL of us, the community. In order to perpetuate the energy and connection of community, as well as your connection to the festival, we ask you to get your hands dirty. For just two hours. To really feel like you have a part in building this festival. Also, with the elimination of the crew days, we have to do the same amount of work in a shorter amount of time. As previously mentioned, when you arrive, things will still be in the process of being

built/set up, and then quickly disassembled and packed on Sunday. If you see something that needs to be done, jump in and offer a hand! We'll certainly appreciate it! Also, our crews work HARD. I mean, REALLY HARD. If you see a way to ease their burden, allow yourself to feel compelled to do so! After a meal, jump in and wash some dishes! If you see fellas loading up the wood truck, ask if you can help load and then distribute the wood. If a temple is being built/disassembled, offer your services. On Sunday, check the grounds for garbage, check all the cabins in your camp to make sure they are clean and swept. Last year, there was a lot of recycling that needed to be separated into the bins at the back of the kitchen that was tended to by the site coordinator and myself; we certainly would have appreciated having some extra hands! So, there is a lot to do, so please jump in and help!

Question #14 – "I always see you (Spyder, or enter any other board member name) running around at festival, and you never stop to say 'hi' or visit. Are you avoiding me/snubbing me/etc?"

Answer #14 – When I joined this board back in 2000, there were about 30 board members running this festival (I might be exaggerating, but probably not by much). Today, in 2013, we have a total of 7 board members that will be running this festival. The work that goes into a successful festival did not decrease by any means, so that means the few of us are wearing many hats. Just to give you a small taste, here is my list of responsibilities to this board, and subsequently, you: board secretary, registration, t-shirt fundraiser, ritual liaison, ritualist, set up of raffle fundraiser, organizer of onsite cash, Tantric temple priestess/crew head, workshop coordinator, workshop presenter, festival schedule coordinator, festival packet editor, festival email, PO Box, back-up medic.....just to name a few, lol. In short, if you see us rushing around,

that's because there is something we need to do to keep this festival going. Please don't take offense that we don't have time to sit and catch up with everybody. In fact, if some of you take Answer #13 to heart (hint hint), we might have time to slow down and enjoy the company of others more often. When you do see a board/staff member slow down for a minute, take the time to thank them for their hard work. (We don't do this for the kudos, but the positive energy seems to make the work easier to do sometimes, and gives us energy to carry on when we grow weary. Some people have even made it habit to offer me granola bars when they see me, because sometimes I get so busy I neglect my blood sugar level, lol. ) But whatever you do, please do not take our busy-ness as a neglect of you, because most times it's quite the opposite!

Question #15 – “I need to plan the dates for next year's festival/I have an event with another group that I'd like to schedule and don't want to conflict with NWFEF/what are the dates for the next NWFEF?/can you please schedule NWFEF so as to not conflict with (enter another well-known reoccurring September event here)?”

Answer #15 – The park allows us to book our dates 9 months in advance, and no sooner than that. We will book our dates sometime in December and make the announcement in January (watch our website [www.ninehouses.org](http://www.ninehouses.org) or check our Facebook page), with registration starting in February. We attempt to get our date as close to Fall Equinox proper as we can. Silver Falls is quite a popular venue, and sometimes we have to be a bit forgiving in exactly what weekend in September we get. We do attempt to avoid booking in opposition to other well-known and popular events occurring in September, but so many of them have cropped up

in recent years, that sometimes, between the sheer number of them and the effort itself it takes to book the venue, it is difficult to avoid double-booking against other events.

So, I hope you have found this article enlightening and helpful. I hope you now have ideas on how to improve festival experience for yourself and those around you, as well as ideas on how to help us help you! If you have any further questions that I might be able to answer, please feel free to email me at [nwfef@ninehouses.org](mailto:nwfef@ninehouses.org).

Many blessings

Spyder