## Gallantly Gothic

What comes to mind when you hear the word Gothic? Are you bombarded by images of death and darkness, youths wearing all black? Or perhaps your mind conjures images of wicked teens clad in black holding séances with Ouija Boards, people listening to heavy metal and somehow hearing messages of murder in the lyrics? Many people have no idea what the modern Alternative Gothic lifestyle is. This is an attempt to dispel some misconceptions and explain what Gothic also shortened to 'Goth' means to me.

From an early age I began to watch horror movies with my mother. But perhaps I became most enchanted with the most famous Gothic image of all time: Dracula portrayed by Hungarian-born Bela Lugosi and his glamorization of the vampire myth. Many people are not aware that he was buried with one of his Dracula capes. How Goth is that? Most vampire movies since are a bit tongue-in-cheek. But the range of Gothic horror and macabre fantasies played out on the silver screen are endless.

It is often easier to explain what Goth isn't rather than what it is. Some people are more what society considers to be the 'norm' and others are not. Many such as me have tastes and preferences that are very non-traditional. Usually when describing what Goth is to someone completely unaware of it I refer them to The Addams Family or Elvira Mistress of the Dark. They are kooky, creepy, darkly humorous, but harmless, friendly characters. I don't believe you have to listen to only Gothic rock or death metal to be Goth. My musical taste is very eclectic and varied. Nor do I believe you must always have a grave demeanor and cadaverously thin physique.  Goth is not a creepy religious cult or movement that forces people to shun family and friends and accept Satan. No one much cares who you choose to worship. It is in fact an

inexplicable attraction to and fascination with things of a dark or macabre nature. There are many people who possess these tendencies.

From a very young age I can also recall having much more energy at night. I am unsure if it was the stillness and the peace, or the time to think however conversely morning was always a struggle for me. I have from as long as I can remember preferred to stay up late and sleep late. Most Goths I know have day jobs; it is on the weekends when we get to succumb to our 'dark' desires.

There are Goth clubs which not only play Goth rock but also 80's, New Wave, Synth Pop, and many other sub-genres of which even I am not familiar. Since the Goth scene is relatively small there is an air of community and camaraderie unlike that of other club scenes. Goth clothing can also be very varied. Although dark colors are a must, the clothing styles can range from historical period costume to modern formal wear or cyber futuristic wear and beyond. Many people are very creative and are coming up with new styles all the time. There are variations on these themes and if you are truly curious and would like to learn more I suggest you check out gothic.net, or simply Google Gothic. Another alternative for the very bold would also be to actually go to a Goth club venue and see for yourself what it entails. Again I cannot stress enough that the Gothic style is not a religion or a belief system of any kind, no more than the Hip Hop style is or any other such genre that involves more than just music, but also clothing and an overall style.

Over all I consider myself a naturally Goth person, naturally attracted to things that are on the dark side, forbidden, taboo, a little macabre or otherwise against society's norms. Some of my favorite things include but are not limited to: Halloween, vampire movies, TV shows, and novels, night time, Full Moons, candles, Paganism etc. I have also almost always enjoyed wearing dark colors, mostly black. Many people

confusingly think that it's negative or bad for you because of the funereal association. However, very few people realize that here in the West we wear black and dark colors to funerals because it is believed that dark colors give us strength during hard times. The wearing of dark colors is a way of empowering ourselves. So it would make perfect sense for an individual who is often scrutinized by society or emotionally sensitive, as many Goths are, to wear cark colors much of the time. They may be subconsciously trying to empower themselves. So all those superstitions against wearing black and dark colors too much are baseless and absurd, as is the notion that we are focused on or obsessed with death. For many of us we are trying to lend energy and strength to our lives.

I have always drawn strength and energy from the dark and black and dark colors that I wear. So the next time you see someone dressed all in black and a little unusual, perhaps a little 'Goth' realize that they are doing and being what feels comfortable and natural to them. After all it is important to realize and recognize that no one chooses their preferences, but simply whether or not to express them.

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