



# Medicine Stories Podcast

Episode 24 with Fay Johnstone

Plant Spirits and Deep Remembering  
that Speaks to the Bones

August 20, 2018

[Intro]

[0:00:00]

*(Excerpt from today's show by Fay Johnstone)*

*Because I really believe it's about our personal connection and exploring our relationship with how the plants are speaking to us, and we're all led to create different things. And for me, working with plants is a very creative process because it's really connecting us to that source of who we are, and what our magic is to bring out in the world.*

—

*(Intro Music: acoustic guitar folk song "Wild Eyes" by Mariee Sioux)*

[0:00:29]

**Amber:** Hey friends, welcome to the [Medicine Stories](#) podcast, where we explore the mythic journeys we undertake when coming to know ourselves through interviews with herbalists, story keepers, ancestral listeners, consciousness explorers, earth dreamers, and otherwise folk with the guiding assumptions beliefs, truisms, that story is medicine, magic is real, and healing is open-ended and endless.

My name is Amber Hill, and this is Episode 24. Today I'm talking to herbalist and author, Fay Johnston. Fay is the author of a recent book called [Plants that Speak, Souls that Sing](#), and it's a really sweet book. I love her whole message. her whole vibe, and I'm excited to share this with you.

Some of the things that we talk about are:

- Returning to an ancestral homeland and taking up ancestral activities
- Being called by something invisible

- When something that feels like failure turns out to be a blessing
- How plants can connect us to the source of creativity
- Giving ourselves the time and permission for inner exploration and play
- Bringing enchantment and ritual to our relationship with plants
- Fay shares a deeply transformative mugwort medicine story
- We talk about generational forgetting & shame around using plant medicine
- A vision/visitation from the great-grandmother that Fay never knew
- How our bodies carry our stories
- Meeting the spirit of plants with the breath
- The benefits of not having a ton of plant knowledge
- And bypassing the brain to get to the heart

I want to remind you that my first-ever herb teacher and Episode 20 guest, Kami McBride, still has, as of the day of this release, still has her three free videos on all about healing, herbal oils, available right now on her website. I think they become unavailable on Friday, August 24, and that's when registration for her online course about how to make herbal oils closes. But until then, these three videos are free, and they're wonderful.

The first one is about how to make fresh, plant-infused oils — which is the method that I use for all of my Mythic Medicinals oils, taught to me by Kami in person, in her apprenticeship in 2007. And the second video is all about making dried plant oil infusions. And Kami has a really special method of doing this. She uses calendula as an example in the video. You can also use it with comfrey and just other plants that really should be dried when you make them into oil.

This is a question I get all the time, “Which plants should I use fresh, which dried? How do I know, and then how do I do it without having them spoil?” Kami answers all of these questions in these videos and shows you how to make them. So I'll put the link to that in the show notes to this episode that you're listening to right now. I'll put it near the top so it's really easy to access and go check them out. Go check them out. And the third video is just all about how herbal oils are the easiest home remedy, herbal home remedy, to make with the most rewarding returns, the biggest bang for your buck.

I love herbal oils. I've talked about this a ton. The last Episode 23 is all about this, so I don't want to say too much but just check it out. Check it out. Kami's course, [\*Handcrafted, Healing Herbal Oils\*](#), will take you step-by-step through how to make affordable, high-quality, homemade, shelf-stable, herbal oils right in your own kitchen. She's been doing this for decades; she's a master.

This is such a great way for people to step into the world of herbalism, or to really deepen their own, not only herbal practice but, like, your presence in your body.

[0:04:49]

**Amber:** And this is something that I never would have guessed would end up sort of almost been the theme of this whole podcast. Pretty much every single episode for me has boiled down to, like, how to be a more embodied human, how to live in my body instead of in my mind all the time, and therefore, you know, how to access my intuition and my instinctive knowing in order to connect more with the world around me; be a better herbalist, be a better mother, be a better person.

For me now, for 11 years oiling my body with whole-plant, infused oils has been my main practice as far as grounding myself, becoming present, and really knowing myself, and interacting with the world in such a way that my nervous system is in a state of calm and receptiveness.

So, Fay has an awesome ebook available for today's listeners. It's called *Becoming a Plant Spirit Explorer*. The beautiful PDF, which also has a bonus, embedded link to a strengthening meditation to breathe and connect with a tree. And we talk about this idea in this interview, as I've already mentioned, of connecting with the spirit of plants through breath; such a simple technique, but like, so powerful, just seems like it should be, really, a foundational practice to anyone wishing to deepen their connection with the plant realm. And anyone can receive a free audio from Fay's book by signing up on her website, [fayjohnstone.com](http://fayjohnstone.com).

[0:06:42]

**Amber:** I wanted to mention, really quick, this thing I saw on Facebook that I thought was a neat merging of two of the past guests on this podcast. So this is something that Stephen Harrod Buhner posted on his Facebook page on July 29, if you feel like going back, reading it. His name on Facebook is just Stephen Buhner, no Harrod.

And it was a pretty long post all about how he has dealt with and almost fully, it sounds like, healed has chronic back pain, which is a result of writing so many books, basically, like a book a year for 20 years, I think, and just sitting, sitting, sitting — which, for me, as an aspiring author was really good to think about how to, you know, prevent that from happening to myself one day, when I have enough time to just sit and sit for hours and hours when the kids are older.

So basically, he lists all these things that he tried, and the thing that really ended up working for him was microdosing psilocybin, and I think some sort of cacti as well. And of course, Stephen was my guest on Episode Eight of the podcast, and we did talk a little bit about psychedelics; we didn't talk about micro-dosing at all.

And then Episode 13, my guest was James Fadiman, who has popularized the concept of microdosing, and we talked quite a bit about that in that podcast. So I just thought it was really neat to see one guest talking about how this idea, this work that's been brought forth by another guest, microdosing psychedelics, help to heal chronic back pain. That's a really big deal.

So I sent the message, I sent Stephen's post to Jim, Jim Fadiman, and he wrote back and was just very grateful to read this testimonial because pain is something that he's been really curious about with microdosing and is it helping people with pain, and he hadn't heard much back from people but this was a glowing testimonial speaking to that.

[0:08:51]

**Amber:** And one more thing that I wanted to mention before we get into this lovely conversation: so, Fay shares a really neat story all about mugwort and this, like, deep trance state that she was not expecting to be put into while just sitting and meditating and looking at a mugwort plant in her garden and just how, like, yeah, transformative and healing this experience was for her.

And I love mugwort. Mugwort is my main plant ally, always has been, and it reminded me — I thought I would share with you guys — that there's this really neat, 10th-century Old English manuscript known as the "Nine Herbs Charm." You can look it up if you're interested, see what the other herbs are. I don't want to talk too much about it, but mugwort is the first plant listed in this ancient text, and what it says about mugwort is:

*Remember, Mugwort, what you revealed, what you established at the mighty proclamation.  
Una, you are called, oldest of herbs.  
You may avail against three and against thirty.  
You may avail against poison and against contagion.  
You may avail against the loathsome one who travels through the land.*

So, you know, no one knows what "the mighty proclamation" means. There's a lot here, obviously, that doesn't really translate into modern times, modern language. But clearly, mugwort is being called upon as a very powerful plant against poison, against contagion. And the part that really speaks to me, though, is "oldest of herbs." Mugwort is called "oldest of herbs," and that is just so the feeling that I get from this powerful, beautiful plant, too, every time I smell it, every time I taste it, which I do all the time.

My main practice of connecting with mugwort for over 10 years now has been putting it in my mouth whenever I see a plant, whenever I pass by one, the dried mugwort I have in my home, the tinctures and vinegars and oxymels that I've made, and the oil that I put in my skin, but mostly just putting mugwort leaf and flowers in my mouth has been a major practice for me now, for a while, and there's something about that taste, that smell, the interaction of this plant with my body that "opens chambers of ancient memory in the brain," to quote Judith Berger and her lovely book, *Herbal Rituals*. So yeah, that's called the nine herbs charm. If you want to learn more, it's really neat.

[0:11:41]

**Amber:** And now let me tell you about Fay really quickly — oh, and I should tell you that the free PDF that I mentioned earlier is *Becoming a Plant Explorer*, is available on the Patreon for this podcast. It's [patreon.com/medicinstories](https://patreon.com/medicinstories) at the \$2 level.

Thank you so much, everyone, who has pledged. It just makes my heart grow three sizes every time I see it. Every time I check and see that there have been more pledges, more comments, more likes, more thank yous, for the incredible content that the past guests on this podcast have made available as support for this show. And thank you so much to those of you who have supported by pledging there.

It's really fun to communicate with my guests and figure out what we can offer that would be valuable and that would be in line with the episode and the interview and what we talked about here. So you can check that out there. You can join the [Medicine Stories Facebook](#) group if you're into that.

And so Fay Johnstone is a Shamanic Practitioner, Herbalist, and Reiki Master with a passion for helping people and plants grow together. Fay believes that restoring our sacred relationship with the

Earth and connecting to our natural environment, seasons, and cycles is essential in order for us to maintain our vitality, health, and well-being.

Fay is the author of the book *Plants that Speak, Souls that Sing*, a guide to transforming your life with the spirit of plants, inspired by Fay's five years as an organic flower and herb farmer. It's Fay's goal to help us weave nature and enchantment back into our own lives to feel more in harmony with our true nature and sense of self. Fay offers workshops educating on Plant Spirit connection and Earth-based ritual and shamanic treatments across the UK, online, and from her home in Scotland.

So let's get right into it and listen to this interview with Fay Johnston.

## [Interview Begins]

—

*(Transitional Music: acoustic guitar folk song "Wild Eyes" by Mariee Sioux)*

[0:13:49]

**Amber:** Hello Fay. Welcome to Medicine Stories podcast.

**Fay:** Hi Amber, lovely to be here.

**Amber:** I'm really enjoying the sound of your voice so far, and the accent, really, it just brings me right in line with a branch of my ancestry that I am very enamored of and taken with and interested in exploring further. So you're just, you know, in reading about your life, and you're living in Scotland now, I believe, makes me... it's just kind of reopening this path of interest for me.

**Fay:** Yeah, well, interestingly, I've only been living here for about, coming up to, just four years now. And I feel the same way in a sense because I was living in the south of England, that's where I was brought up. I moved to Nova Scotia, and we kind of say, "Oh, yeah, we came back to the UK," but coming to Scotland is that was like coming home, too, coming home in the sense that my ancestors were from here, too.

And up until very recently, I was really just living down the road from where my great-grandfather grew up and was working, and I was working at the time, interestingly, as a gardener for a big house, a big estate house, and interestingly, he and my ancestors, had been gardeners, you know, back in the day for another estate house.

So it was very interesting kind of blending of lives and connecting with that plant ancestry, and it just felt it felt like the right thing because it was sad for us to leave Canada and come to Scotland, but that really helped me land and find a connection with plants and the land where I was so.

And there is a big draw, you know, in the Celtic cultures and our ancestors and that Scottish fire, there this really big draw because it is a magical place here. Just like everywhere, I mean, I think, in

the British Isles. Actually, I feel really truly blessed to be back on this soil because it's steeped in history and, you know, ancient, sacred places.

And we were just driving the other day, and we bumped into someone who was like, "Oh, have you been to see the standing stones over there?" And we're like, "No! We didn't know there were standing stones here." This is just, you know, twenty minutes from where we live. So we're always able to discover these magical places that nature has for us.

And there are some beautiful, ancient yew trees, for example, where my partner has his studio and just walking in that, it originally was part of a, you know, an ancient forest, and now these trees, they're all that remains of it, and just, you know, it's like you're going through a portal when you're walking in this part of the gardens there, and, you know, it's palpable.

The atmosphere around you changes, and through your physical senses you do. You start to feel it because, obviously, you're getting cooler because the coverage in the trees is slightly thicker. And the sounds around you change, you know, the birds change, the forest kind of envelops you, as you come into this tunnel. And there are these ancient yew trees, and it's, again, a really beautiful, powerful place to sit and contemplate.

And I feel really fortunate that — because this is kind of the thing that I love to do and try and make a living from — that this is, you know, I'm really drawn to this. And so I do spend the time, and, you know, make the space for it in my life, but, you know, sadly, many of us are just, you know, too busy going from place to place without really opening the senses to feel our way into these magical places.

**Amber:** My whole body is just buzzing, listening to you speak about the British Isles like that.

[0:17:57]

**Amber:** I would love to hear then about your time in Nova Scotia. And you had a flower farm there, I believe, that sort of really led you deeper into this plant path that you're on, and through that, too, you can kind of tell us about your approach to working with the spirits of plants, you know, above and beyond just quote "using them as medicine" but really connecting with them as beings, and sort of how this lays the groundwork for your book.

**Fay:** Um, well, we, my partner and I, when we moved to Nova Scotia. We had this sort of, you know, we were really following our hearts. I was feeling very trapped, almost, in this kind of tiny house and this life that was mapped out for us in the south of England where we were. And so we followed our dreams to have some space and start to grow, and that was obviously very wide open. So in a sense, we were pulled by something invisible from the start and allowed it to manifest around us, and it did turn into this organic flower and herb farm.

And yeah, up till that point, I had been doing a BSc in Herbal Medicine in the UK, which actually I'd stopped because they'd been — you know, long story. I stopped doing this, the studying — and so I always, at the back of my mind, I'd been kind of annoyed at myself that I didn't pursue it hard enough, that I hadn't, you know, tried harder to find another school that could do it. And so I always

had this, I suppose, in a sense, a sense of I was carrying this sense of “I've failed somewhere” because, like, I never became the clinical herbalist that I could have been.

And what happened then is, in a way, plants were not really in the forefront of my mind. It was my partner, this gentle nudging, saying, “Well, you know, don't you want to start making some more herbal potions? Don't you want to start doing this again?” And I was like, “Oh yeah, I guess I do.” And it was almost like I'd had a love affair with plants when I was studying my herbal medicine degree. And then because that had ended badly or changed directions slightly, I, you know, like we are with lovers, we're kind of like, “Huh, okay, well, I'm going to shut that part of me down.”

And so being out in Nova Scotia on our beautiful farm, we had lovely 35 acres, and we were very rural in this lovely, rural community. So really, there was no choice but to totally immerse myself in the plants that were there. And it was an absolute awakening for me, a remembering, that deep remembering that speaks to your bones. I mean, you know how plants are; they manage to get their roots right in there, and they pull up those places of sadness; they pull up those shadows from the depths that we've pushed down, and we said, “Oh, that doesn't matter. I'm not doing that anymore.” And that's kind of what happened to me.

And I realized that there was this connection with plants through my breath, through meditation, through my shamanic journeys, because I guess I've been on my shamanic path for a couple of years before I got to Nova Scotia. So I was beginning to really open those extra senses, that intuitive way of being in the world, and with one foot kind of in this earthly plane and another foot in the spirit world.

Anyway, so it was just this opening that, in a way, it crept up on me, and it was so persistent, and, you know, there was nowhere to turn. There was no city to run off to and hide in a coffee shop. It was there every day, and it was very raw but equally so inviting and so sweet that that's how this awakening happened for me.

And it sounds silly like, “Oh, well, you didn't realize that that was gonna happen? Wasn't that your plan when you went to Canada?” And no, it wasn't at all. But I know that your listeners will agree that plants have a very, they're very persistent in a very gentle, sometimes not so gentle way, but they persistently — it's like the way they grow around you entwines you. And I felt so entwined, really, with all the plants and the sort of spirit, really, of the farm that I was totally inspired to create medicinal products and beauty products and salves and tinctures. But also to really add in the magic there of that plant spirit connection.

And we found ourselves unable to, you know, we learned the hard way. When you're farming, you know, you get into that headspace that says, “Right, I want these plants to be here because this makes sense for me harvesting, and then this happens,” and, you know, you're very logical about how things need to be.

But we soon learned that the plants you know, they had another idea of how they wanted to be on the farm. And so there were some really steep learning curves. And, you know, plants don't like to grow in straight lines; they don't like to be part of a formula. They're a journey that we go on, and I feel like, yeah, it was huge medicine for me, really, just being in that immersive space.

[0:23:42]

**Fay:** And so when we actually, and so, well, what I started doing is I thought, “Well, this is amazing,” and I wanted to teach people how to do it. I've always really been very practical, and I never liked to, — you know, working as a healer when I was predominantly giving Reiki treatments— I never liked to kind of be prescriptive and like, “Well, oh, this is the message I've been given.” My way of being, really, is I would love to teach people and empower people to learn for themselves, grow plants themselves. So rather than just be simply, say, for example, giving somebody a motherwort tincture, I was like, “Hey, why don't I give you this tincture so you can see how you get along, come up to the farm, I will give you a motherwort plant, so you can take that home, and you can find your way to connect.” So that was really how I like to bring it in for other people.

And it was really wonderful to having the farm space for people to be able to come to the farm, meet me, meet the plants, and have their own experiences because I really believe it's about our personal connection and exploring our relationship with how the plants are speaking to us, and we're all led to create different things. And for me, working with plants is a very creative process because it's really connecting us to that source of who we are and what our magic is to bring out in the world. And I find that plants have this beautiful method for us to be doing that.

And so I guess that was the inspiration for the book was “I need to really get all of this down, so that there's a practical guide for people, too, as a starting point.” Because I'm very — I'm, like I said, I get very inspired by nature, and it really brings out this creative force in me, you know, reminding me that I am this force of nature. And so I actually think the book is a design theory, as a guide to kind of start people off on that journey.

And so many, many people, they come to me, and they're just like, they think they think they're missing something because they're not sure how to connect with plants. And, you know, really, all it is— and as you know— it's really remembering this wisdom that we carry, remembering the ancient wisdom that our ancestors enjoyed, experienced. We're just calling back that power to remember this connection. We think we're disconnected, we're not. We just need to pause and take the time and create the space for that connection.

So I find mostly in the workshops that I run now, and even back in Canada, it was really just allowing people, holding that space, so that people can come in to the space, bringing whatever they're bringing with them, and connecting him with the senses within that space, so that they can really explore because we don't give ourselves this time in our in our lives, and we don't give ourselves the permission either to to do that exploring and that playing, you know, with our childlike nature. So that's a little bit about how the book came about.

[0:26:59]

**Fay:** I was realizing I was having all these wonderful experiences, and I really wanted to share them. But really, it was this inspiration to give people the very practical starting points, particularly because we can get started, I think, quite easily now with the herbal side of things, the herbal making, herbal medicines, foraging, identifying plants, and so forth, that practical side of making herbal medicines. But in terms of making those spirit connections, I wanted to just really put down some practical tips of how you can bridge that gap because also I find, as well, sometimes when I talk to people and say



that I work as a shamanic herbalist or a shamanic practitioner, there's a bit of eyes glazing over as to what that really is. So what I wanted to do with the book is to really help bridge that.

So we're talking about plant-spirit connection, but you know that that spirit of nature is that wonderful essence that stops us in our tracks when we're on a lovely walk, and we see a beautiful tree in front of us, or we see the sunset, looking so magical, you know. That's what we're, that's the essence that we are wanting to connect with and reminding ourselves to forge a deep relationship with.

And so I wanted to give the starting point, the springboard, as to how someone who's never even thought about, you know, shamanic path or never even thought about plant spirits even might just want to connect or go further with their gardening or go further with their herbal medicine making; just feel a little bit more inspired to perhaps bring prayer and blessing and ritual into the preparation of medicines or into the planting of a garden, just to help allow that enchantment and magic to grow within our within ourselves.

Yeah, so that's the story of the birthing of the book, really, I suppose. And it's obviously taken a few years since I got back from Canada to Scotland to get it down and to get it organized and just, really, because it's a birthing process in a sense, and it's hard to... Well it's a process to get that out into the world and really, in a sense, I'm really excited now that it is out in the world because then I can actually get creating other new ideas and plant stories which are flowing, too.

So it's interesting how the more you work with plants, the way you work with them changes and flows, and it's just you know, the seasons and cycles. So I've got so many new things bubbling because I've managed to actually birth something so new things can start growing. So that's the exciting part for me is bringing all that will come and all the hearts that are going to open, you know, on these parts with us with this plant spirit work.

**Amber:** Book is forever, you know. Once it's out there, you don't know whose hands it's gonna find itself in and how it's going to change their lives. And I wanted to have you on because I, your message is just so in alignment with what I am doing on this podcast and with this underlying belief and guiding principle that the plants can bring us deeper into ourselves, and that is really going to be the the foundation of any real healing journey, especially long term, especially chronic conditions, you know.

And so I love, I just love your emphasis on moving beyond working with physical medicine and medicine making— although that's, of course, a part of it— but really using the plants to to get to know ourselves; building relationships with the plants to build a deeper relationship with yourself, with the land around us, with the other-than-human creatures that we are all in relationship with. So I'm just very excited about your book and about sharing it with people.

[0:31:09]

**Amber:** And so I would like to hear, you mentioned stories, plant stories. And of course, that's also a big part of what I'm trying to do here with this show. And you had told me a little bit about this beautiful encounter you had with the spirit of mugwort. Mugwort is very much my— I always say mugwort initiated me into the path of herbalism. And I think that many, many people, maybe

especially women, find that that is the case. You know, there's just so much to say about mugwort. So why don't you tell us your story with that?

**Fay:** I'd love to share it with you. So I was— well, really, it starts really with me in my garden. So I was bumping into something, an issue that was happening in my life, and I was thinking: what on earth is all of this about, this drama that keeps coming up for me? And so I took it, you know, in my garden, I took it somewhere in nature to just, you know, allow the inspiration to come in because this is what I do, is always, you know, recommend everybody needs to, if there's something on your mind, you need to just, you know, change the scene, get out in nature, get with some plant, something to bring in some magic for you.

So there I was in my garden, and I'm going over in my head what on earth could it be and then I find myself, like, this mugwort plant was directly in my line of vision, and it was, you know, doing it's little wave to me, and I'm thinking, oh my goodness, this plant's really speaking to me.

And what happened then, really, was probably the next few hours of absolute kind of trance/meditation/journeying with this mugwort plant, and it was very spontaneous. And I mean, I'm in my back garden, which at the time was connected to some flats and small houses. So my garden is overlooked by people. So I am not alone in nature by any sense. I'm in a very urban environment in my garden, but this mugwort plant was really calling to me.

And I found myself... it just reminded me of a memory, a really long time ago as a child where I was hiding, and this mugwort was just, it was taking me really right down into that shadow part of me that was feeling like it wasn't enough. And I tell you, the memory that it brought out for me was something I had, you know, one of those things that ,you know, I couldn't even tell you that memory that, you know, it wasn't anything that at the time seemed significant, nothing that I thought I was carrying with me. But mugwort had this way of just bringing it up to me and showing it to me and showing where I had buried that part in me, and actually just reminding me. It was mugwort was kind of challenging me. It was like the plant was pushing me to, you know, this choice: you either can hold on to this, or we can go in the spiral, and we can let this go.

And so I ended up really with the plant moving and as if I was kind of doing the spontaneous movement around the garden, and like I said, I was really, you know, if there had been a neighbor overlooking — well, they would have had an absolute, you know, laugh at looking at me, you know, in doing this spontaneous movement with my body while the plant was as if it was moving through me, moving the the experience I'd had, showing it to me, highlighting it to me, that it didn't need to be there anymore. It was very, very emotional for me, this.

And at the time, I kind of went on and on. It was one of those things that I was trapped in. It was like I was transfixed with the mugwort plant, and I couldn't break the spell, I was totally under the mugwort spell. And at one stage I— literally, this was kind of towards the end, when I really felt it moving through me, moving this experience through me— I became an eagle. And I was, you know, running around my garden flapping my wings. I mean, this sounds totally hilarious and hysterical, but this was how the plant was moving through me.

So it was incredibly powerful, these kind of surges of energy that were causing me to, you know, become a bird. And it was just, it was kind of exhausting. And because it was so physical throughout my body, and this is why I know that mugwort is such a deep, magical healer because, I don't know,

I'd hidden this experience which upset me when I was a little girl, it was an experience all associated with shame, which I never knew I was carrying. And this mugwort, you know, it wasn't gonna let go; it challenged me. And it was, you know, it was like, "We're taking this out. We're taking this out." And as a result, you know, I'm becoming this free bird, like an eagle-like creature, as this mugwort moves this medicine through me.

And the interesting thing was that I kind of came to rest in the garden, and I thought, "Oh my goodness, I'm so glad that's over." And I'm sort of breathing heavily, and I'm just feeling quite physically exhausted by this plant and this whole experience because it, you know, I've gone outside like I said, to take five minutes just to think something over; not really thinking that I was going to step into a sort of deep healing process.

[0:37:07]

**Fay:** And so I go to walk back in my house, and I'm coming up the stairs, and it was when I came to the top of the stairs, and I saw mugwort in the mirror at the top of our stairs. And you know, there's no mugwort, you know, in the mirror; there's no mugwort at that particular place in my flat. So I came back in the flat, and I thought and I knew that the mugwort was not finished with me. She was not going to let me go; this was not over. There was still something else that needed to be processed.

And so I, again, I found myself spontaneously moving. So this time I'm in my living room, and I'm just spontaneously moving, flowing, and this song came to me. I was singing a beautiful song of being free— and I'm sure I can remember the song if I thought hard enough— but I sang this beautiful song of being free, not having any shame, being free of shame, and it was just a beautiful, healing experience of allowing this to move through me, and really move it from a place of deep, hidden secrecy and pain, locked away, into this expansion of joy. So it's really going from dark to light, from stagnant to movement from pain to joy.

And, again this experience was just, it was so physically draining and exhausting, and I ended up, I asked that, too. I was sort of almost, like, desperate for this to finish because it was like how long is this going to go on for? I'm, you know, mugwort, I don't know if I have the stamina for this, you know, and this plant was not letting me go. But I ended up sat on the sofa. I thought to write, you know, I'm managing to plug in the brain, this thinking, "Oh my goodness, how can I get this to, how can I escape mugwort?" basically. And what I ended up doing is playing a track.

I put on YouTube, and I thought, "Oh, I need some, you know, I need some really inspirational light music," and I was playing that track called "I Am Light." I think it's by India Arie. And I ended up just playing that, and I was just listening to it over and over again, trying to basically ground myself, but in the light, and giving thanks to mugwort, "Thank you for your blessings."

And really, it was very difficult to take myself out of that experience, actually, because mugwort had got this hold on me. And it was like we decided— or my spirit had decided— "Yes, this is time to let this shame go." Mugwort was, "Yes, I recognize that we're doing this." But it took a lot of time to actually get that experience out of my system.

And then when I felt more down to earth, then took myself for you know, an epsom salt bath and water just to, really, you know, cleanse that, honor that, and, again, let it go.

But that was my— I mean, we talked about mugwort being a magical plant; she's a very magical plant. I've always worked with her in a dream salve that I make and to help my dreams be more vivid and clearer and brighter and my shamanic journeys. But this is really my first. It was my baptism, actually, of really personally meeting how powerful and deep that plant can go, and it was all my shadow shame coming up, and boy. Wow. I mean, it was just intense.

[0:40:42]

**Amber:** Mm hmm. Yeah, I was having a similar thought, that you may think of mugwort as this very magical plant, and it is, and people are like, "Use it for your dreams. Just use it. Take it! Yeah!" But a lot of people have an experience similar to yours where mugwort is very fierce with them, and that can come through in a variety of ways. It can come through in not-so-pleasant dreams and things, and experiences like yours. But it's something that is, in the long run, healing, even, you know, even immediately healing, as long as it's integrated, processed, and understood correctly— as you did.

**Amber:** And you had, you know, you were prepared for that kind of experience through the work that you had been doing the inner work you'd been doing the, as you mentioned, shamanic work that you had been doing for decades, I believe, already at that point. So you were able to meet mugwort there, you meet in the middle, and figure out what this meant and what was going on, and give yourself over to it, and then process and integrate it fully.

**Fay:** Yeah, actually, that's where I think mugwort, because she's such a powerful plant, can be a little frightening for people. I mean, I was really fortunate in that setting in that I had the time and the space, and like you say, that that kind of spiritual tools in terms of how I ground myself and that awareness of, "Oh, okay, this is happening now," you know, more as a curiosity rather than a panic coming up in me because of some other, you know, other experiences I've had shamanically and the training I've had.

And I think mugwort can, I mean, this is actually true for all herbs, isn't it? We become very blasé about them, like, "Oh yeah, here's a cup of mint tea," or "Here, try this new infusion blend I've made. It's this, it's this, it's this." And we become a little blasé with them, and almost sometimes forget that they really are very deeply powerful. And we all are so individual because of our conditioning and our experiences and the filters that we have with these beautiful plants that we all react differently, and we all react differently at different times as well.

[0:43:08]

**Fay:** So, yeah, I've had experiences with clients who have been fine, you know, one particular workshop, maybe using rue and handling rue, for example. And then another workshop, they just, it touches them ever so lightly, and they break out in terrible rashes and blisters, you know, from these plants. So we, I think, in a sense, we have to remind ourselves, you know, there's that humility isn't there, and that just that reminder that actually these plants are quite ancient beings.

And so, certainly for me, mugwort is such a gran; she's like a fierce grandmother. So sometimes, she's very sweet, and we can have, we can sit and have tea and cake, and that's all lovely. I'm having my mugwort tea, but other times, you know, grandma is, she's not going to let you get away with something. She's going to pull you back into that alignment with your true self, with who you are. And so we always have to remember to have that respect — and not just for mugwort, like I said, for all the plants. There's always something they will do to remind us.

I had an interesting experience recently with a good friend of mine who's a herbalist, and I had got back from the Amazon, actually, and we'd had some beautiful— well, many, many, amazing plant experiences, as you can imagine with the Amazon. And I had some of the herbs that I bought out there with me, things like guayusa, there was some [inaudible @ 0:44:47] as well. And I shared them with my friend because they were such beautiful medicines, and lovely herbal teas and infusions, and we were having, you know, we'd been having lovely medicinal plant bonds. And I shared them with my friend because I knew she'd enjoy them.

And you know, a few days later, I'm getting a phone call from her saying, “Oh my goodness me, I've had this terrible reaction to one of the herbs. Has this ever happened to you?” She said, you know. And fortunately she was doing herbal bathing, and fortunately, she hadn't just decided to dive in or or throw herself, you know, in a shower of this herbal infusion. Fortunately, she decided to just, you know, stick her hand in first or, you know, to test it out because she was savvy enough to know that, you know, not all plants agree with all people all the time. And she had an absolutely intense reaction that I have never heard of.

And that, again, was this reminder, just it brings you back to center. And maybe I think it always helps us to question: well, what am I doing this for? What am I really looking for? What am I really hoping for? Why am I really here with this herb? And it helps us, right, perhaps look at our intention again and again, go inside and find what's this really teaching me? What's this really showing me? And then asking ourselves again: have I got the courage to hear those answers of the questions that I'm asking?

**Amber:** Yeah, it's kind of like any, like anything else, like synchronicities or oracle cards, any kind of divination, or even dreams. It's all just reflecting you back to you, and it's reflecting you where you are at that moment back to you.

**Fay:** Yeah, absolutely.

[0:46:50]

**Amber:** I wanted to go back a little bit and just comment on what you said about how you were on the path to get a degree in— what's the exact title?

**Fay:** Herbal medicine.

**Amber:** Just herbal medicine. And then you didn't. And, you know, thinking, thinking back to that, it seems like because the regulations around practicing botanical medicine are so strict in Europe, that could have been a very limiting path for you. And I mean, do you feel that way as well?

And instead, here you are still completely engaging with the plants, helping people heal, and it's so much more open-ended, and there's so much more freedom in the eventual plant connection that you ended up cultivating.

**Fay:** I, you know, it's, I know, it's a blessing, isn't it? And it took me so many years to let myself off that hook. It's like, "It's okay. You didn't have to get that degree and become a clinical herbalist because guess what? You wouldn't really have enjoyed it anyway." You know, that's one thing that, you know, I was saying earlier is how inspired I am when I'm in relationship with the plants and out in nature, and how that brings out— well, it reminds me that I am a creative being, and I'm as creative as a cherry tree. I'm creative because I'm part of Mother Earth.

And so yes, I think even though it took me a long time to, you know, to lay that to rest as a career path, I think yeah, it would have been very constricting for me. And I know many many herbalist who feel that they don't even have the connection with the plants because they've been, you know, so many years in clinical study, and they are longing, themselves, for the actual connection with the plants. So it's interesting times for herbal medicine, and I really think I'm really happy with the the path that I'm on because when we're connecting with spirits we are really, we're getting right to the heart of who we are, like you were saying earlier, and how we really all fit together in this magical place.

So, I'm happy that yeah, the traditional herbal medicine route was perhaps not the one for me. And I love the fact that the work that I do, you know, it enhances that work that people are doing and the teachings, medicine, of home medicine making, that people are doing. I think it opens up many, many other pathways when we start to look at plants in that way, and our perception of plant consciousness is really changing, too. So I think it's just really encouraging, and it's driven, really, I believe, by the plants themselves, too.

But yes, the strict regulations here, that sort of changing, things like that, yeah, we will have to kind of see how it all pans out, I think, because it is a medicine of the people, as we know.

[0:50:11]

**Fay:** And I have an interesting friend of mine. She's a traditional storyteller here in Scotland, and she's been spending time with seniors in homes. And she goes round, and she tells her stories because she's talking a lot of the old Celtic legends and myths, but she always loves to talk to them about herbs and herbal medicine.

And what she's uncovering, which is really interesting, is that there's a reluctance amongst them to really talk about it and to own it, because for them, it was seen as a *[inaudible @0:50:52]*. And so that generation was so quick to adopt, you know, going to pharmacies and, you know, "Why would I go and forage in the fields for two hours to find the medicine, and then have to prepare it and cook it and have it as a tea, when I could go to the pharmacy and the doctor for free or just for a small payment, and be able to get the medicine I need?"

So for them she's really uncovering that actually, there is a bit of shame associated with the herbal medicine of our path, even though we are super excited, as the younger generation, to reclaim it. She's uncovering that these wounds, actually, that are there of shame, of being someone who

maybe can't afford to go to the doctor. So they dig up the roots and pick the leaves and the berries to make their own medicine.

So I found that fascinating, and we were both really feeling into that as an area that we can work towards healing, really. So yeah, I just wanted to share that because we do. We kind of, we look back on it as, "Wow! There was all this amazing knowledge that we've lost and goodness me, it's so amazing all of this traditional medicine, and why don't we use it anymore?" And it's just really, it's just really fascinating to feel into the emotions behind that loss of knowledge and the reasons— that was certainly one of the reasons— that would have happened for us so. So yeah.

[0:52:35]

**Amber:** Yes, you know, I'm reading a book right now on the 1918 flu pandemic, which is just something I'm endlessly fascinated by, and the author goes really deeply into the history, starting in like the late 1800s of modern scientific medicine.

And, you know, for those generations, it really was miraculous that you could, that antibiotics would kill diseases, and that vaccines could help prevent diseases. But what we know now is that it's so much more complex than that, and that those are not, you know, surefire bullets that will just take care of everything, and we're done with infectious diseases now, because we're not. And they're actually getting worse and mutating rapidly, and we know that now.

So I'm just thinking about what you said, in that bigger, historical context of it really did seem miraculous, modern medicine, to those people. In many ways, of course, it still is, you know, surgeries and life-saving techniques. But I think we have the perspective now, in our generation, of seeing that there's so much more complexity to health, to disease, to global disease than we thought, you know, during those times.

And it reminds me, too, of, you know, indigenous and other oppressed peoples and immigrants, you know, refusing to speak their language or teach their children their language, and turning away from that very deep, rooted part of themselves because they were they were needing to fit into the dominant paradigm in order to survive. And I'm grateful that now we get to be a part of the generation who's reclaiming these things, and who's kind of able to integrate maybe the best of both worlds as far as medicine goes, and to, you know, reclaim lost languages and parts of our cultural heritage.

[0:54:25]

**Amber:** I was very much wanting to hear more about this story that you hinted to me about, a vision that you had of your great grandmother.

**Fay:** Ooh, my great-grandmother.

**Amber:** Yeah, sitting at the bed, at your bed, at the foot of your bed, when you were a little girl.

**Fay:** Oh, my goodness, me. I know. I'm smiling away because that was just amazing.

Well, actually, I mean, this is one of the reasons why I'm also a reflexologist. I learned reflexology, and actually, in a way, this story is one of the reasons that I learned reflexology because for me, you know, lots of people think reflexology is like, "Oh, it's a little massage on your feet," and it just really goes way beyond that.

And so during a reflexology session I was having a friend of mine was giving to me, I had kind of went on a journey. I had a vision and really remembering in my whole body. So some of the points that she was obviously pressing on my feet were unlocking this energy or unlocking these memories for me. And the memory I had was of my great grandmother, who I never met at all as a child because she'd gone long before I was born.

But in this vision, she was sitting at the edge, on the end of my bed, as I was a child sleeping. And I knew in my whole being that this was a vision that I had seen many, many times as a child. So it wasn't me having this treatment, sort of having a dream about that. It was actually me remembering this happening to me as a child.

And wow, it just, it felt so reassuring that she had been looking out for me and connecting with me as a young girl. It felt, because I was always very scared of the dark, and we were in a house that was haunted, you know; there was all sorts of creaks and groans, growing up in the house I grew up in. And I always used to just tell the ghosts to just go away and leave me alone. That was the thing I used to say most of all as a child: go away, leave me alone, if ever heard a creek. And I'm still a bit like that now with my boundaries in the spirit world. If I'm not up for anything, I'll just say, "Go away. Leave me alone, please," which I think is a very safe way to be actually.

But yeah, this memory, this treatment unlocked something that I'd buried inside of my body. And it just brought this beautiful memory of my great grandma and that caring love that she had and watching over me, and so yeah, that feels actually, even to think about it now, just feels really comforting for me. So, yeah, it's a beautiful one, too, of mine.

[0:57:32]

**Fay:** And it's a reminder actually, really, again, I mean, similar to my mugwort story in the sense that we bury, so like, our body is our vessel for our spirit in this lifetime, and it's been through every experience with us. And I always think about this in terms of, you know, when we get so attached to possessions or even photos of things, and I'm like, "Well, if I was there, my being knows, my being remembers. So I don't necessarily need a keepsake or reminder because I am the reminder." And so actually my two stories there really highlight that, yes, this body carries us through each of those experiences, and it does remember these things.

So I think there's such a greatness to being able to access what lies in our body, and that's really a beautiful relationship that we can have with clients because obviously, we can physically interact with them, and we can ingest them so they can actually become part of us, too, as well as meeting them in meditation and movement, as well.

So all these, I mean, we're just living in such amazing, magical times where we are, like, more and more, we're just becoming empowered with all of these ways that we can heal ourselves and transform and just raise the vibration that we carry.



So yeah, we talked about modern medicine, we've got herbal medicine, we've got many, many types of actual body therapies, you know, therapeutic massage, reflexology, all of it. I mean, we've got so many ways now of helping the physical body, healthwise, and also helping our spiritual and mental health. So I just feel like we're so empowered. We've got all these amazing tools around us to unlock trauma, to unlock past memories.

And actually, yeah, my story about my great grandma shows that actually, they're not all sad memories that we bury deep down and painful memories. The body is carrying so much joy, actually. And it's not that we mean to bury it; it's just that we get so freaking busy with everything, that we're not always carrying that amazing vibration.

And, actually, yeah, I think one of the things I work on— and this is part of my shamanic path— is holding the light, and holding the light of who I am, and holding the light on the path for other people, and being in that light and being in that sort of transfigured state of being, allowing the light that we are to shine through. And so the light that I am includes all my joyful experiences that I can radiate out into the world, and then as I'm shining the light in through my being, I can shine a light on all the shadow parts of me that I'm trying to hide away.

And in a sense, though, the story with the mugwort shows that once we start to work with something which is painful and shadow-like, once we shine the light on it, and, you know, add one of our herbal friends, it shifts, it moves, and it becomes something different. And then the vibration will change and move through us in a different way.

So yeah, unlocking stories, that seems to be the theme of our talk today; unlocking the stories from within, and then also unlocking, which really is unlocking our power and our medicine isn't it.

**Amber:** I've been loving this. I've been thinking about it a lot lately that, you know, our bodies carry our stories, and, as you said, we're not always aware of it. We just, you know, our consciousness can't, we just cannot hold everything at once. We're focusing on the here and now and survival and getting through our days and what's in front of us, but we hold so much.

And I think this is why ancestry is so powerful, too, because our bodies carry the stories of our ancestors as well. Our bodies are their bodies. We have our body because they had their bodies. And those stories get passed down and the genes and the DNA, literally, on a more subtle, spiritual level as well. So the more work that we can all do to keep finding our own stories, the more healing we can all experience. And I really appreciate you and all the guests I've had on the show and all the people working in this realm.

[1:02:37]

**Amber:** I was curious what you meant— I think I got this from your book, this snippet, a phrase that I wrote down here— can you explain to us what is your practice of meeting the spirit of plants with the breath?

**Fay:** Oh, this actually is a beautiful practice, which you can call— I think, actually, Pam Montgomery calls it “the green breath.” But it's really, I suppose the technique I do is similar to that, but slightly different.

And so what I mean by that is that we are already in this relationship with plants because of the way we, that symbiotic relationship we have from our breath with our breath, in that I am breathing out carbon dioxide and breathing in oxygen. That's what I need in order to survive. And plants, quite beautifully, are the opposite: a plant needs carbon dioxide in order to, you know, complete all its complex functions. And then the plant, through photosynthesis, produces oxygen in which in turn we breathe.

So you can do a beautiful meditation with a plant where you just spend some time tuning into the plant you know, find a plant to work with, holding your intention, “Oh, I'm going to connect with the plant,” and just find a beautiful plant to work with, sit down by the plant [*inaudible @ 1:04:07*] and how that wants to expand.

And then with your intention, just start breathing very intentionally. And I like to, as I breathe out, breathe out through my mouth so I can kind of blow my breath toward the plant. And as I'm breathing in, I'm saying a mantra to myself. I'm saying, “I breathe you,” and then as I'm breathing out, I simply am saying it to myself, “You breathe me.” So “I breathe”— you breathing in— “you breathe me”— breathing out and then blowing the breath to the plant.

And so this is a sweet sort of place to meet the plant and just the sharing of the breath of life really because they are the breath of life for us and we are the breath of life for them. So it's an honoring of that relationship that we have. And it's beautiful for you because you get to slow down and tune in, and the longer you do it for, the more you'll be getting into that state where you're kind of merging with the plant, really, the sort of the energy fields around you seem to just encompass you. And it's a lovely pleasant place to be.

And if you've ever made a flower essence, or sat with a plant for a period of time, then you and your listeners will know what that feeling feels like to merge with the plant in that way. And so yeah, it's a really simple practice, but very, but really beautiful. So it's just like a conscious way of honoring that connection that we have with each other.

**Amber:** Yeah, I mean, it's so simple, but it sounds so profound, and I am looking forward to doing it myself. And also, I would imagine that, you know, you get into a somewhat altered state, anytime you're really just focusing on your breath, you know, just simple meditation, a meditative state, and that can really open us up to deeper encounters.

[1:06:19]

**Fay:** Yeah, absolutely. And I think I talked about it in the book, really what we're trying to do, or I feel that I'm trying to do when I'm with the plants, is I want to bypass my brain, actually, because my brain is going to think, “Oh, I know this plant. Oh, that's interesting. Wow, that looks weird.” So my brain is going to be thinking all the time, and it's going to be thinking it knows what's happening or thinking it's going to know what's happening next.

And I mean, actually, going back to the fact that I never did my herbal medicine degree, I think it's such a blessing because, in a sense, my knowledge of plants is perhaps not as expansive as it would have been if I had really become a clinical herbalist. And that is such an advantage when you want to connect with the spirit of plants because you're out. You're not as in your head as you would be if you have a lot of plant knowledge. And sometimes it's much harder for people who have so much plant knowledge or medicinal knowledge because they think they know about a plant before they've got there.

And so we have to get out of that headspace, and I call it "being in your heart space," and that's how we feel our way around the garden. We feel our way around the herb patch to tune into which plants are calling to us, which plants are speaking to us. Once we can get into the heart space, we're feeling it.

And you know, we've talked today about how much knowledge and wisdom, you know, is held within our bodies, and so we're trying to tune in as well to the to that wisdom that is carried in our bodies, and we might pick up sensations through, by feeling cold, feeling hot, feeling tingles, things like this, or sharp pain when we connect with certain plants. And I'm always encouraging people to start there, start with the heart space, start feeling your way, and tuning in.

When we tune in really acutely to the physical senses with the body— so through the smell, through the eyes, through the ears, even through song and movement and touch— what we're doing there is, because we've got this knowledge in our body, we're actually bypassing the brain. Because... the way the body reacts to touch, these touch receptors, they don't even have to go, you know, through us, through that logical, thinking brain because the body has these automatic responses. So we're just trying to be in that space to fool the thinking mind.

And once we can— and yes, if we're if we're used to meditation, and we're used to being in this calm space, then it's actually it's much easier because we're already used to tuning, tuning our awareness into into the breath or tuning awareness into into putting our attention elsewhere other than, you know, "Oh my goodness, what am I going to have for dinner tonight? Did I do this? I need to do the washing," you know, all these other things which can happen to us when we get out in nature.

And often it's, what I find interesting is, when we start to want to connect with nature, we'll go for a walk, and sometimes the first, you know, twenty minutes of being out in nature, having a walk, we're so in our heads because we're going through what's happened in the day or where we're gearing up for something which is going to happen, that we're not really in that present state in nature.

So being in nature and connecting with nature, it requires a little more than just, oh, going for a walk. It's, we've tried to really help ourselves get back to center, get back to the knowledge of who we are. And actually doing it through the breath is a brilliant, grounding way of anchoring that attention.

And as is, you know, feet: bringing that attention from the head into the heart and just feeling our way, not thinking, but just feeling which way would I like to turn on the path? What feels right for me? Rather than "Oh, I think this way is the shortest, and I haven't got much time today." You know, there's a sort of difference in the way we operate when we start to feel things, and that's certainly in my experience, the language of plants.

**Amber:** Mm hmm. Yeah, that's a lesson I'm constantly in need of learning, that I am constantly learning and that comes up over and over again on this podcast too, is you know, moving out of the head, moving into the body moving into the heart and your soul. The plants are an amazing gateway into that way that mode of being in the world.

[1:11:08]

**Amber:** Okay Fay, thank you so much for talking to me today. Maybe someday I'll come visit you in Scotland because I'm certainly going to go to Scotland someday and visit my ancestral lands, and I let's let's tell the good people where they can find you where they can find your book and you know what you've got going

**Fay:** Well, you can find me at [fayjohnstone.com](http://fayjohnstone.com), and on that there is a link to *Plant Power*. So you can get a free chapter, free audio from the book, and you can find the book on —I mean, it's pretty much available in all good bookshops and online, as well. And it's cool plants that speak souls that thing

And I've also got a YouTube channel. I'm on Facebook as well @Fayjohnstone, so just check me out. And I've also got a free online course, which is *Discover the Spirit of Plants*, as well. And you'll find that on my website too.

So there's all sorts of ways to work with me. You can work with me one to one or certainly in September. I'm releasing some new online programs because I really want to be able to have a space for people to share their experiences with clients and, too, you know, for me to hold with guidance to help everyone go a little bit deeper.

We already do this, I have a Facebook group called Plant Spirit people, which everyone is welcome to join. So that's another sharing space in terms of what people are doing, what plants they're working with. But yeah, it's my vision, really, to get more and more people just expanding their awareness with plants, making plant medicines, bringing, raising, this vibration so that we're all really the forces of nature that we're born to be.

**Amber:** And of course, I will have the links to everything that Fay just mentioned on the show notes to this podcast. So again, thank you so much, Fay. It's been a pleasure talking to you.

**Fay:** Thank you, Amber. Take care.

---

[Closing]

*(Exit Music: acoustic guitar folk song "Wild Eyes" by Mariee Sioux)*

[1:13:18]

**Amber:** Thank you for taking these Medicine Stories in. I hope they inspire you to keep walking the mythic path of your own unfolding self. I love sharing information and will always put any relevant links in the show notes. You can find my blog, handmade herbal medicines, and a lot more at [MythicMedicine.love](https://MythicMedicine.love).

While you're there, I invite you to click the black banner to take my quiz, "[Which Magical Herb is your Spirit Plant?](#)" It's a fun and lighthearted quiz, but the results are really in-depth and designed to bring you into closer alignment with the medicine you are in need of.

If you love this show, please consider supporting my work at [Patreon.com/MedicineStories](https://Patreon.com/MedicineStories). There's some cool rewards there, like exclusive content, free access to my herbal e-book and online course, and the ability to chat with me.

I'm a crazy busy and overwhelmed mom and adding this project into my life has been a questionable move, but I'm also so excited about and just pray that Patreon allows me the financial wiggle room to keep on doing it while giving back to everyone who is listening.

Another way that you can support, if that's not an option, is to head over to iTunes and subscribe and review the podcast. That would be super helpful. Thank you.

And thank you to Mariee Sioux for providing the music that I use. This is from her song "Wild Eyes," one of my favorites. Check out Mariee Sioux's beautiful music.

Thank you and I look forward to next time. Bye.

[1:14:54]