



Medicine Stories Podcast

Episode 78 with Farai Herreld

Plants are Infinitely Healing & Folk Herbalism is for Everyone

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[Intro]

[0:00:00]

(Excerpt from today's show by Farai Herreld)

We should be inspiring people to go pick nettles and make tea. We should be inspiring people to make a simple poultice with plantain, and show them that you may not even know what your heritage is, or you may not know what your background is, or you may not even know anything. But if this feels right, if this makes your bones sing, then come have a cup of tea, and let's talk about it, you know?

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

[0:00:27]

Amber: Hey, friends, welcome to your *Medicine Stories*. I'm Amber Magnolia Hill. Today, I'm sharing my interview with Farai Herreld. This is just some deep, folk, herbal talk, which is what I'll be focusing on for the next couple episodes as well. Really just feeling that, after talking to Marysia, feeling that return to the earth and wanting to have almost like a mini-series of the podcast where we just have really, yeah, simple conversations on everyday, home, folk herbalism.

So let me tell you real quick about the Patreon giveaways. The first one is from my guest — from Farai. And it's a really beautiful, loving the looks of this PDF e-book, 17 pages: *10 Herbs for the Family Medicinal Herb Garden*. And what is covered is why grow herbs, the 10 herbs, how to source the herbs, and ways to grow the herbs. Yeah, really beautiful. The second one — so that one is for patrons at the \$2 level. This is all at the patreon.com/medicinstories, Medicine Stories Patreon page — my second one is a little resource guide that I have put together on what to do when someone gets a tick bite.

As you'll hear towards the end of this episode, we get into kind of first aid and like the herbal remedies that we always want to have on hand for ourselves, our kids, our animals. And we go into ticks and tick bites, and I started putting the resources in the show notes as usual. But then I thought, "I'm just gonna put them all together in one place and put it on Patreon." But I just can't bring myself to put it behind a paywall, even if it is only two dollars. So it's going to be there, open to the public, and please check it out now.

If this is something that you fear, that you know you have ticks in your area, and you don't already know what to do when someone has a tick bite, you want to read this before that happens, not when you're in a panic (*Amber laughs*), and it's too late because that little shit is already embedded deep in someone's flesh. So it's there.

There's also one link to a resource I really like about Lyme — but in general, I'm not trying to give any advice or opinions on Lyme disease because I don't know very much about it at all. But I do think that resource is a pretty good one. So that's it. This is the shortest intro I've ever done, and I'm loving that (*Amber laughs*). Also while you're over on Patreon, check out Farai's Patreon, [Folk Herbalism for Everyone](#).

Farai Herralld is a postpartum doula, folk herbalist, urban homesteader, writer, and caregiver. She was born in Zimbabwe, raised in Botswana, and currently living and loving in Kaw and Osage land in so-called Kansas — hope I said that word right. I've never heard it spoken. Her passions include empowering people to build community and reclaim simple herbal medicine as their birthright. Farai derives joy and connection to her ancestors through handwork. She's a freelance writer on topics ranging from plants, motherhood, food, race, fashion, gardening, and much more. Find her over at [@thehillbillyafrican](#) on Instagram or at [faraiHerreld.com](#). All those links are in the show notes.

And hey, I really love you guys, and it's such an honor to do this podcast and to have a small — I mean, a relatively small, I don't know numbers and metrics. They're all relative — a decent-sized following of beautiful, heartfelt, critically-thinking, kind humans who enjoy the work I'm doing on this podcast. It just means everything. It means more than everything, and I'm so glad and thank you to those of you who are patrons. And I'm absolutely fine with those of you who aren't patrons as well (*Amber laughs*). Okay, let's get into the episode.

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

[Interview Begins]

[0:05:02]

Amber: Okay, Farai, welcome to Medicine Stories. It's so cool to be seeing you and talking to you after a long time of Instagram friendship.

Farai: Yeah, for sure. Thank you so much for having me, Amber. I'm excited to be here.

Amber: Yeah, I'm excited to learn more about you. And just, I'm feeling, as I've said to you before, a focus on more just folk herbalism and conversations with how people are living their daily lives in relationship to plants. And I know this is a focus of yours, your Patreon is [Folk Herbalism for Everyone](#).

Farai: Yeah.

Amber: So I want to start in a place I feel like I haven't started for a while with my guests even that's one of my favorite questions to ask, which is, please tell us about your name, any aspect of your name, any of your names, what it means to you, and where it comes from, and who your people are, and all that.

Farai: It's actually funny that you bring that up because I was reflecting on my name yesterday because I like to joke that — so Farai means “rejoice” — and I like to joke that my mom either cursed me or blessed me when she named me that (*Farai laughs*) because I'm truly a happy-go-lucky person most of the time. And I can — I mean, we all have moments of happiness — but I'm really good at finding the silver lining and finding gratitude. And I've had a pretty challenging life, and I've been able to not be embittered by it. I'm just, like, super joyful.

So I feel like my mom knew exactly what she was doing when she named me. That's why I'm like, “I don't know if this is a blessing or a curse. I feel like I should be upset, more upset about this than I am. And I'm not.” So yeah, my first name, Farai, means “rejoice.”

My middle name is Diana, named for my grandmother on my mother's side. I'm half Zimbabwean. So Diana was my Zimbabwean grandmother. So my father was an archer, and Diana is the goddess associated with Artemis, who was, you know, a goddess of archery, among other things. And so I was like, “Oh, it's like two parts of my ancestry, melding together in this cute way from my name.”

And then my last name is Herreld. And my aunt Rosemary tells me that it means “champion.” So I'm like, yeah, I'll be a joyful, goddess of archery champion any day. (*both laugh*) So that's my name.

Amber: So your Botswanan grandmother has a Greek goddess name.

Farai: Zimbabwean. I grew up in Botswana. So people often get confused. But no, yeah, my grandmother had an English name. But yeah, Diana is now associated with English, but yeah, Zimbabwe was colonized by the British. So I'm assuming that's why her parents, or whoever named her, you know, gave her an English name as opposed to a Zimbabwean name. I mean, most Zimbabweans have, you know, an English name and a shorter name, but not all of them. And my mother didn't give me an English first name either, so.

[0:08:30]

Amber: How did your family... why did they choose to come to the States?

Farai: Well, my father is American, born and raised in Kansas, farm boy. And he moved to Zimbabwe for archery, right? He was a pharmacist, and he was just kind of fed up with the ways

and values in which people were hunting, among other things. I think he was just done with America and wanted to be in the wilderness somewhere.

And so the way that it was explained to me was that he was like, "Okay, I'm either going to Australia or I'm going to Zimbabwe." And he picked Zimbabwe, and he moved there with my brother, my half brother, Jason. And then when he was there, he met my mom. And... because he was a pharmacist, he also, you know, worked at hospitals and did other things. So he met my mom, and I was born not too long after that.

And my whole, most — other than my brother, Jason, who lives here, and my father's family. My dad was, I feel like he found his place then he didn't come back. He died there. And my mom also lived there. My mom's side of the family, they're scattered around the globe, but mostly my family's in southern Africa, or Kansas.

Amber: And so, when you came to the States, was your father still living? It was like the three of you?

Farai: Yes, that was years ago, and I moved here when I was 18. So my dad had this really weird — I mean, he moved to America, I don't know, maybe 30-40, no, it was probably like 35 years ago. And life was very different when he left.

And when I turned 18, so I grew up in Botswana. And the way that it is, is that when you turn 18, if you're not from there, you have to prove what you're doing there like, are you going to go to school? Are you going to work? And my dad was like, "You're gonna go to America, you're gonna get an education." He's like, "You can wash dishes, and stay at a boarding house and pay your way through college." I was like... I think he was thinking that college was still like, \$100 a semester like it was when he was a kid (*Farai laughs*).

So yeah, I moved here when I was 18. All alone. I didn't know anyone. I had never been here before. I moved in with my brother Jason. I hadn't seen him in maybe a decade. I didn't know anyone. And I moved here about 18. I'm 30 now, so, about 11-12 years ago.

Amber: Wow.

Farai: And the last time I was home was for my dad's funeral about five years ago. Yeah, so I have, you know, dual citizenship. Because my dad's American, etc, etc.

Amber: Yeah, so I'm thinking, too, of your Instagram name and how that clearly ties in this story.

Farai: Yeah, yes it does. Some people love my Instagram name, and I've had like a few people get offended by it (*Farai laughs*).

Amber: I can imagine, like what is — so it's The Hillbilly African. What is it they found offensive?

Farai: The hillbilly part. They think that I'm making light of it. But the fact is, my family's from Southern Kansas. And I have lineage from the South. We are. My family is. They are hillbillies, not all

of them, but you know, the way back when, they are, they were. So I love, you know, I thought it was hilarious when I came up with that. And I was like, "I'm rolling with it."

Amber: (*Amber laughs*) Yeah, it's definitely intriguing. I say the same thing about my family and my dad's line, the Hills. So literally, their last name is Hill. And they were just, like, in the hollers of North Carolina. They were moonshiners. And I've seen the photos, like, no they were really hillbillies. Like, I don't mean this in a negative way. Even though I understand that that word does have negative connotations for people.

Farai: Sure.

Amber: So I'm thinking our daughters are the same age. So your little one probably has not gone back to Botswana.

Farai: No, not yet. Not yet. We got our passports, and her passport right when COVID hit with the intention of going home last year (*Farai laughs*) and that hasn't happened. I'm so excited to take her there and for her to see everything and to just be immersed in the culture because I haven't been to Zimbabwe, which is where I was born, since I was 16. That was the last time, and it's one of the most beautiful places on earth. And I just can't wait, ugh, just for her to be in the flora and fauna. And just I can't wait. I can't wait! (*both laugh*)

[00:13:24]

Amber: I was gonna ask you: so do you have memories of herbalism or any plant connections in your family, or for yourself, when you were growing up?

Farai: I mean, from my African side, right, from my Zimbabwean side, the only people that I knew to be working with herbs were what we call witch doctors "sangomas." And because my stepmom was Christian, and we were, I was raised Christian — I use that loosely. You know, sangomas are kind of looked down upon. They were seen as like, "working with the devil" and all this stuff. And so that's what I knew of, like, people that worked with plants.

But then my dad was an animist, and so he very much had, like a deep relationship with the flora and fauna of places and like, becoming intimate with places and knowing things and "if you feel like you have an infection, use some garlic," and so it was really strange.

Like, my dad was the one who, even though he wasn't Botswanaian, he wasn't Zimbabwean, he definitely took the time to learn and become a part of wherever it was that he lived in. And so now, in my adulthood, I can reflect and see, like, those were my first examples of herbalism essentially, and then I also remember me, like making rosewater and making potions and things like that when I was a kid.

But no, my family, we lived in like the suburbs. My family was not very — my Zimbabwean family, anyway — we weren't incredibly traditional or tapped into the land. Like, we had a garden, but no. There's like a whole other side of that that I would love to tap into and learn from, like a Zimbabwean herbalist or something like that, because that's a part that I feel like is definitely

missing. I know in my lineage that we have witch doctors, we've had medicine folk. But no, none that was passed down to me from that side of my family.

[0:15:34]

Amber: How do you know that? Like, what are the whispers of those people in your lineage?

Farai: Okay, so this story is from — I don't want to say that I'm clairvoyant, but I just want to say that, but I do want to say that I've had, I would get these feelings, inklings about things. I would know things about people, before they knew them. And then I would, I would call someone who I'd get a feeling about. And typically, when I'd call them, they'd be crying. And they'd be like, "Oh, my God, this is happening" or, and I'd be like, "Oh, fuck." Like, I knew this. I knew that this was happening. And I was like, I was young. I was maybe 18, 19, and I was in this new country, and I was inundated with all these feelings and emotions, and I was struggling and so scared, and I just kind of was like, "I'm done. Leave me alone. Whatever you are, like, I don't have the mental space for any of this."

So it left, and I was cool. I was living my best life, you know, moved to the town that I live in now. met my partner, who I've been with for nine years. And I took a trip with a cousin of his to this woman. Well, no, so this woman — the way that Americans treat Africans is like, "Oh, you're from Africa. I know somebody who's from Africa," even if we're from completely different places on the continent. And so yeah, my husband's cousin was like, "Oh, I know, this Kenyan woman, you should come with me to go meet her." And I was like, "Okay, I have nothing better to do. I'll go with you."

So we went to this town, and there was this Kenyan woman, and we didn't get along, obviously (*Farai laughs*), because it's just two random Africans put together. And I left and I went with Anthony's cousin into the store. And it was a, you know, like a metaphysical store. And my hackles were immediately raised. I'm like, "Oh, no, this is exactly the kind of place that someone like me is trying to avoid." So I was like, "Okay, but it's really cute. Everything in here is so awesome. I'm just going to get, like, a couple of things for my dad. And then I'm going to hightail it out of there."

So there was a woman in the store, and she was clearly giving a reading to someone. And I was like, "Oh, no, oh, no, no, no, no, no, I definitely don't want to be here anymore." So I'm like, getting turned around to leave. And then my husband's cousin, Ellen, goes to the woman. He essentially is like, "What's your gimmick?" And the woman was like, "Excuse me?" And he was like, "How do you... what do you do?" And I saw him being rude to her, and I just was like, "I think what he's trying to say is, what kind of readings do you give?" And she basically went on to read him.

Well, she said, "I don't advertise because spirits talk to me, and then I relay that to the person. And the spirits don't always have to say something. They'll always have something to say about people. So then there's nothing to say. So I don't really advertise." And he was like, "Well, what are the spirits saying about me?" And she went on to, like, read him for real.

Like things on the way to the town, it was about an hour drive, he opened up to me and told me things, like, experiences about his childhood, his feelings about his dad. And when we're done talking, he was like, you know, "These are things I've never told anyone." And he was like, "I'm so glad that, you know, I felt comfortable enough." And yeah, she went on to tell him everything that

he had just told me, and we were both just, like jaw-dropped, like freaked out. And I was like, "Okay, I definitely don't want to be in here anymore." So I leave, and then I come back because I still wanted to get that thing from my dad.

So I go to the checkout line, to go pick up, you know, to pay, and I'm like, trying to have the other staff member check me out, and she comes to me. And she essentially tells me all this stuff about me (*Farai laughs*). One of the things including that I have, like, powerful medicine folk on both sides of my family and that I am, you know, a healer, and the things that I touched with my hands are, you know, blessed things. And I was young. I was maybe 22, 23 maybe. And she was like, "Yeah, you fully won't actualize it 'til you're in your thirties," and all this stuff. And I was like, "Good day, ma'am."

(both laugh)

But so I kind of forgot everything that she said about herbalism and medicine, but I remembered her talking about my family, my ancestry, right? Because that's always been something that, you know, as a person of mixed heritage, it's like something that we can grip to when we're feeling so displaced in the world.

So, yeah, that's how I know that I have medicine folk. And I've corroborated, like I later on found out that my great grandmother was an herbalist and later on found out about other things in my past. So yeah, that's the long and short of it. (*Farai laughs*)

[00:20:52]

Amber: Yeah, I love that. It reminds me that I had something similar. I was also about the same age early twenties. And I ended up with this astrologer guide, old man, elder, and someone told me, "Like he is like, famous," you know. And he ended up looking at my chart. And he said, "You're a teacher and a healer." And I was like, "Pssh. You clearly don't know me. (*Amber laughs*) Like, I'm a lost little child."

But you know, those things kind of stick with you. They stick in the back of your head, and you grow and you learn and you follow your heart's calling. And suddenly, here I am at 40 being like, oh, like, in a way I am fulfilling those roles, or I see myself more as an intermediary and bringing teachers and healers into people's lives. But just, I love thinking about how these seeds that can be planted in a young person's mind and heart can blossom later in their life.

Farai: Yeah, like I was already at the beginning of being interested in herbalism, but it had to do with like my hair, using rosemary to make hair rinse teas, and I felt so good, and it felt so right. But I didn't make that inclination. I didn't make that connection at all until I was at one of the apprenticeships that I did for six months with one of my teachers. And I was in her garden, and I was like, "Oh, I'm doing exactly what that woman said it was gonna do."

Amber: Yeah, so I was gonna ask you: what, if any, formal study you've undertaken?

Farai: Um nothing formal. I mean, I've taken lots of online courses. I prefer to study in real-time with teachers. And so I've done... So I'm a doula as well, and I've studied with Sister Divine. She's a southern... she studies in the southern, black granny, midwife tradition. And so I took one of her

classes that was, like, so profound and life-changing for me in like postpartum and like my view of postpartum, among other things... Like it honestly, it felt like a year, but when you condense the time, it was a six-month apprenticeship with a local, eighty-year-old, bad ass, powerhouse herbalist that lives in northeast Kansas, which is where I live. And then just countless years of study.

And you know, at one point, I was doing a group with my friends where we were meeting up and sharing and teaching. And so it's been quite a few years of study. But I think what attracts me the most to plants is the connection that human beings have with them. And, you know, we learn that through like folklore and in our interactions with them and the stories we tell about them.

[0:23:58]

Amber: I'm so curious now about your dad. So he's this, like, Kansas boy, a generation older than us, but he has this animist ethos and is really caring about the way people are hunting the animals in his area. Like, what, how did that happen?

Farai: Ah, I don't know. I think he had a typical upbringing in rural Kansas, and had like, probably a gun. And if I remember correctly, so I was born, my dad was, like, 48 when I was born. So he had lived his best life already before I came along (*Farai laughs*). So the things that I know I pieced together from like stories that he's told as well as my siblings.

He was, at some point, he was using guns— I think, in the beginning. And then he got into archery, pretty early on. And then archery, he began to like study. He was a very hands on guy. So he's like, "Okay, if I'm into a bows then I'm gonna learn how to make them. So I'm going to learn what trees go into longbows, I'm going to know how to do this. And what..." And I mean, like he made his own string, he made his own bow strings, he fledged his own arrows. Like I got to see him do all those things.

And growing up, he had this just intense reverence for animals and life. And I think I'm the one that got to experience that, and my brother Jake didn't. I think Jake got the more westernized version of my dad. And then I got the true animist, because by the time I came along, my dad was very anti-gun — among other things.

And so yeah, I don't know what the change was. I don't know how it happened in him. He read a lot of books about indigenous cultures. And he was really, yeah. And probably just immersing himself in culture.

Amber: That's so cool. And then he, takes off and moves to Botswana.

Farai: Zimbabwe first, and then when the political climate started getting bad in Zimbabwe, we left and moved to Botswana. Yeah.

[0:26:11]

Amber: How old were you when you made that move?

Farai: From Zimbabwe to Botswana I was about four or five.

Amber: And did you grow up speaking English?

Farai: Yes. Yes, I'm multilingual. I speak Setswana and Shona. But in the house, to speak to my father we would speak English, and then to my stepmom and the rest of our family, I would speak whatever, and then at school, English or Setswana.

Amber: Are you teaching your daughter those languages?

Farai: No! I've tried. I'm not trying hard enough. She thinks it's hilarious. When she was a baby and I would speak to her in Setswana, she would cackle. And I'm like, "You need to learn the language of people now," (*Farai laughs*).

But now she just doesn't express interest, which I think is a failing on my part, because I should have just spoken to her. But I'm the only person around me that speaks it. My husband has learned some cuss words, but (*Farai laughs*) it's not enough. And so that's part of the reason why I want to take her home so she can learn. She has a, you know, an African name. So I'm like, "You know, I want you to be around your people and see what it's like."

Amber: What is her name?

Farai: Thandiwe. It was my mother's name.

Amber: And you call her Thandi?

Farai: Yeah.

Amber: That's how I read it, when I'm reading on Instagram. I can imagine how strong that pull is to take her back there.

Farai: Yeah, all the time. My brother — so I have two half brothers, my other brother, Ronald, and I have the same mother. He's there. And he's her godfather. He was my postpartum doula when she was born. But yeah, so I want her to go and be with him and be with his kids, and just.. Ugh.

I have this story that I wrote. It's called *Fruit-bearing Trees*. And I just talk about like, this time in Zimbabwe, I remember in my childhood, of like, on my uncle's property, just having mangoes and avocados and watermelon. And just the lushness and the beauty of it all, I just want her to experience that, you know? And also take pride in that.

[0:28:33]

Amber: Yeah. Is there any other living family still there?

Farai: Lots. But oh, my God, this is awkward (*Farai laughs*). A lot of trauma, a lot of unsavory characters in my family that I've had to set up boundaries, because my mom passed when I was six. And yeah, my family was not there. I don't want to say they're not good people. There's only a few

good people in there. So other than my brother, I'm not close with a lot of them. So my brother and I have made our own family over time.

Amber: That's so sweet. That's so lucky. Does he feel the same way as you do about some of the other family members?

Farai: Yeah, I mean, it probably took him a lot longer to come to that conclusion than I did — obviously, because I'm the smarter one (*Farai laughs*). But yeah, I knew early on.

And I was like, you know, like, “the cycle breaker,” so I'm the one holding people accountable and asking these questions and not going along with people's behavior, and so that's challenging for people. They don't like to be held accountable. But in the interest of me and my future descendants, I'm not going to tolerate, you know, abuse and nonsense.

Amber: Yeah, I think we have a lot of cycle breakers who listen to this podcast probably. And I know for me, it's been super helpful to have my sister, you know, to just be able to be like, “Oh! I just realized that grandpa...” and she's like, “Oh my god, you're right!” you know, and to like to realize what those cycles are and what the patterns are.

Farai: Oh, yeah, for sure. It's definitely hard when you're in it. But I knew from a young age, I was like, “This does not feel right.” And I have it on both sides of my family. Like there's a lot of violence, a lot of trauma, a lot of pain, unresolved pain and avoidance in my lineage on both sides. And I was like, “I don't want any of this. Like, let's fix this. And if you can't fix this, stay the heck away from me.”

[0:30:47]

Amber: Mm hmm. So like, what does that look like to you? You've like, put up the boundaries. Have you done ritual work or anything that would like fall under an ancestral healing umbrella? Or are you just like, “I'm raising my daughter differently.”

Farai: Um, I have not done any ancestral healing work. I think that's something that I would like to do for sure, the older I get. I'm still uncovering. I'm still in the process of learning so much about my ancestry and piecing together. So like, right now my cousin is staying with me. His mom is my dad's younger sister. And we're putting together so many puzzles, and it's been so good, because now I feel like I have a framework. But for me, right now, the most radical thing that I'm doing is raising my child differently. And healing myself from all the trauma that I endured, and that my dad endured.

Amber: Yeah, that's the heart of the work right there healing ourselves and choosing something different for our descendants.

I recently put up some Instagram stories about a visit to my dad last week that I took with my girls and his alcoholism, and all this family stuff. And someone recommended the book, *It Didn't Start with You* by Mark Wallen, and I have been loving it. And it just makes me... I just love hearing people's family stories like this and really seeing so many people in our generation doing that work: looking at what happened and not wanting to unconsciously carry it forward anymore.

Farai: Yeah, I realized that, right, this cycle of violence. What I did before I had my daughter was I worked at this an agency that provided services for survivors of domestic violence, sexual violence, and human trafficking. And so my job mainly was to work in an education standpoint, but I also worked with perpetrators of these things.

And in getting to know them, the main thing was that all of them experienced violence. All of them were perpetrating what had happened to them in some shape, or form. And I think — I was young, because I probably started volunteering for that organization before I even started working there and engaging in that work, in that rhetoric for like, five years.

So I was like, “Okay, if they are perpetrating these cycles of violence, what am I perpetrating in myself? What am I perpetrating in my romantic relationships? What am I perpetrating in my friendships?” And then I had my kid and I was like, “Oh, crap, what am I gonna perpetrate on this little blank CD that I have?” And that’s when I really and truly began.

Well, I knew that, you know, the cycles of violence, how we pass them on, is called like the “river of cruelty.” And like, you float along it, and then you have an experience, and you have an experience, and it just floats down; someone’s got to take those things out. You know, make a change.

Amber: Yeah. When you were volunteering and working there, did you start to have realizations about your family history at that time?

Farai: No, I always knew that my family was trash (*Farai laughs*), and I think I always knew it. I didn’t know whether or not I could be any different, I would say, until I started, you know, being with advocates and working in that realm and seeing that there was another way to be. It’s not like I was out perpetrating those things or being cruel; I was actually the antithesis of that. But I was not doing the healing work. I was very stuck and frozen and shy and timid and quiet. And if you know me, then you know that I’m not this. I was so frozen in grief and anger and confusion and pain, and I needed to be like, “It’s okay to have emotions, it’s okay to feel things.” And that was freeing.

[0:35:07]

Amber: Do you feel like being in a garden or working with plants is healing?

Farai: Yes, infinitely, all the time, in all the ways. I think, you know, gardening, it almost has the — you know, it’s been discussed in this series — but it transmutes the pain and the grief and the anger, and it just takes it. Like, the earth takes it from us and metabolizes it into something else: metabolizes it into beauty, metabolizes it into compost, into soil, into something.

And even like, the other day I had this experience. I was in an empty lot by my friend’s house, and I was struggling with feelings of like, rejection and fear over something. And I looked up into the sky, and there’s this big canopy of trees. And I exhaled, and I just felt like the trees were taking my struggles away from me, and giving me joy and giving me oxygen and just, you know, cleansing me, and I was like, “Damn.”

I called my husband immediately because he’s been joking about — he’s not been joking. He’s been hinting about us moving away to somewhere like Arizona where it’s much drier. And I was

like, "Bro, you can't take me away from trees. You can't take me away from the forest. I don't know how I'd survive." (*both laugh*) So definitely. And the desert flora and fauna is incredible in and of its own. But right now, Farai needs canopies of trees.

[0:36:47]

Amber: Yeah. Is your husband still away in the military?

Farai: Yeah, unfortunately.

Amber: Yeah. I was just thinking when you were talking about your name meaning — was it "rejoice?" — and how you're a happy person. Like, I mean, obviously, I'm just getting little bits off of Instagram, but you seem to be weathering it well. And I'm happy to hear that your cousin's living with you, too. At least you're not fully a lone adult with a child.

Farai: Yeah, it's rough. It's super rough.

Amber: Yeah. It was unexpected,

Farai: It was incredibly unexpected, you know. He was in his last year getting out. We were like done. And it was something that I wouldn't say that he got coerced into (*Farai laughs*), but you know, young black, poor, college students, like the military is like, "We'll pay for your education, we'll do this, we'll do that." And so it seemed like the most viable option and the smartest option for him at the time and also looking forward to the end of his.

Every man in my family has served. I'm incredibly anti-military. I know, I shouldn't say that, but I am (*Farai laughs*). So this is like, a really rough part of my life, one that I wasn't happy for. And then boom, last year, he's gone, we're in a pandemic. I would not be able to even be standing if it wasn't for my amazing community and supportive friends. But it's been super hard. And he's been getting, you know, lots of pouting and complaining from me sometimes (*Farai laughs*). But we're good. And we still got a ways to go.

Amber: How much longer?

Farai: Like, to the end of the year. October, hopefully.

Amber: It's just, I don't... that's so crazy to me. I just, I don't understand the military at all. And that they can just be like, "Boom, we're uprooting you." And you've got to do it because you signed up for this and you're still within the terms of your service.

Farai: Yeah, I am not even going to begin to explain. I mean, not explain, but even try to understand because they do so many things that make no damn sense to me.

Amber: Like so much modern, American, Western, everything culture. Right?

Farai: It's so counterintuitive.

Amber: It's so anti life.

Farai: Yes! I was literally telling him that this morning, like, the food that they feed them. And I'm like, if this is supposedly the best, you know — what is it? What do they call it? The best military on earth? — I was like, why are we feeding them processed foods and garbage and then expecting them to function optimally?

Yeah. It doesn't make sense to me.

Amber: Yeah, and removing them from their families and loved ones.

Farai: I'm just anti-military in general, so there's no way to justify any of it to me. But I've been that way since childhood, so it's been an interesting conundrum.

[0:40:02]

Amber: It seems to me, too, like that book I was talking about, and then I also been reading a book by Oprah and Dr. Bruce Perry called *What Happened to You?* and it's about trauma. And like the thing that heals trauma — obviously, there are many — but the main one is connection with other human beings, relationship. And so here, like you said, it is a somewhat coercive way that the military recruits a lot of people. And a lot of these people have been through a ton of childhood trauma, and then they just go into this.

Farai: Into a brotherhood. It gives them family, gives them camaraderie; it gives them a sense of belonging, which is all that human beings want.

Amber: Yes.

Farai: You know, this sense of belonging.

Amber: Yep.

Farai: Companionship, inclusion. And those are all promises that are made to the people that they know recruit.

Amber: Yeah. And I think that's how warriors have always been trained in all cultures, right? Like, through those bonding rituals?

Farai: Yeah.

Amber: But then there's this hole, all these people left behind.

Farai: Right? And that's my big thing.

Amber: But you guys have seen him?

Farai: Yeah, yeah, we got to see him in January for my 30th. We went to the Grand Canyon. And then hopefully, he'll be home for a few days for my daughter's birthday. And then, who knows after that? It's touch and go, but, again, none of it has a rhyme or reason. So we just hope for the best.

[00:41:47]

Amber: So I'm curious, I always love asking moms, like how you incorporate herbalism into mothering?

Farai: In terms of our child or ourselves?

Amber: Either, whatever.

Farai: Um, I think, obviously, one of the earliest examples of introducing herbalism to my child was just gardening with her on my back, and, you know, giving her herbal remedies, giving her little teas when she was a baby. And I am constantly giving myself herbs. I'm trying to shove as many herbs into myself as humanly possible, just to cope, being a human being, and so she sees and she developed relationships.

I think the one plant that was like a really, really big deal for my relationship with my child was mullein because she — you know how human beings have, like, a meridian in their body that they struggle with, right? So for her, it's always been, like, the lungs. And so the roots of mullein was like this ally that, essentially, I don't want to say, saved their life, but it kind of did, in that it was this supportive plant that, you know, was a tonic and was there for her and was there for me when we were at the worst of some of her health issues.

And so, she loves the mullein plant. She calls it her big, fuzzy leaf. And I literally have to stop her from — like, right now, we only have one plant in the garden, whereas we've always had a little bit more— and she wants to rip the leaves up all the time. And I'm like, "No! Let it grow. Let it grow, please!" So she's definitely a little herbalist. I think she just sees me, and I don't think she sees it as herbalism; she just sees it as a thing that we are and how we do and so for her.

And then, for me, as a postpartum doula, I just think that herbs are so important to the ways in which mothers and human beings, in general, need to support themselves. And so yeah, shower in me in herbs all day, like literally any and everything— from my deodorant to my chapstick to anything. If it can have plants in it, I want it. (*both laugh*) I get my way of self-care by also nourishing and nurturing myself. Yeah.

Amber: Kids love mullein so much. Such a great plant to introduce little ones to

Farai: And it's so ridiculous looking sometimes. (*Amber laughs*)

[0:44:33]

Amber: So what is your main method of preparation for her lung issues?

Farai: Teas. Teas and then tinctures. So I'll put the tincture into the tea.

We had mold pretty badly in our bathroom, and I am very allergic to mold, but it was setting her off, too. And so one of the things that I was doing was making these oat baths. So I powder the oats and powder herbs, nourishing herbs like calendula and chamomile, and I'm sure I did other things, but I can't remember off the top of my head. But yeah, so like those old baths and I would make almost like a gelatinous bath in the tub for her to sit in, because she was also getting a rash. Her skin was so irritated from the mold in the bathroom. So that's one way.

And then salves, you know. Kids they spend so much time outside, so plantain salve, calendula salve for scrapes and bruises and then teas. Oh, you were asking about how about I use mullein. My bad. I got distracted (*Farai laughs*)!

Dr. Aviva Romm, I love her. She has that book [*Naturally Healthy Babies and Children*](#), I think, and there was, it's called "Auntie Aviva's Cough Syrup," and it's a recipe for the book, in the book, and it has many things. And I think one of the first times that ever started making them, I didn't have everything that it needed. So I just made what I had. And one of those things was mullein. And I made that, and it was so incredible and amazing, and yeah, I haven't looked back. I always tried to have mullein on hand for things.

And then one of the easiest preparations, obviously, is tea, sweetened with a little bit of honey for kids, and then make sure you're straining it through, like, a coffee filter, because mullein has those irritating hairs that could affect some people.

Amber: Yeah, I love that book. I got that book 15 years ago, when I was pregnant with my oldest, and I was just, so many times I was so happy it was on my shelf.

Farai: Like that book is a lifesaver. I don't know. I recommend it to anybody that has a child.

Amber: Because it's like alphabetized by ailment. So anything that's going on with your kid, you can just open that book to get some help.

Farai: And yeah, I will never not refer to it. You know, we've never had ear infections or anything. But she recently was having ear pain, and I was like, "Oh, crap. I don't even know what to do." Because even if you know how to interact with plants, you don't always know what to do off the top of your head, and so to have that is amazing. And yeah, so she had swimmers ear.

Amber: Oh, yeah.

Farai: She talks about that, and I was like, oh thank God, Auntie Aviva. Even her podcasts are so helpful when my daughter was a baby.

[0:47:39]

Amber: So what did you do for the swimmers ear? I've always just got the alcohol drops from the pharmacy.

Farai: That's what it was. So yeah, that's what she prescribed. She also suggested a warm, hot water bottle, them lying on it to encourage the water to leave, you know, drip out. I believe that was it, and then getting alcohol drops.

Amber: Yeah, I was at the river a few years ago, and there was a family whose blanket was near ours, and the teenage boy was like, "Oh my gosh, I've got water in my ear!" And he was just, like, miserable. He's like, "I want to go, I feel so crappy." And I always have those alcohol drops with me when we go to the river.

So I was like, "Excuse me, couldn't help but overhear," you know, and the family had never heard of them before. And he used it, and he was like, "Oh my gosh, it's gone. Thank you!" And I didn't know about it either, until someone told me about those. And they're so helpful if you tend to get water in your ear.

Farai: Yeah, I was really grateful to know that. Yeah.

Amber: And yeah, I know, especially when it's yourself or your kid who has something pressing, like, it is really hard to remember what to do. And then you talk to someone, or you open the book, and you're like, "Oh, of course. Yeah, no, of course, I'm gonna be using mullein for this," you know. But when you're triggered, it can get hard to remember.

Farai: Yes, exactly. And that's why I keep that book on me all times. Like, I actually want more than one copy (*Farai laughs*) floating around in the house.

Amber: Yeah, I've made ear drops by just putting garlic and mullein in olive oil, or sometimes I'll do it in the St. John's wort oil that we have already made. But my kids have never had ear problems so we've never had to use them, and then they go bad, and we throw them out. But I always want ear remedies on hand because ear aches are so terrible.

Farai: Yeah, I keep garlic, mullein drops on hand anyway, just because with allergies and things like that. I think it's part of the reason why maybe we've never gotten these infections is because I'm proactive. Like if you know your child is incredibly snotty or has intense allergies like, every so often, I will put a couple drops in the ears just to fight off because you know that mucus will come up in your sinuses and will cause an infection if you're not careful. So every once in a while, but so that's what I like to have on hand.

Amber: Do you ever heat it before you drop it in?

Farai: Yeah, I'm, like, dipping it in a cup of hot water. You can even use it on dogs, and so I kept it on hand. I also keep it on hand for my dogs just in case.

[0:50:15]

Amber: Wow, cool. That's a whole 'nother realm is herbal care for pets.

Farai: Yes, and the one that I'm exploring now that I have chickens, I have [Juliette de Bairacli Levy's](#) book, have not looked at it yet, but she's one of the only ones that I know of.

Amber: It's old, too. She was like the original person.

Farai: Yeah. I don't know if there are any other herbalists who are writing books about herbal care for dogs and farm animals.

Amber: Yeah, I had to make a whole chicken first aid kit last year. I was like, wow, I never knew when I decided to start keeping chickens that this is where we'd be going.

Farai: I'm slowly building mine, too.

Amber: Yeah, because chicken-keeping really is a whole education. And I've learned that a lot of it is around first aid issues.

Farai: That's what I'm hoping I never have to deal with (*Farai laughs*), but I want to be prepared for. We just got another one yesterday, so we now have four. So I'm tentatively excited and also terrified about their care.

That's probably what kept me away from chicken keeping for the longest time was like, what happens to them if, you know, they fall ill, or they get hurt? Will I be able to take care of them? Will I be able to euthanize them if it's past care, and it's the humane thing to do? Yeah, there were all these questions that I had to contend with before I felt comfortable.

Amber: Yeah, it's a lot and like you really have to be taking care of yourself in order to take care of other people and that includes chickens, because you got to be out there every day — sometimes multiple times a day, depending on their age and your setup — to be checking in on them.

[0:52:03]

Amber: Well, one thing I was thinking about is that — it's kind of like how our conversations going towards like herbal remedies to have on hand with kids and chickens — is any kind of wound spray. And I've never made one myself, but I always buy them from other people when it's time, with like alcohol, you know, some sort of antiseptic medium, with antibacterial herbs in it, like yarrow or something. And that came in handy with our chicken who got attacked by, we think, a raccoon last year.

Farai: I'm pretty basic. Hydrogen peroxide is like my favorite thing for those things, like any cuts, wounds, or scrapes, because I don't know. Maybe it's just because I've always had this giant bottle of it because I worked at the health store. But yeah, for wounds, like the first thing that I will do before I apply plants is I just spray it with hydrogen peroxide, and then go in with a poultice or a salve or something like that.

But Rosemary Gladstar has like an old school — it's not old school. She had this recipe in one of her first books that was a skin-soothing spray. And it was, I believe, calendula tincture and lavender tincture mixed together with like a little bit of witch hazel and lavender essential oil. I think that was the original recipe. And I've tweaked it so much because now, you know, like I don't put the essential oil, or sometimes I only infuse it in witch hazel, or you know. So it's become like this

morphing thing for my family where sometimes it's skin-soothing spray, sometimes it's sunburn stuff.

I got like a really gnarly burn on my foot when I was wearing a wool sock, and I accidentally dumped boiling water on my foot. And that spray was the only reason, I think, that I didn't, like, have redness and blistering was because I immediately put that on there. So any iteration of that is typically floating around in my house. I think her original recipe was for bug bites and sun? Maybe sunburn. Yeah, that's another favorite of mine because it can also double as a wound wash. I'm sure it's painful, stinging wound wash, but it will get the job. *(Amber laughs)*

Amber: Another thing I use all the time is just yarrow-infused honey, any sort of skin infection or wound or burn, and it's been incredible. We think we had impetigo earlier this year, but I caught it when it was still one tiny, tiny, little sore because my oldest had had it when she was little, and I was like, "Oh yeah." It got rid of it just like that.

Farai: I've never really worked with honey, topically, so that's interesting. I think that's fun. I mean, I have an herbal, there's a herbal hair company called [Camille Rose Naturals](#) that makes products for black hair. And she has a product that's like mostly honey and nettles. And I love it so much for my hair. I don't know why I've never really put it on my skin like that, but that sounds amazing. That's something because honey is such a healing medium.

Amber: Yeah. It's incredible. It's super antibacterial and vulnerary, wound-healing.

Farai: I'd just be trying not to eat it. That's my main problem.

Amber: It is hard with kids because her sore was, like, right above her lips. So she would just, like, lick it off immediately.

A friend of mine pulled a tumor out of her dog, using a black salve: applied the black salve to his belly and over, I think it took about a month, the tumor came through the skin and out of his body.

Farai: That's wild. Yeah, black salve is a whole other thing that we have to have that on hand because it's splinter season. And sometimes, you know, kids, especially at the young age that my daughter is, getting a splinter out is like pulling teeth. So I'm like, "Okay, but I'll put the drawing out salve", slap on a band aid, and then by the time either the band aid falls off, or the next morning, splinters out, and everything's fine.

[0:56:14]

Amber: Yeah, any kind of drawing salve is also absolutely necessary for us to have on hand at all times. It's funny, now that I'm thinking about it now, I don't really have a first aid kit all in one place, like I do for my chickens now. I don't really have that for us. I just like know where all the things are scattered throughout the house.

Farai: I try, like I made it a point to build one last year. And it's since then been scattered all over the house, right, with everything. But I wanted to do it, too, because it's like something that I want

to actually create and then I put on my sites as like, "These are all the herbal things on my list of things to do. Everything that I find so valuable."

Yeah, like I want to have, at first I was trying to be like, "Here's a tick first aid kit. Here's this first aid kit for this," and it's just all over the place all over my house right now.

Amber: Yeah, ticks — whole 'nother conversation (*Amber laughs*).

Farai: Oh man, don't even get me started. At my apprenticeship, it was an oak forest, and it was just like, tick central. And I was the one screening and like covered head to toe. I've always just had this like intense fear of them. And so preparedness is really important for me.

Amber: Yeah. Well, I remember when Nixie got a tick in her, and I posted in stories what we did about it, and I think you got in touch pretty soon afterwards. You're like, "What was that again?"

Farai: Yeah. And then, yeah, I wrote it out. I have like, what my teacher told me, and then like, what I read somewhere else, just to make sure I have everything on hand. I don't know what it is about ticks in general. They terrify me. I mean, they terrify a lot of people.

Amber: Yeah, well, all the diseases they can impart are terrifying. They can ruin your life, and they're these tiny little things, and they get on our kids. Eww, I hate it.

Farai: Yeah, and we have such a thick hair, and I'm like, if we get a, if I get a tick in my afro, I don't know if I'll ever find it. Like we wear headscarves when we go out and all this stuff just to be super careful.

Amber: Yeah, we were getting in bed the other night, and there was one crawling on my pillow. And we're like, "How did this even get here? And what if we hadn't seen it?" I don't remember. We just put some tinctures on it — because I'm sure people will be like "Amber, what did you do when Nixie got that in?" But she got one recently again, right at her hairline at the very center of her neck and back. And we just took it out and then put in, I think, andrographis tincture?

Farai: Yeah, well, first off, get a tick pick 'cause that...

Amber: Yes. Yeah, we have one of those.

Farai: And then yeah, andrographis tincture and then homeopathic ledum.

Amber: We don't have that.

Farai: Yeah. And, like a few other things.

Amber: I did a drawing salve on it, too, with a band aid for overnight, just in case there were any little pieces of it left in there. And then we repeated that for a couple of weeks because it had been pretty deeply embedded.

Farai: That's about the same that I would do.

Amber: Yeah, I have an album in my phone of just tick related posts people have done and different ideas. Because, again, when it happens you're like (*Amber gasps*).

Farai: Exactly. I keep one on the fridge. And then I try to have everything readily available like on my kitchen door. And then I tried to have a toothpick in the car, a tick pick, like in the kitchen underneath the stove, and then another one in the bathroom. Just in case.

[0:59:56]

Amber: Yep. Yeah, that's a good idea. Oh and my husband, when he pulled this last one out, he just immediately put it in the toilet and flushed it because that's what we do when we pull them off our cats. So we had to be like, remember to not flush it next time. Remember to put it in the ziplock.

Farai: That always brings out the violence in me whenever I find one, I'm like, "Die!" and I'm like, "Oh wait."

Amber: (*both laugh*) Me too. Have you ever had one sent in for testing?

Farai: Never. I did get a bite. And I was reminded on Facebook, my Facebook memories the other days, like, I got bit on the belly. I don't even know where it came from, but I got the bull's eye, and I did not know at all.

I was 19, and I had a really violent oral infection that same year, and I had to be on a plethora of antibiotics. And I'm sure that's what saved my life, like, piecing it together later on, because who knows where I'd be now if that... I know so many people that have had undiagnosed or misdiagnosed Lyme, among other things. And so it was a blessing in disguise.

Amber: Yeah, well, also, I've just been recently learning, I started following a woman on Instagram named theholisticmom, or [@the.holistic.mother](#), and she's really Lyme focused. And she's, again, so smart about it. I feel like it's one of those things where it's just people have had to, like step up, because the medical community has failed people for so long with this one. But people can get the bullseye and never develop anything. Or people can, you can send the tick in, and it will test positive for all these co-infections, but you'll never manifest. It's just like with anything else with health. It depends on the terrain, and how it's going to hit.

Farai: Exactly. I remember people saying that it will only show up in your body way later on in your life, what one teacher told me.

Amber: Right. Yeah, or it can be triggered by like stress or vaccine or war, you know, whatever sort of huge hit to the system that can bring something awake that's been dormant.

Farai: Yeah, that's why I'm grateful for the plants. So I'm so grateful to have these herbal remedies around me, supporting me, nourishing me when I'm scared. Like, Rescue Remedy is like a really simple, very easily accessible thing that I will keep on hand with me, so that, you know, I can be prepared.

Amber: Yeah, at my daughter's preschool, they call them "fairy drops," and she's always asking for fairy drops. *(both laugh)*

[1:02:41]

Amber: So I want to talk about your Patreon Folk Herbalism for Everyone. That's what we're here talking about. I appreciated Nixie watched the video on the right way to harvest nettles with me. I've always been given huge amounts of nettles by friends. So it's been a long time since I've harvested them, and I used gloves back then. But we have some in a big pot outside that are doing really well, and they're ready to harvest. And so I was like, "Sweet. Now I know how to do that."

What was the impetus behind starting this and why was like folk herbalism an important focus for you?

Farai: Well, the folk herbalism part was kind of, you know, because I'm also a writer, so my love of combining story and history into the plants that, you know, my patrons picked for me to talk about monthly. But you know, you were also a part of the reason why I started the Patreon, just because you were one of the first people when I was studying online or beginning to find like-minded people online, you were one of those people like, "Yeah, you can do this." And I was like, "Oh crap, I can do this! And I will do this!"

And then for me being a person of color, being a black woman, not finding people that looked like me, you know, occupying the spaces, and then I don't know, not being represented. And I was like, well, how do I combat that? And it's by putting myself out there.

And so I think I just reached out to the audience that I had at the time. And I was like, they were interested in the things that I would share on my Instagram. And I was like, "How would you feel if I made a Patreon?" And a lot of people were like, "Heck, yeah!" So I really wanted it to be really approachable and simple and make people feel like, you know, this is not something complicated.

Oftentimes, I also saw that — I was seeing on Instagram, specifically, right? I also feel like with the pandemic, natural living and, like, herbalism and things, that kind of got really elevated and became really popular. And then I also saw, like, a lot of gatekeeping and people being like, "Well, you can't be in a place if you don't have a clinical education, and you can't call yourself this, you can't do this."

And I was like, this is detracting away from the actual reason that we're all doing this. It's just like a love of plants. Like, we should be inspiring people to go pick nettles and make tea. We should be inspiring people to make a simple poultice with plantain, show them that you may not even know what your heritage is, or you may not know what your background is, or you may not even know anything. But if this feels right, if this makes your bones sing, then come have a cup of tea, and let's talk about it, you know. So that's where my Patreon came from.

Amber: Hell yeah, that makes me so happy. Just keep spreading the word, planting the seeds: herbalism is for everyone. This is in your blood. This is in your DNA. If it's calling to you, heed the call.

Farai: Exactly. And it's exactly why I did it. I was like I wanted people to feel like this was approachable, and I wanted people to feel the joy that I feel.

Amber: Yeah. Rejoice in the plants.

Farai: There you go. I need a T-shirt that says that.

Amber: Yeah, I'd buy it. (*Amber laughs*) I can make it my paid Patreon offering.

Okay, thank you so much. I'm so happy to connect with you and share this conversation with other folks.

Farai: Thank you so much, Amber.

[Closing]

[1:06:37]

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 past episodes, my blog, handmade herbal medicines, and a lot more at MythicMedicine.love. We've got reishi, lion's mane, elderberry, mugwort, yarrow, redwood, body oils, an amazing sleep medicine, heart medicine, earth essences, so much more — more than I can list there: MythicMedicine.love.

While you're there, check out my quiz "[Which Healing Herb is your Spirit Medicine?](#)" It's fun and lighthearted, but the results are really in-depth and designed to bring you into closer alignment with both the medicine you are in need of and the medicine that you already carry that you can bring to others.

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The music that opens and closes the show is Mariee Sioux. It's from her beautiful song "Wild Eyes." Thank you, Mariee.

And thanks to you all. I look forward to next time!

