

Hey, you. I'm here sitting at the edge of one of our sweet little mountain streams. It's in that weird transition time between spring and summer, about midday.

The birds have been out foraging, but the land is starting to kind of quiet down. I just wanted to take a few minutes to tell you how I got here — not just to this land, but to this work, and to the particular way I practice it. People are often curious about my background, and I think that's because what I do doesn't fit neatly into a single category. I want to try to connect some of the dots for you, because understanding where I come from might help you understand whether this is the right place for you.

So we're going to time travel back a little more than a decade ago, before I came to this mountain. I was living in a beautiful 250-year-old farmhouse surrounded by established permaculture gardens and forest. I had this sweet, little successful herbal clinic and a functioning apothecary, and from the outside I looked like someone who had it figured out. I want to name that, because a lot of people with complex chronic illness look exactly like that — like they're holding it together, until they aren't.

What was kind of happening under the surface was actually mold. I was living in a house that had a lot of mold — black mold — in it. I had this creeping fatigue, unresolved GI issues that would flare when I was stressed, the particular grief and rage that comes with being a neurodivergent person who doesn't yet have the language for what that means. And underneath all of this was a body that was quietly, steadily moving towards collapse.

That is the context in which I met Dave from Blue Heron Outdoor School. Dave was a maintenance man, which is a completely inadequate description of a person who is essentially a polyglot of traditional skills. People sought him out specifically to work on historic homes, because he understood how old things were built and how to care for them. He had that same relationship with the land.

He had come over to this old farmhouse I was leasing, doing some spring work, and he asked me about the herbs that were covering every flat surface of my house. Something in that conversation opened a door. At the time I was having these really intense dreams about bears, and I wasn't sleeping. David asked me, hey, are you okay? You look really tired. And in that conversation, Dave recognized what that meant in a way I didn't really have a framework for — and he brought me to sweat lodge.

I'll just say here: I do not recommend sweat lodge for people with MCAS or POTS. My body made that very clear. But that's actually part of the story, because it was one of the first moments where I had to learn to listen to what my body was telling me, rather than push through.

So. Dave. Lena was at herb school — all good herbalists go back to herb school.

It was around that summer that my family and I went primitive camping over at Dave and Lena's, at Blue Heron Outdoor School. I want to try to describe what kind of learning that is, because it's different from anything I'd experienced before. Land skills are often taught as if they're separate things — here's plant identification, here's basket weaving, here's fire making. That summer we learned them all at once, as part of a lived experience. We made tulip poplar baskets by fires we'd built. We learned reciprocity and gift economy not from a book, but by living inside it with people who embodied it completely.

Before Robin Wall Kimmerer had written *The Serviceberry*, I was learning those principles with my hands in the dirt. Dave taught me plant identification in a way that held two things at once — the indigenous ways of knowing a plant, and the Western practice of keying it out — and he didn't treat those as opposites. He treated them as different languages for the same relationship.

That summer, I learned that the land provides for what we need. I learned to regulate my nervous system with water and fire and with gratitude and with presence. And I began to understand what it means to be in genuine relationship with a place.

At the end of that summer, my family and I made a tobacco offering to ask formally for apprenticeship. Dave and Lena accepted, and that created ties of responsibility and obligation between our families that are still alive today. With that asking, part of the obligation on his side — he tells me all the time — is that if I jump, he will not let me fall. That has created the foundation and the safety for so much of what was to come.

I want to be transparent about what this lineage is and what it isn't. Lena is a Métis woman of Anishinaabe descent, and the knowledge she has shared with me has been shared freely and intentionally across many years of lived relationship and ceremony. What was not offered, I do not carry or transmit. I hold that with a lot of gratitude and with enormous care. Dave has supported Lena in reconnecting with her culture — they both speak Anishinaabemowin, they've both gone back to Lena's people and done ceremony and been part of their culture. All of that work is alive and well in how I work with clients.

I also want to name that this work — this apprenticeship, this land, this practice — happens on the traditional territory of the Monacan people, whose relationship with these mountains is far older and deeper than mine. I don't hold that as a resolved thing, but as an ongoing reckoning.

So we had made this formal offer of apprenticeship, and what happened next is that we started coming back to the mountains every summer. We would go live our nine-to-five life in the city, practice skills, hold our questions, stay in relationship — and come back during the summers. While we were still living in the city, I continued my formal academic training: several hundred hours of clinical Western herbalism, physiology, pharmacology, studying with some of the most respected voices in the field.

And then my health came apart — slowly and painfully. It taught me what it means to live in a body that responds to the world with an intensity the medical system doesn't have good language for. During that time, the plants held me. Dave and Lena taught me something I now consider one of the most important clinical skills I have: how to turn toward my own suffering instead of away from it. How to be with what is, rather than fighting for what should be. And I was starting — without knowing it yet — to apprentice to my own body.

And then the pandemic happened. When it came, something shifted. Dave and Lena were retiring, and they asked if we would take over stewardship of this land — this botanical sanctuary that held their school and their practice, and really, their life's work. I just want to say: we came with no building skills. I didn't know how to use a hammer. I'm actually sitting right now on the first thing we ever built out here, which was the bridge over the stream.

We came in ceremony. We came with respect for what had been here before us and what we were being asked to carry forward. That stewardship is ongoing, and the relationship of it is ongoing.

I think we'd been on the mountain two or three years into the pandemic when I finally caught COVID. I want to say — in the middle of all of this — that no one had ever seen or heard coyotes here. People had run tracking classes on this land for over a decade. They would have known. But the night I caught COVID, as my fever climbed, coyotes came and surrounded our cabin and sang to us. I honestly thought at first that my fever was high enough that I was hallucinating. But they stayed through the night, and they left in the morning.

And they didn't come back.

That morning when I woke up, I was unable to stand on my own. I was then unable to hold a spoon. I couldn't walk. I had a really massive autoimmune and histamine reaction to COVID, and it would take me two years to get a formal diagnosis.

The only time we have ever encountered a coyote on this mountain again was the day I was finally diagnosed. A single coyote stepped out of the mountain laurel in front of our car, forcing my partner to stop. He made eye contact with me for about 45 seconds. And then he ran into the forest.

I'm not going to tell you what that means. I think either you understand that, or you don't.

Those two years — having had COVID, not having a diagnosis — were honestly really difficult. They were also something of a completion. I had a decade of land-based apprenticeship. I had hundreds of hours of formal clinical training. And now I had the lived experience of navigating my own complex, undiagnosed, highly sensitive body through a medical system that just didn't have the right tools for me. The same apprenticeship model Dave had used with me — that slow, immersive, relational way of learning — I ended up applying to my own illness. That's not a metaphor. That's literally what happened.

I apprenticed to my own body. I learned to read it the way Dave taught me to read the land. Eventually, friends and family would come and build me a disability-friendly tiny cabin on the mountain, so I could heal closer to the ground. Resilience, I learned, happens in community. It always has.

That integration of clinical science and land-based knowing, and the experience of being a patient in my own body — that is what I bring to every client file I open. Before I open yours, I'll step out onto this land, into the very spot I'm sitting right now, and make an offering for the work we'll do together. Because I want you to know that you are held with intention from the very beginning.

If any of this resonated — if you heard something in this that felt like recognition, like maybe this is a place where your body might finally make sense — I'd love to hear from you. There's a button below called Let's Talk On Paper. It's a low-stakes alternative to a discovery call. Fill it out at whatever pace feels right, and I will be in touch.

All right. Talk to you soon.