



Chapter 2

NATIVE NATIONS MEDICINE

Today, 566 tribal nations call the United States their home—and since each region fosters its own kind of healing using herbs and trees endemic to its area, the broad collection that is native healing is rich and vibrant. While it's well known that native North and South American food plants such as corn, tomatoes, potatoes, cocoa, cranberries, ramps, juniper berries, squash, and pumpkins were new to European settlers/invaders in 1492, it's not so well known that North America has its own abundant healing herbs, as well.

Throughout history, native nations have used wild herbs as medicine to treat a wide variety of conditions, from headache and sore eyes to heart problems, skin issues, digestive disturbances, cancers, and more. Women's reproductive issues are commonly listed in books about native medicines and many plants were given monikers referring to their use for women, such as squaw vine (*Mitchella repens*).

Native plants include the bayberry shrub; the berberine-containing plants barberry, goldenseal, and coptis (goldthread); black cohosh and blue cohosh; bugleweed; boneset; chicory and dandelion; and the food plants cranberry and lamb's quarter. In addition to myriad edible and medicinal mushrooms, native people harvested bloodroot and other herbs to use as dyes and paints, and they used many grasses and barks for cordage and rope-making.

Sassafras was a popular herb when Captain Bartholomew Gosnold sailed the northeast seas in the late 1500s and early 1600s; its name is likely a corruption of saxifrage and the root was

quickly shipped back to Europe as a potential cure for syphilis. The fragrant roots, twigs, bark, pith, and leaves of the tree were used by native tribes to treat fever, infection, nosebleeds, and to purify the blood.

Native healing methods are not restricted to botanicals; some tribes use fasting or cleanses before taking medicines, others include extensive prayer and spiritual shamanism. The sweat lodge is not only a place for stories and singing, but is a vital instrument for healing since letting go of waste products from the body and soul is required before healing can begin. Certain herbs are associated with this cleansing as well, including sage, tobacco, cedar, and sweetgrass.

Healing methods in the native Indian repertoire were more extensive than in European medicine; for example, one common way to relieve chest congestion was to inhale the smoke of burning herbs through a pipe; crushed leaves could be used as a snuff for headaches. These types of methods were seldom employed in other Western systems. Native medicine also included the widespread use of poultices, teas, rinses (eye problems were common), douches, and ointments.

Today there are roughly 5.2 million American Indians and Alaska natives living in the United States, which represents 1.7 percent of the US total population.¹ By far the largest tribal grouping is the Cherokee, followed by the Navajo, Choctaw, Mexican American Indian, Chippewa, Sioux, Apache, and Blackfeet.

Dr. Jody Noé

Jody Noé comes as something of a surprise: she says fun words like *moon-pauser* for women experiencing menopause and phrases such as *empower ourselves* in her popular herbal medicine lectures—and at the same time she conducts research and designs clinical trials in random comparison studies with prescriptive intervention in stomatitis. An anomaly for our age and a true inspiration, Jody is a fascinating and successful woman and role model who combines two identities not often found together: a traditional Cherokee and a nationally renowned naturopathic doctor.

Early in her career (as she would put it, in her “hippie days”), Jody approached her study of naturopathy with her arms held wide open: in addition to midwifery, she participated in California’s gay pride movement, worked with Harvey Milk in San Francisco, “went a whole different way with my own civil rights movement,” studied botany, ethnobotany, behavioral modification, psych nursing, plant science, exercise, nutrition, holistic nursing, healing touch, and worked with the disabled. She thought it would be a straightforward path from bachelor’s to master’s to medical doctor, but she received



Photo credit: Jody Noé

Jody with Mama Gene

a surprise soon after the completion of her studies that changed her life completely: the plants would not leave her alone. “I wanted zen in [my studies], I wanted all these things that didn’t really exist in the eighties as an integrative degree. But I realized I really wanted to study the plants. They kept calling me, ‘Just use me!’” Jody had to let go of her preconceived ideas of a mainstream career to heed to a spiritual calling. “I had a spiritual awakening because to go back to school, Spirit had to knock me over the head and say *this is not what you’re supposed to do. You have to go back to school.* That’s when I really started listening to Spirit; it was like a voice on the intercom, it was that clear.”

Jody didn’t want to listen at first; she tried to make outrageous deals, telling the Universe, *get rid of my credit cards and then I’ll go back to school.* “And that happened!” she says. “My credit cards got consolidated, so I said, ‘Alright I’ll go back to school.’” At the time, she was living hippie-like on an organic farm growing produce she sold to a local food co-op; it was off the grid and very alternative. One night she had a dream where Spirit told her that school was really the Reservation. It was completely unexpected, as Jody had never had contact with a reservation, had not studied Native American practices or culture, and was only remotely aware that she might have Indian ancestry. She said to Spirit, “*What reservation?!*” But she decided to take a research trip to the Pamunkey and Mattaponi Reservations in Virginia. Intending her trip to be academic, she was surprised when she began cultivating relationships that led to spiritual education.

She was interviewed by Cherokee teacher Mary Chiltoskey (carefully interviewed, even *grilled*, one might say) and Cherokee teacher and pediatric nurse Mama Gene Jackson. These women took Jody under their guidance and instructed her to set up a campsite on a nearby mountain where Jody lived for the next three months, receiving counsel and learning. “It was very wholistic, not just studying. It was going out, walking in nature with the plants, the rituals of going to water, getting up at sunrise and going to bed at sunset.” With these Cherokee elders, Jody studied herbal medicine and home remedies, considered the first line of therapy when sick. “The first medicines that all Cherokee women know are the helpful medicines. When you get sick in Cherokee fashion, you go home to the women—to the mother, the grandmother, the auntie—who will make you tea. It’s a very indigenous tradition that was still in play in the eighties.” But at the end of the year, Jody asked about the spirituality of the plants and the rituals of

spirituality, and because she was not part of the tribe, she was sent to learn spiritual medicine in Oklahoma.

“I feel really connected to those South Carolina roots because I can totally understand giving up everything to stay with your landscape of memory, with your plants, with your land, with what you know and with those plants that talk to you and are part of your life.”

To raise money for her journey, Jody called on her family and friends back on her organic farm; they held a giant potluck dinner, charged \$5 per plate, and raised enough money to pay for the gas to get her to Oklahoma. She arrived in Tahlequah, the capital of the Cherokee Nation, and pitched her tent in the yard of the Cherokee Nation’s spiritual leader Crosslin S. Smith; the elder returned from Stomp Dance to find Jody waiting for him “and I’ve been with him ever since. I’ll train with him for the rest of my life,” Jody says. “Traditionally, you study the Cherokee Way from age thirty to age fifty; at fifty you can become a teacher.”

Jody had begun a little early, at age twenty-seven, after her year with Mary Chitolski in the Appalachians. With Crosslin and his wife, Glenna, Jody completed seasonal chores and worked in a medicine room in an old cabin. “It’s his home,” she says, “and people will come all hours of the day, and if we’re eating dinner, even if they’re strangers, they’ll eat dinner with us and then they’ll

go in and do medicine. It’s very organic. It’s a very different kind of concept of medicine, so the teaching too—you have to live there, you have to go through the chores of running a ranch to building a house, all that stuff is in the teaching. How to listen to the plants. I went through years and years of teaching with him on how to obtain the Good Mind, to put yourself into the Good Mind before you are able to go and collect medicine. The plants call you, and once you obtain that Good Mind, you can’t talk from sunrise to sunset. The long and short of it is that it allows you to actually hear the voice of the plant, which I imagine is what many people would call the Spirit.

“We used to get up at sunrise and he’d say, ‘Let’s go get all the roots and plants that we’ll need today because we’ll have a large group of people,’ and he wouldn’t know, but they would line up down the block and they’d wait and they’d come one at a time and he would see them outside in his lawn chair underneath the tree, and they would do medicine. I would have the roots and would prepare them, all different kinds of roots. I asked him one time, ‘How do you know what kinds of roots you need if you don’t have the people there in front of you?’ He said, ‘That’s what I’m trying to teach you, you gotta listen to the plants. I’m just going out and picking the plants that are telling me to pick them today. The people are going to come that need these plants. You’re thinking about this all wrong!’”

Crosslin is the grandson of Redbird Smith, founder of the traditional Keetoowahs—the traditionalists of the Cherokee—and he is the son of Stoke Smith, the chief of the traditional Keetoowah.

Roots and Ancestry

The Cherokee Nation is a huge, prosperous, sovereign nation. “It’s a city,” Jody says, “it has courthouses, buildings, the high school gym is like a giant university. It’s a big industry, a big nation.” The Eastern band is much smaller, looks more Native American, and has a boundary—the top of the Great Smokies. The Nation is a boundary-less reservation and has many dilutes of blood since members are not required to meet a blood quantum or have direct lineage to qualify. Jody is a member of neither; when she began studying Native plant medicines, she was not aware of her Cherokee roots. She completed her bachelor’s, wrote her master’s thesis *Ethnobotany of the Cherokee People*, submitted her unique collection of 250 specimens of both Eastern and



Photo credit: Jody Noe

Jody with Crosslin Smith



Jody with Glynn Smith

Western Cherokee botanicals to an herbarium collection housed at Dominion College, and moved to Seattle to attend Bastyr naturopathic medical school. It was here, of all places, that she finally discovered her Cherokee ancestry when, of all things, she met a man who had appeared to her in a dream years before: Robert Ward, White Cloud, a direct descendant of Nancy Ward, took one look at Jody and told her she must be related to him. They performed a big ceremony for Jody and when she later began genealogical research she discovered he was right: her grandfather's mother was a Martin Cherokee, a direct descendant of Nancy Ward. "That's the South Carolina Cherokees, those South Carolinians where my mother was born and raised, still living in the same spot where they've lived all generations as Cherokee. I feel really connected to those South Carolina roots because I can totally understand giving up everything to stay with your landscape of memory, with your plants, with your land, with what you know and with those plants that talk to you and are part of your life. In some way, that kept my people there. And they lost everything and had to hide their culture and hide who they were, but it's that connection."

Born in Norfolk, Virginia, in 1959, Jody was the first of her mother's family to be born out of South Carolina. She was also the first of her father's family born in America after he had emigrated from Sicily, Italy, to Ellis Island. Her parents moved to California, where Jody spent the first decade of her life in a close-knit, Italian, old-world community.



CHEROKEE

The Cherokee language is the only Southern Iroquoian language still spoken today. A reference to *Chalauque* first appeared in a Portuguese narrative of De Soto's expedition in 1557, then as *Cheraqui* in a French document of 1699, and finally in its current Anglicized form *Cherokee* in 1708.¹ Etymologist Douglas Harper also lists *Tsaragi* as an early spelling of Cherokee from the 1670s, though he lists no sources. The written form of the language was invented by Cherokee farmer and silversmith Sequoyah, or George Gist, in 1821.

Though Sequoyah's life remains largely speculative, he is believed to have been the son of a Cherokee mother and possibly a migrant German father, raised in the village of Tuskegee. He was a farmworker and also a silversmith,² and he began creating his syllabary in 1809. His loosely mixed alphabetical characters of Roman, Cyrillic, Arabic, and Greek letters, and his writing method was finally accepted by a wary and suspicious Cherokee public in 1825, a year after the General Council of the Cherokee awarded him a silver medal of honor and appreciation.

"The plants go on both sides!" she says happily. "The plant medicines go on both sides. My Italian *nonna* grew her own plants and would also smuggle plants from Sicily when she went to visit. She brought over a Sicilian jasmine, a fig tree, and other native plants to grow in her yard in California. She always used herbal medicine and cooked with herbs; she made everything from scratch like from old-world Italy. She never drove a car or became an American citizen, though she married an Italian American man after my grandfather was killed in 1939 in the war. All the herbal medicine I grew up with started with her because when we got sick, she would bring down jars of loose-leaf herbs and make herbal teas for us. She always used chamomile for everything, with lots of sugar to sweeten it up! I remember her boiling herbs in her coffee pot when we got sick. I'm not sure what those were but she grew them all in her yard."



Jody with her Italian Nona Josephine D'Agostino Noé Satariano

When her parents divorced, Jody moved to Virginia with her mother and sisters. “At a 1970s family reunion in South Carolina, where the Cherokee branch was, my great Aunt Sally came up to me; since I’m pretty tall and big and she had tall girls, and everyone else in the family is pretty short, she tried to tell me things in a roundabout way about Indian people in our bloodline. I asked my mom about it but she said no way. I learned it was really taboo in a certain period of that family history to let your native bloodline be known, so it was hidden.”

Jody’s Practice

Today, the first thing Jody tries to do in her busy Connecticut naturopathic practice is make the patient feel like family. “It’s very relaxed, sitting in comfortable chairs; we spend nearly two hours for the first visit and an hour for the second.” For cancer patients that includes labs, diagnostics, pathologies, treatments, what they do, what failed. But, Jody says, integrated into that scientific medical approach is diet, lifestyle, spirituality, the “hygiens” (sleep habits, stress habits, elimination, and so on).

“It’s a very wholistic old-fashioned approach. If we need to do a physical exam or test, we have time, and they also have time to talk to me, that’s why they want to come. I put it together physiologically, biologically, with biochemistry, and I prescribe with the top layer of my intuition guiding that. The spirituality of the plants comes in through that way. I could be talking to a patient about their diagnostic imaging and a plant might pop up right there, so I’ve learned to listen and say, ‘Oh that plant wants to be with this person, I’ve got to put this plant into their regimen.’ We’re blending the science and the spirituality. I call it spirit-mind-body medicine instead of mind-body-spirit medicine.”

Jody’s apothecary includes dried herbs, tinctures, essential oils, homeopathics, capsules, teas, whole herbs, combination therapies, aromatherapy, topicals, spirituals, ethnogens, and more, and she’s created databases for intensive client education. Her book *The Textbook of Naturopathic Integrative Oncology* includes a large section on nutrition, diet, and medical botany where she looks at the constituents of the plants and their targeted effect on patients for cancer and their whole effect with the whole herb. “It’s really fascinating because everything that my indigenous elders have taught me [about herbs] has proven true with science. Now that plant medicine is so abundantly studied across the world, it’s easy to find that this plant was traditionally used for cancer and guess what—its constituent is now used for cancer! Periwinkle, your *Vinca* species, that’s vincristine in chemotherapy. Sanguinarin from bloodroot . . . I can’t tell you how many of those indigenous learnings are proving to be true. Mistletoe, that’s *Viscum album*, that white mistletoe grown on oak is what isacadore is. It’s amazing. That’s been my whole life’s work, using everything I’ve learned throughout all the levels and places.”

Jody is a professor of oncology and family medicine at the University of Bridgeport College of Naturopathic Medicine, is the founder of the Integrative Oncology Clinic, and is the chair of Botanical Medicine. She’s not nearly finished. “There’s a lot more to [what I teach] than biochemistry, though I really think biochemistry is just the expression of Spirit. It works for me, the science of the Spirit. I tell my students and I tell my elders and my family: I have a lot to do in this lifetime, and I have to do it. It’s like a calling.”



CEDAR

Thuja spp. and Juniperus spp.

Many cedars and junipers share their names, making identification confusing. Red cedar, or *Juniperus virginiana*, grows throughout the Eastern and central parts of the United States and the poles made from its red wood (used as boundary markers by native peoples) were the inspiration for the naming of Baton Rouge by French traders. Known as White Cedar or Arbor Vitae (Tree of Life), *Thuja occidentalis L.* is used as a fragrance, ceremonial incense, medicine, and food. The lacy, flat-scaled leaves and the rough red bark contain the volatile oil *thujone* and, despite confusion, this tree is not the Juniper (*Juniperus Oxycedrus*) called prickly cedar.



The Ojibwe used the pith of the young white cedar to make a sweet soup, and the Iroquois inhaled the steam from a decoction of the leaves to remedy colds. Many nations used various cedars as a poultice to treat swellings and sores and burned the wood to purify sacred objects and ceremonial participants. Iroquois women valued cedar leaf infusion as a tonic during pregnancy and as a diaphoretic to increase a new mother’s milk flow. The infusion made a type of “sitz bath” for the vaginal area postpartum.

Members of the Maliseet Nation used cedar as a burn dressing—drying the under-bark, pounding it to a powder and mixing it with grease. British Columbia nations burned cedar smoke or incense to clear bad emotions and to purify the air after an illness.



GEORGIA AND SOUTH CAROLINA

Often called red-dirt country, Georgia includes rural sprawling country, charming antebellum farmhouses, and inner-city metropolitan culture and business. The last of the thirteen colonies to join the Union (in 1733), Georgia seceded more than a hundred years later to join the Confederacy. The British attempted to empty their debtor's prisons into Georgia, though this was largely unsuccessful. Its neighbor South Carolina became a state in 1800, seceded in 1860, and was readmitted in 1868.

What *was* successful, however, at least from the white settler's point of view, was Georgia's removal of all eastern Native nations from its lands. When gold was discovered in 1829 near Dahlonega in Georgia's mountains, hoards of settlers moved in to claim the wealth. However, the lands were mostly Cherokee lands; in 1830, Georgia enacted the Indian Removal Act whereby it legally banished its Native American population (which had refused allegiance to Georgia's government and operated its own written constitution). Over the next eight years, first the Choctaw left Georgia and South Carolina, then

the Seminole, the Creek, and the Chicasaw. By 1837, 46,000 Native peoples had evacuated their homelands, opening 25 million acres to white settlement and exploitation.

Most of those that remained by 1838 were forcibly relocated to Indian Territory (Oklahoma) during what came to be known as the Trail of Tears. "The Cherokee are very resilient people," says Dr. Jody Noé. "They were yanked out and stockaded and genocided along the way; some 6,000 to 10,000 people (underestimated at 4,000) died on that walk. [They moved] to a whole new earth-based place to live—and to thrive, to be successful and resilient and to now be prosperous says a lot about a people. I have a lot of respect for the Eastern band of Cherokee and their leaders and the Western band of Cherokee and their leaders. And the other bands—the Arkansas band, the Texas band, the state-recognized bands, the non-recognized bands like the South Carolina band, all these people are now successful at getting recognized, saying, 'We're here, this little part of our culture is still alive in this part of the community.' The Cherokee people are an amazing people."

Photo credit: Angelina Bellebuono



Cut sorghum and leftover cotton

Ada-Belinda DancingLion

Born to parents of the Lakota Sioux/Blackfoot, and Anishinabe Nations, Ada-Belinda DancingLion also claims West African heritage and proudly refers to herself as a Black Indian. Tall and sporting long dreadlocks, Ada-Belinda has an easy laugh and a strong voice and is a vibrant, enthusiastic keeper of her ancestors' traditions. Her elders of the White Horse Warrior Mountain Lion clan named her She Walks With Lightning for good reason—Ada-Belinda is a powerhouse of historic information regarding women's traditions, healing ceremonies, and the importance of heritage.

At age eight, Ada-Belinda began apprenticing with her Lakota Sioux/Blackfoot great-grandmother. She later studied with Cameroonian healer and plant geneticist Tabi Orang and Master African Conga drummer Malik Del Mar.

"I carry a pipe and pour Lodge in Anishinabe fashion (though I'm of Lakota blood)," she says. "There aren't many women who pour in Lakota tradition. Anishinabe is more matrilineal." She is the youngest person in her nation to carry a pipe and facilitate the sacred "sweat lodge" ceremony as water pourer, an honor because water is Life. The meeting of water and stone during ceremony is a sacred occasion.

"When we sit in Lodge, we are literally availing ourselves of all elements—earth, fire, water, and air—to be reborn. We are in a womb-type structure shaped like a big pregnant belly," she laughs. "We go in with ails and worries, and we use herbs to release that which is causing us harm. We are renewed and reborn," Ada-Belinda says. "Plant your experiences into the earth and they'll bear fruit for future generations, which is why we say that for seven generations into the future we must consider our actions, words, and deeds."

"Every step upon the earth is a prayer."

Re-learning the Old Ways

Ada-Belinda believes it is important to archive knowledge for the use of future generations. "Information about the women's holocaust, herbal healers, the suppression of indigenous people—

this information was not available to us, which is why as a culture the wisdom of plants and natural healing was not there for us," she says. "There was a punitive energy that cautioned, 'If you reach for this, there will be terrible repercussions.' For a long time, humanity bore the brunt of this loss of information, suffering poor health and vitality, but as we mature as a culture, we find there is value in what the elders had to say. Now, we're consulting with them: 'What did you used to do?' It has new names: Permaculture, being green, living in harmony, but it's the indigenous way."

Plants are central to her tenets of healing. "We need to treat plants as teachers, as our elders and grandmothers, and respect them accordingly. Even if one plant becomes extinct, it affects everything else—the weather, the availability of medicine, air, and water quality. We have no right to wipe anything off the earth—if we do, we do so to our own detriment."

"Today's science is yesterday's magic."

Ada-Belinda uses abundant local foods as medicine, including nettle, oatstraw, and comfrey. "Start with food and toning plants such as motherwort and St. Joan's Wort. Then move to infusions, tinctures, to the really strong plants." In ceremonies, Ada-Belinda uses sage, cedar, sweet grass, tobacco, bear-root, and osha. "Use what is in season and grows near you," she advises. "Shipping plants across the globe is not natural. How much access did our ancestors have to Costa Rican lilies? We used to call it walking softly upon the earth—now it's called our 'carbon footprint.'" Ada-Belinda smiles: "Every step upon the earth is a prayer."



PRAYER

The PIE *prek* meant to ask, request, or entreat, just as Sanskrit *prasna* meant to question, and Lithuanian *prasyti*, to ask or beg. From this came Latin's *precari*, to ask earnestly. In the 900s, Old French used *preier*, which entered English circa 1300 as *prayer*.



Photo credit: Ada-Belinda DancingLion



MILKWEED AND BUTTERFLY WEED

Asclepias syriaca and *A. tuberosa*

The cousins milkweed and butterfly weed have a very devoted winged fan club; both these perennials attract butterflies by the hundreds and are prized in colorful butterfly gardens. As the name suggests, milkweed exudes a milky latex sap from its stalk, though its young flower buds are edible and make a pleasant wild-food treat.

Named for the ancient deified healer Asclepius, the family *Asclepiadaceae* boasts more than two



thousand species, one of which defies that characteristic that groups them all: butterfly weed has no milky latex sap but instead exudes a watery juice. This lovely orange wildflower is respectfully called *pleurisy root* because Europeans and Native Americans have both used it as an expectorant for lower lung congestion, pleurisy, and bronchial spasm. The bitter pounded root also has use as an external anti-inflammatory, a vulnerary for wounds, and as a laxative.



SAGE

Salvia officinalis

Sages are eaten, smoked, inhaled, smudged, dried, burned, drunk, and tinctured, as the plant is a source of great medicinal, culinary, and even shamanic value in cultures throughout the world.

White sage is a popular ceremonial herb, while *Salvia officinalis*, common garden sage, lends its unique flavor to grilled meats and broth. Medicinally, astringent sage treats fever, sore throats, mouth ulcers, and swollen gums. Nursing mothers wean their babies by drinking sage tea or cooking with dried sage. Rosemary Gladstar hails sage as a “yang” grounding herb for relieving menopausal hot flashes, and herbalist Ben Charles Harris praised sage for healing the liver and gallbladder and for removing kidney stones. Harvard scientists are researching the esoteric species *Salvia divinorum* as a hallucinogen with potential for treating schizophrenia and bipolar mood disorders.

