

Women Healers of the World

**The Traditions, History, and
Geography of Herbal Medicine**

Holly Bellebuono

Foreword by Rosemary Gladstar

Watercolor Art by Tracy Thorpe



Dedication

This book is lovingly dedicated to my mom, Carla S. Horton, RN, who set the bar high as a nurse for forty-four years and continues to be a source of strength, generosity, and creativity



... and to the following women who participated in the creation of this book but passed away before its completion; I am honored to introduce these women who shared their transcendent passion and inspiring talent with us all. Because of their perseverance and work, we have an incredible world heritage of healing.

Because of the people in this book, we have herbalism.

For
Raylene Ha'alelea Kawaia'e'a
Mary Beith
Cascade Anderson Geller
Mama Kia Ingenlath
Juliette de Bairacli Levy

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Foreword

“While herbalism can lend itself to encyclopedic lists of herbs and their actions, it’s also rich in heritage and the stories of people. Herbalism can be the launching pad from which great people create themselves.”

—Holly Bellebuono, from *The Authentic Healer*

When Holly first shared her vision with me to create a documentary on our herbal heritage by interviewing and recording the stories of women healers from around the world, I was intrigued and supportive from the start. The project sounded exciting and grand—to travel the world, interviewing, recording, and photographing the remarkable stories of women herbalists and to create a slide documentation to preserve these stories for future generations. If anyone could do this project well—and with flair—Holly could! And, of course, she did; she not only created a memorable slide presentation that has been highlighted at numerous gatherings throughout the country, but also created this beautiful and brilliant book that documents and preserves the lively stories of women healers and the rich feminine her-story of herbalism (or, her-balism).

And what a treasure this book is! Visually stunning, *Women Healers of the World* is filled with colorful photographs of herbs and the lovely, wild-hearted women who favored them; it also contains beautiful paintings, renditions of influential women healers who lived long before the advent of tape recorders or cameras. But more than just another lovely “coffee table book” to be displayed for its appealing layout, this book invites us to delve deeply into the mystery and power of herbal healing and its importance in our global history, both past and present. Holly thoughtfully includes enriching insights about the countries and geography in which each healer lives, interesting and unusual facts about the plants, herbal healing, and global herbalism.

There is much to learn here.

But at the core of this book, its essence and heartbeat, are the remarkable stories of women healers. As diverse as the pioneering spirits of Tulsi La Brun and Inez White from outback Australia to



Zoubida Charrouf, the celebrated expert on Argan oil and champion of women’s rights in Morocco, to the wise, gentle Polynesian elder, Auntie Velma DelaPena, who carries on the traditions of the ancient Kahunas on the island of Hawai’i, each story is inspiring, each woman empowering; the herbs weave the stories together as Holly navigates us on a journey around the world, through time, to the present.

As different and unique as each woman's story is, the central themes are similar; each woman's desire to serve humanity, to heal, their love of plants, their sense of purpose. But Holly captures something else unique, but similar, that's core to each of the storytellers and brings it to light: *the value of mentoring* and *confidence in healing*. These two principles are, I feel, the essential messages Holly brings forth through these women healers and their stories.

"We need to take seriously our long-term influence on the children in our lives and understand that we have the power to change the future" and *"The captain—the herbalist, the wise woman—charts the course, tests the waters, stands at the helm with confidence."* Like adages to be remembered, she plants these thoughts firmly as though they are seeds in our hearts to be nourished, and then moves on to the next chapter . . . her next project, a new vision, navigating onward.

Holly was the perfect visionary for creating such a profoundly moving work. A dedicated and impassioned herbalist, she is well known in the herbal community for her generous teaching style, informative books, and her popular online course. For more than eighteen years, Holly has practiced her herbal craft in the small village of Martha's Vineyard, but her teachings are wide spread. A well-known presenter at herb events across the country, Holly's slide

presentation, *Our Healing Heritage: Celebrating World Medicine and Women Healers* has been featured at several conferences and events. Back home in her apothecary garden on Martha's Vineyard, Holly grows, gathers, and makes herbal medicine for her community—and beyond. Like many of the woman healers she interviews, Holly was mentored by several older herbalists and is now passing her knowledge and love of plants to her own children and the children of her community. In fact, Holly is one of the wise women healers she writes about in this book . . . one of those who knows the *value of mentoring* and has attained *confidence in healing*. One day, someone else, perhaps one of those young herbalists she's been mentoring, will be writing Holly's personal herbal story, preserving it so that the long continuum of our herbal traditions and the stories that give them spark and bring them alive will continue on for future generations of plant lovers, healers, and green enthusiasts.

In Joy,

Rosemary Gladstar
Herbalist & Author
Sage Mountain, Vermont

"The most beautiful experience of my life, the most enriching, is the love that the plants have taught me. To love one's neighbor is to care for them, to attend to their suffering and restore their joy of living."

— Bernadette Rébiénot, Gabon, Africa

A Note from the Author

Instead of a dull encyclopedia, within these pages you'll find the stories of lively and passionate women from the far corners of our world who make plant medicine their life's purpose. They've given our generation a great gift, continuing a long and crucial heritage of botanical healing that relieves suffering and inspires ever-greater understanding.

The book's four primary parts (Plant, Body, Spirit, and Land Traditions) zero in on the subtle differences between the various methods of botanical medicine as they are practiced today, though the women listed in each category can (and often do) represent other methods. These categories are rather fluid, as the healers demonstrate their ability and interest to use other methods than simply the category into which I've placed them. For example, Dr. Zoubida Charrouf is profiled in "pharmacology," but she could easily be studied under "conservation," since she is a leader in the preservation of her country's native argan tree. Susun Weed is profiled in "spirit," but she is a strong ambassador for western herbalism, and Doña Enriqueta Contreras is a midwife but is also a self-professed shaman. Healing is, by its very nature, a multi-disciplinary approach to the body, mind, and spirit, and this book, in addition to celebrating individual healing arts, confirms the wisdom of working cross-culturally, honoring a rich array of heritages, and practicing what—in every sense of the word—is integrated medicine.

At the end of the book, you'll find a list of organizations, non-profits, and resources with which some of these women are associated. Thank you for supporting their ongoing work.

