



Medicine Stories Podcast

Episode 34 with Anja Robinson

Womb Wisdom, Addiction, & the Way of the Wounded Healer

December 3, 2018

[0:00:00]

(Excerpt from today's show by Anja Robinson)

... But our bodies are so resilient. And as long as we're providing them with good nutrients and herbs and rest, and we're really giving it kind of what it needs that it has such a capacity to rebuild and restore.

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

[Intro]

[0:00:24]

Amber: Hello friends! Welcome back to Medicine Stories Episode 34.

This is the second part of my interview with Anja Robinson. If you haven't listened to the first part yet, it's the most recent episode. We've gotten a huge response from listeners, some really helpful information about women's health, and we continue that conversation today and we also get more into some of Anja's personal medicine stories.

I want to let you know that this intro is going to be (I think) slightly longer than usual; not much. It's probably going to be about 20-30 minutes. If you really don't want to hear the intro you can skip ahead. Every podcast player has buttons where you can skip ahead by a certain number of seconds, or you can also just put your finger on the little bar and drag the little ball forward. You can tell when the interview starts by listening.

So I also want to say that Anja and I give so many resources, especially books, in this interview, and I have made sure to put every single book in the show notes in the links section, and I always try to do that, but from now on I'm going to be super, super fastidious about doing it because I always hear from people who are like, "What was that thing you mentioned and what was that book?"

What was that film? That podcast?” And I get it. I do that all the time when I’m listening to stuff, then I go back and make sure I got the name right or whatever, but what I would like to suggest — because this is what I finally learned to do, rather than go back to the podcast and trying to skip forward and backward and “Where was it where they talked about that?” — is if I don’t have time right then to stop and write down the resource I’m interested in, I take a screenshot on my phone or my computer of where I’m at in the podcast. Then I can go back later and say, “Oh, at 1 hour and 6 seconds, 6 minutes and 32 seconds is where they talked about that book,” and then I can hear it again. and I can write it down.

I do always try to respond to people when they ask me that, but I just thought I’d give that little tip and always, of course, check the show notes, too, ‘cause the info is going to be there.

[0:02:53]

Amber: So I’ve had a number of people write and ask me how keto is going for me. I talked about doing the ketogenic diet and why it makes sense to me as someone with a longstanding fascination with human evolution and diet, and so I talk about that in the intro to episode 28. So I have been cycling in and out of ketosis because what has come to me, since recording that intro, is that that’s really the best way to do it. It comes from a few different sources: Dave Asprey, Dr. Mercola, and Jon Douillard, who is an Ayurvedic practitioner and host of the [LifeSpa](#) podcast.

I found that podcast when I was searching in the podcasts app for interviews with Dr. Zach Bush, who I’ve talked about many times on this show. It’s Z-A-C-H. I have just made it my goal to listen to every single podcast he’s ever been interviewed on because I think his work, and his message, and his ideas, and his innovations regarding human health and the microbiome, and the soil, and so much more is really vitally, vitally important. So he had an interview on that podcast that I listened to, and I was super impressed with the host, this “John” guy. The tagline of that podcast, which, again, is LifeSpa, is, like, “Ancient Wisdom and Modern Science”; the merging of the two through an ayurvedic lens, and it’s super great.

I was scrolling back through his podcast titles, and one was about ketosis and the benefits and drawbacks of it. So I listened to that, and he really talks about this idea of cycling and how current research (which I think is on rats, if I remember correctly, so I’m not sure. We’re different animals than rats), but what’s really emerging is that it’s not something we need to be in all the time. And of course, I acknowledge that there are certain people who have certain illnesses and ailments, who it really feels best to them to always be in ketosis and to have almost zero sugars or carbs enter their body: people with cancer, and people with auto-immune and inflammatory issues. But, for someone without those issues, it just feels best to me to go in and out, and I don’t really have that down to a science, you know? I probably should. I’m sure other people are much more intentional with how they’re doing it.

But one thing I noticed was when I was in ketosis, my periods were really bad. Really bad. Super emotional, and super crampy, and we talk about those things in this interview with Anja, and we talk about menstrual health for the first few minutes here.

[0:05:56]

Amber: So I'm in a Facebook group of women doing keto, and I went and searched in that group for "periods", and every single post was saying the same thing: much worse symptoms, or bleeding twice a month, or haven't gotten their periods in months since they started keto. So I would like to know more about that.

To me, that's not good. That's an indicator that this is maybe the best diet for people, or that we need to figure out — or these women need to figure out — something. I don't know. Menstrual health is really a reflection of overall health. So seeing how much being in ketosis is messing with so many women's periods made me curious. It really made me think this isn't something I want to do all the time.

So I'm still working with it and just trying to follow my body's signals and not get caught up in any kind of dogma. I'm still eating **way** less carbs than I used to and focusing more on high-quality fats than I used to, and I feel good, and just loosening my ideas of how things "should" be, especially when it comes to diet, feels really important to me. We talked about food confusion a number of times on this show.

I wanted to read a passage from a book I'm reading regarding that. First, I'm going to tell you how I found this book, though, because it was in that podcast in LifeSpa about ketosis. He gave this — he talked about, apparently, the Inuits, who evolved pretty much eating a pure ketogenic diet. They're eating almost all animal fats and proteins with no carbohydrates, living so far in the north, evolved a gene to keep them out of ketosis. And, you know, he talked about this as a pretty solid indicator that it's not good for a human body to be in ketosis all the time. He said he got that information from this book, and so I ordered this book, and have been reading it. And first I have to say that that information is actually not in this book, so I ended up looking it up online and finding the study, and I didn't really dive too deeply into it; not enough to make a call and say if it's... I don't know. It's just... I don't want to make any calls. I'm not a dietician, I'm not a nutrition expert in any way, but I think that's a really interesting piece of information and something that convinces me at least that it's not something that I need to be doing all the time.

So this book is called *The Story of the Human Body: Evolution, Health, and Disease* by Daniel E. Lieberman, and, again, you can find it in the show notes. If you are someone like me, who just loves learning about health and being a human from an evolutionary perspective, this is an AMAZING book. He's not trying to push any dietary agenda. He's not, like, you know, a "paleo guy" or anything like that, writing his diet book, based on his dogmatic beliefs. He's an evolutionary biologist. It's really well-written, really applicable to daily life. It doesn't just look at diet at all, but it definitely, definitely looks at diet, and I just love it! If you listened to [episode 18 with Suuzi Hazen](#), and were into the things we talked about, you would probably really like this book.

[0:09:35]

Amber: So I just wanted to read this one paragraph from it because I think it just echoes back to so much of what we've talked about in this show, and there were a lot of things that I just found helpful and interesting in this paragraph.

So if you do get this book, it's on page 166, and it starts out:

Another application of evolutionary medicine is to recognize that many symptoms are actually adaptations, thus helping doctors and patients rethink the way we treat some illnesses and injuries. How often do you take an over-the-counter medication at the first sign of fever, nausea, diarrhea, or just aches and pains? These discomforts are widely regarded as “symptoms to alleviate”, but evolutionary perspectives indicate they can be adaptations to heed and put into service.

- *Fevers help your body fight infections.*
- *Joint and muscle pains can be signals to cause you to cease doing something harmful, like running incorrectly.*
- *And nausea and diarrhea assist you in purging harmful bugs and toxins.*

Moreover, as chapter 1 emphasized, adaption is a tricky concept. The human body’s adaptations evolved long ago, solely because they had increased how many surviving offspring our ancestors had. Consequently, we sometimes get sick because natural selection generally favors fertility over health. Meaning, we didn’t necessarily evolve to be healthy.

Amber: Isn’t that interesting? We evolved to have as many kids as possible, not to be in perfect health.

For example, because paleolithic hunter-gatherers faced periodic shortages of food, and they had to be very physically active, they were selected to crave energy-rich foods and rest whenever possible, helping them to store fat and devote more energy to reproduction. An evolutionary perspective predicts that most diets and fitness programs will fail (as they do) because we still don’t know how to counter once-adaptive primal instincts to “eat donuts and take the elevator.”

Further, because the body is a complex jumble of adaptations, all of which have costs and benefits, and some of which conflict with one another, there is no such thing as a perfect, optimal diet, or fitness program. Our bodies are full of compromises.

[0:11:59]

Amber: So, man. Those last couple sentences, I really loved seeing that perspective because I have tended, for years now, to think that there IS a perfect or optimal diet or fitness program for me, not for everyone, but for me, and it’s just a matter of me figuring out what it is, and what foods are totally super awesome and good for me, and only do good things, and just this idea that “the body is a complex jumble of adaptations, all of which have costs and benefits” is so helpful.

And I think that applies to food, too. Like, almost... maybe not almost any food. I don’t know what percentage of foods, but many foods that we’re going to eat are gonna have costs and benefits. So we can kinda just do our best and not get caught up obsessing over it.

[0:12:50]

Amber: I also really loved that he talked about symptom suppression. This is something I’ve talked about before in [Episode 30 with Cilla Whatcott](#), and I have video on my blog at [MythicMedicine.love](#) talking about [An Herbalist’s Perspective on Cold & Flu](#), and just how important it is to not suppress symptoms, especially some that are helping the body to deal with

an infection and to move it out and to move the energy, such as fever and diarrhea and I just thought it was really neat to see that reflected in this book that has NOTHING to do with herbalism, homeopathy, or natural health in any way. But, of course, so much of natural health really is predicated on an understanding of evolutionary biology and who we are as humans and what we are adapted for and what is most likely to help us be in a state of health wholeness and balance.

Just another sentence from this book that I thought was relevant to what Anja and I talk about today because we talk about the menstrual cycle and PMS symptoms and one thing that he says in this book is, “When women cycle they repeatedly experience high doses of estrogen.”

We talked about estrogen dominance, of course, in the most recent episode with Anja, the one that already came out. Reading this made me realize, it kind of validated, like, yeah, periods are hard. The menstrual cycle is a difficult thing because we are dealing with these huge surges of hormones. It’s not all in your head, or it’s not necessarily can be something totally fixed with the “perfect, optimal diet” or lifestyle. We’re really dealing with some serious, very tangible surges of hormones.

So, again, you might like episode 18 with Suuzi Hazen. Also in that episode, Suuzi and I talk a lot about liver, like, consuming liver, and about iron, and getting enough iron, and what iron means for women. And Anja and I talk about those things in this episode, too.

[0:15:16]

Amber: Another episode in which menstruation was a focus was [Episode 20 with Kami McBride](#). Kami was my first ever, and most important, always, herb teacher, and she’s just an amazing powerhouse of herbal knowledge, and knowledge about women’s bodies. We talk about really different things related to menstruation than Anja talk about today. If you like what you hear today, you’ll really like that.

And hey, speaking of Kami, she emailed me to tell me she’s going to reopen her [Handcrafted Healing Herbal Oils](#) online course this week only because she’s hearing from so many people who want to make their own Christmas gifts.

So if you’re interested in doing that, Kami is the person who taught me how to make herb-infused oils. She’s amazing. This course is beautiful. It has so much good information and has such a strong community around it. Generally, when she releases it in teh summertime, it kind of drips out over a period of a few weeks, but for this special Christmas time launch, she’s just releasing it all at one time. So you can get all the information right now, this week, and get going with your own herbal body oiling practice.

So the link to that will be in the show notes of this episode. I’ll have it right at the very top, so it’s really easy for you to find if you’re interested in that.

Anja and I have a giveaway going on to celebrate these two episodes coming out. It is on Patreon for supporters of this podcast at the \$2 level. That is at patreon.com/MedicineStories, and the giveaway is that you’ll win a \$100 gift certificate to my online shop, which is [mythic medicinals](#), and also a \$100 gift certificate to Anja’s, which is [Mana Medicinals](#). So \$200 worth of herbal

medicine, and it's been really fun seeing the comments come in on that post. There's a lot of other really great things available there, on Patreon for you.

And just thank you so much for everyone who has supported this show. It's been a year. It was the year anniversary last week, and I'm feeling pretty good that I got 33 episodes out in a year. That's more than I would've thought if I didn't look at that number. It means that I've done more than two a month for 52 weeks. Yeah, it's still not really easy to make this happen. Having a two-year-old. You know? And it's going to be years until the demands on my time, as far as mothering is concerned, start to abate and lessen a little bit. It's always... I always feel like I'm clawing my way to my own space so I can make this podcast happen, but really appreciate the support of the patrons, and of my husband, and of the two wonderful women who come and watch Nixie for some hours during the week so I can do this. It's been really amazing, and I'm really grateful.

[0:18:41]

Amber: On a totally separate note: I love Christmas time. I'm so happy it's here. We're getting our tree tomorrow. I can't wait. I just really feel — what I'm really feeling this year about Christmas: I'm thinking about my Grandma Iney and how much she LOVED Christmas. It was, like, not only in December did this woman love Christmas, you know (*Amber laughs*)?

I remember her singing "Santa Claus is Coming to Town" to me to get me to take a nap in the summertime. She sang that song year-round, and she had so many Christmas sweaters. They went all-out decorating their house. All out. She made it super magical for me and my sister and our cousins, and I just... this year, for the first time, kind of feel like this sacred responsibility, this sacred reciprocity towards her to carry the Christmas spirit forward for my children. Luckily, that's easy for me to do, because I really love Christmas, too, and we love getting a tree and decorating, as well. My husband, Owen, and I take Christmas music very seriously, very carefully curated vinyl collection of Christmas album, and it's just really fun. I'm just so grateful.

I remember reading this quote when I was, like, in middle school that (*Amber laughs*) seems so cheesy, but it was "Christmas is the day that holds time together," and I kind of always thought that that was true. It's like this, especially in these really disconnected modern times, where we don't have rituals. We don't have shared collective experiences anymore, especially right now when everything is so fragmented politically. There's pain everywhere, and I know that Christmas causes pain for a lot of people, too.

But it's just like this one bright light that we carry forward from our ancestors. The roots of Christmas go so deep. They go so, so deep, and I just... I don't know. I'm really happy at this time of year. So I hope you're happy and can feel some warmth and some joy during this Solstice/Christmas season.

It's really, like, an excuse for magic, I think: the Christmas season, and, of course, I want to acknowledge that not everyone's ancestors came from the northern climates out of which Christmas and Solstice celebrations evolved, but even people who don't have the deep ancestry of Christmas celebrators, I think most of us, most of us, especially in America, have at least the last few generations of people who celebrated Christmas.

And also, real quick, with the release of Kami's handcrafted herbal oils class:

I didn't give the dates, and so people in the future might listen to this and be like, "When is it?!" It's the first week of December here in 2018. So the 3rd-7th, I believe, is when the cart is open to purchase that.

[0:22:11]

Amber: So let me tell you very quickly what Anja and I talk about today:

- Why to start herbally & nutritionally preparing for your period at ovulation. So smart. I'm going to start doing that.
- Understanding nutritional needs throughout the menstrual cycle
- Tracking your period
- Coffee & chocolate for the cycling woman- good or bad? I say as I'm sitting here with some chocolate next to me.
- Iron, blood, oxygen, and women
- How Anja overcame six years of alcohol and drug abuse and built a healthy, healing life
- We both share our stories of growing up with an alcoholic parent, and of our mothers' deaths, and what it feels like when you get that phone call we all dread.
- A super important but always overlooked perspective on nutrient deficiency in addicts and the role of nutrition in recovery
- It's never too late to change your path.
- We talk about when Anja found out about her German great-grandmother being the town mystic and Tarot reader, and how this ancestor's sensitivity has echoed down through the motherline.
- Food, drink, and herbs for winter nourishment
- Carminatives: a simple, delicious, and healing class of herbal medicine that you already have in your kitchen

Amber: I want to say, too, if you are someone who's life has been touched by addiction (which I think might be all of us), I recently heard a really great podcast episode all about this. It's on Russell Brand's podcast, [Under the Skin](#), and it's his interview with Dr. Gabor Mate. They've both written really incredible books on addiction; Russell, through the perspective of someone who's been there, himself, and Gabor, as a doctor who treated severe addicts for a really long time. Gabor Mate is another person who you can just search his name in whatever podcast player you use and listen to any episode, any podcast interview he's ever been on, and it's going to be amazing. I saw him speak at the Psychedelic Science Conference in 2013, and I just... he's just one of my heroes. Russell as well, you know, I just think they're both geniuses and they're both saints, and they're just lovely, lovely people.

One final thing is that we just released our second batch of extra potent elderberry elixir of the season. You can find that at [mythicmedicine.love/shop](#), and Friday, December 14th is the last day to place an order to guarantee Christmas delivery. Oh, and we have gift cards this year, too, for the first time ever, if you want to gift the gift of herbal medicine.

Okay, thanks so much for listening and let's dive into this interview with Anja Robinson.

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

[Interview Begins]

[0:25:23]

Amber: Okay. Hi Anja! Welcome back to Medicine Stories.

Anja: Hi Amber.

Amber: We got such a good response from your (*Amber laughs*) from your podcast, as you know.

Anja: Yeah, I'm so excited that so many women found the information really helpful and just excited that there was so much response to it. It feels really good.

Amber: Yeah! I love doing giveaways on Patreon because, in order to have people enter, I have people comment, talking about what part of the episodes spoke to them the most. And it's just so — I mean, I put out these podcasts and every now and then I hear something good, or I'll hear a real general thing about the podcast being helpful for people, but to get a flood of these really specific comments about what exactly was said that changed someone's life is so heartening! So yeah, women really need this information, and I'm so grateful to you for sharing what you know.

And I thought we would begin today by sort of continuing the really science-y, medical, clinical talk about women's health, and getting a little more into periods, and just straight up: gonna make this really personal (*Amber laughs*) because I'm PMS-ing this week, and I'm like, "Wow, I really go through some shit when I'm PMSing," and it's kinda easy to downplay or ignore it, especially once it passes, you know? Since I'm in it so deeply right now, I thought that I would just ask you about some of my symptoms and kinda see what your — 'cause I know they're just universal — what your knowledge base is on them or if you have any recommendations.

Does that sound okay?

Anja: Yeah, definitely.

Amber: Alright. So, I cramp for, like, 7 to 10 days before I actually start bleeding. And it's not bad. It's not the kind of cramps that you get when you actually do start bleeding for the first day or something (for me). But it's just like this feeling in my uterus that I feel really strongly, and in my lower back, too, and sometimes bad enough that I need a heating pad.

Anja: And you said it's the 7 to 10 days...

Amber: — 7 to 10 days! I can always — something just shifts in my body — and it's almost always exactly 10 days before I start bleeding that I just know, "Okay, I just moved into my premenstrual time."

Anja: Mhmm. Well, I think one thing that can be really helpful, and that a lot of people kind of overlook, is starting menstrual support around the time of ovulation.

So basically, once you're ovulating, which generally, very generally, speaking is around midway through your cycle, and then we're moving into the luteal phase, which is typically somewhere around 10-14 days. And it can be really helpful, starting at ovulation, to really amp up some of your nutrition, and there's a few different supplements that can be helpful, specifically for cramping and PMS symptoms.

One of the big ones is magnesium, and there's been so many studies that have shown magnesium as obviously helpful for all sorts of menstrual cramping, and magnesium is one of those minerals that — as we were talking about before — it's just really not in our soils the way that it used to be. And in order to get enough magnesium into some of our foods, we would have to just eat outrageous amounts of them. That's not really practical.

So magnesium is definitely something I recommend supplementing. It's super important to ramp that up around the time of ovulation. So I recommend women to do somewhere between 300-900 mg a day, starting midway through your cycle, and then going all the way through (or just all month if you really want). I think, again, magnesium, if we're stressed out at all, we blow through our magnesium reserves. It's so important for so many different facets of our health.

It's also really involved in the release and the binding of serotonin in the brain. So magnesium can be really helpful for any sort of depression or broody symptoms that can come along with PMS, as well. And also, magnesium is depleted during that luteal phase. So as our hormones are kind of shifting in that last phase of the cycle, we're going through even more magnesium. So that's why that supplementation can be really helpful.

As far as foods go, we find magnesium in our dark, leafy greens; nuts and seeds are high in magnesium, kelp, molasses, bananas — but I think i read something in order to get our daily dose in leafy greens, we would need, like, 20 cups of leafy greens. So if you can do that, then more power to you, and that's awesome, but it is one of the things that I recommend supplementing. I generally like the form "citrate" is pretty easily absorbed, and there's also a form called "magnesium malate" that is pretty easily absorbed and works well for those symptoms, too.

Amber: Are those both, like, something that you take internally, through the mouth?

Anja: Yeah, you can get pill form and also there's a product, or similar products, kind of like the magnesium "Calm" that's magnesium citrate, and I really like that just 'cause you can add that to your water.

It can really help in the evening for people to wind down. It's really calming. It tastes good, and it's just a nice way, if you don't, if you're opposed to taking sort of pills at all, it's a nice way to get the magnesium in there and get some good electrolytes. It can also help move your bowels, too. So if constipation is something that you deal with during that time, too, the magnesium is kind of a win-win there, also.

Amber: Yeah, I really love taking Calm when I was pregnant. It's funny that I kind of fell out of it. That's such a good idea, and I also have a transdermal oil that I use.

Anja: Oh yeah! And then, of course, Epsom salt baths are a great way to get magnesium baths, as well. You don't have to just be taking it internally. So taking Epsom salt baths or transdermal oils can be really nice. You can mix that in with an herbal body and that would probably be lovely.

[0:32:28]

Amber: Yeah. I just want to put this out there, too, that if anyone has been thinking about doing a float tank, another great benefit of floating is that you are just floating in magnesium because theirs is so supersaturated with Epsom salts in there. But it's like this HUGE dose of magnesium to the body through the skin when you do a float tank, and I've heard people conjecture that that's half the reason why people feel so good when they step out of those tanks. It's because they've been so infused with magnesium.

Anja: That's cool! I actually didn't know that. That makes me really want to do one now.

Amber: Oh, you should. And I loved learning that, too, about the effects of magnesium on mood because, you know, of course, that's another part of my PMS symptoms (*Amber laughs*). I just get a lot more broody and moody and like, "Everything sucks!"

Anja: Yeah, it can be really helpful also for bloating and breast swelling, and yeah, just those premenstrual mood fluctuations.

[0:33:33]

Anja: And then the other supplement that I pretty highly recommend for menses is vitamin B-6, and even if you're doing a full spectrum B vitamin, you're probably not getting as much B-6 as you would want for it to be therapeutic in this way.

And again, it works a lot with neurotransmitters in the brain, including serotonin and dopamine. So it helps us to create new neurotransmitters. It also just can help lower a lot of those symptoms like the cramping and stuff. Again, it's best starting to take at ovulation if you just want to supplement for part of the month.

A lot of the foods that include high amounts of B-6 are animal foods, like, the highest amount you can get is in chicken and eggs and fish. Also, nutritional yeast is pretty high in B-6, and then things like sunflower seeds and walnuts have some, but not as much. Animal foods really do have the highest amount, but therapeutically if you were wanting to work with PMS symptoms, the therapeutic dose is around 300-600 mg a day. So that's a lot more than you would if you were to look at, for example, the back of a B, full B-spectrum, B vitamin. You'd probably only see, like, 50-150 mg of B-6. Supplementing that can also be really helpful.

[0:35:17]

Amber: So I just want to say, for anyone who is listening and is like, "I don't know when I'm ovulating," but of course, there are so many resources out there to help you track and to know when you're ovulating, but one of the most clear indications is that cervical mucus. I always know the day I'm ovulating, because I suddenly have that cervical mucus on my toilet paper and on my underwear, and then I'll check my period tracker app — which I also think every woman should

have because, for me, at least, it's super accurate — and it's always like, yep. That day is the day that I'm ovulating.

Anja: Yeah, there are so many ways that you can tell. I mean, the cervical mucus is great, and I really encourage women to get familiar with the way that it shifts throughout the cycle.

I think that's another thing that as young women we're not really told about, and I remember being a younger woman and not really knowing if I was healthy or not. Like, being embarrassed that I had something on my underwear and not knowing what that was, and it wasn't until I got a lot older and was like, "Oh wow. That's healthy cervical fluid. Okay." (*Anja laughs*) So that's something, too, that's really great to get to know your own body.

You can also do that through taking your basal body temperature. So first thing in the morning, when you wake up, before you even get out of bed, or go to the bathroom, or do anything, you can take your temperature and track that throughout the month. There's a lot of books and resources that go really in-depth into that, but as we approach ovulation, our temperature will actually spike. We'll get a little bit of a spike in our temperature, and our temperature will then stay high, generally, from ovulation then towards when we have our menses. So that's another great way that you can check when you're ovulating.

I really recommend the book [Taking Charge of Your Fertility](#) by Toni Weschler. It's a really, really great resource and has all sorts of information about tracking your cycle and preventing pregnancy or wanting to get pregnant. Really, how to do tracking in a really responsible way so you can actually use it as a form of birth control if you choose.

[0:37:43]

Amber: I also want to touch on - you mentioned last time we talked the book [Women's Bodies, Women's Wisdom](#) by Dr. Christianne Northrup, and yeah, I just want to plug that book, too, 'cause I was thinking about it, and that book has been so, so foundational in my life. I first read it in my early, early twenties, maybe like, 20, and it literally changed everything. Everything for me. I was really reflecting on this after our conversation. I, like, take it so much for granted how much that book changed my life, and I don't think I've ever talked about it publicly. It's just... I just take it so for granted, and I got it off my shelf again, and I was looking at it, and was like, "Yup. This is just as good as it was back then," and I think every woman should have it in their home.

Anja: Definitely. And I just have to say, don't be intimidated by how big it is. You can just read sections of it, but I definitely, my copy is basically falling apart.

(*Amber laughs*)

I reference that book all the time, and it has so much crucial information for women to just be empowered and really understand all the processes that are happening in their body, and how to eat to support our cycle, and how to deal with all sorts of issues that come up as women. So, I definitely, really recommend that book, as well.

Amber: Yeah, it is super thick, but a lot of that thickness, too, is personal stories of clients she's had in her practice. I find those really useful and helpful. Yeah. Love that book.

[0:39:16]

Amber: I wonder what you think about the use of, and effects of, coffee and chocolate and the menstrual cycle.

Anja: Well, you know, I think it's kind of dependent person-to-person on how you tolerate it.

One thing that can really come up in the cycle for women is basically having your breasts feel super sore, or having cyclical cysts. So basically, painful cysts that kind of ebb and flow as your cycle moves through, and so, if you are a woman who's dealt with cysts before, or you're currently dealing with cysts, there's a compound that's in coffee and chocolate (caffeine, basically), that's called "methyl xanthenes." There has been a lot of clinical studies that have shown that that actually has an effect on those cyclical cysts and, kind of, the breast swelling and tenderness. So if that's an aspect that you deal with in your cycle, I definitely recommend taking it out for a couple of months, and seeing if you notice a difference.

I think if you eat a little chocolate every now and again - probably not a big deal. But if you're drinking coffee daily, and you're drinking cacao daily, or you're getting a lot of caffeine, and a lot of coffee or chocolate, and you are having really painful breasts during your cycle, it's definitely an aspect to look at.

Amber: Okay. Thank you.

[0:40:54]

Amber: And you have a really great blog post on your site about iron and women's health. How does iron play into the menstrual cycle, and do you think most women should be supplementing with it?

Anja: Iron is actually one of the most common nutrient deficiencies in the United States. It's something crazy, like, I think 30 to almost 60% of healthy women are deficient in iron. And so, that's a huge amount, and that can be from a host of different things, but obviously, when we menstruate, when we lose blood, we lose iron. So making sure that we're getting enough iron in our diets is really important.

An aspect of this that needs to be taken into consideration is what type of iron you're getting.

So first of all, iron is really necessary for so much in the body. It's necessary for our growth and development, for our cellular function; it helps us synthesize all of our hormones, and it's really important for oxygenation of the brain and all of our cognitive functions. It's hugely important in so many processes, way more than just has to do with our cycles. So it's super important that we have enough.

There's two main forms of dietary iron: so there's heme iron and non-heme iron. Heme iron comes from animal products: meat, and seafood, and poultry, and then non-heme iron is plant sources. So, the thing is, we don't convert non-heme iron into the same iron that heme iron is, and so, it's really hard for people who don't eat animal products to get enough of the type of iron that they need.

So I definitely recommend, if you are a vegetarian or a vegan, and you're not eating animal products, that you definitely need to look into supplementing iron. It just depends also on your cycle. Like, if you are someone who has a heavy flow, then you're probably losing a lot more iron than someone who doesn't have a heavy flow, and also, after giving birth or a miscarriage or even someone who has uterine fibroids, those are ways that we can also lose a lot of iron.

You know, you might, some of the symptoms of iron deficiency that you might notice are tiredness, lack of energy; poor memory and concentration, just having a hard time remembering stuff; getting sick often or not having a great ability to fight off infection; or having a hard time controlling your body temperature, getting cold all the time. So those are some of the main symptoms of anemia iron deficiency, and honestly, I see a lot of women who do experience those symptoms, so I think it's really important.

And I do think that we can get it from foods like I said. All of our animal products, eggs, and meats, all of our organ meats are really high in iron. This is something that if you do eat meat, I really recommend getting organ meats into the diet. Like, liver is one of the best sources of iron that we can have, and it's such an amazing whole food.

And then, also, a lot of our herbs have a lot of iron. Nettles have a lot of iron, and yellow dock has a lot of iron, and all of our dark, leafy greens have iron. Spirulina is a really great place to get that. Molasses has iron. So, you know, we can get a lot from herbs and foods, but I definitely recommend some sort of focus on making sure you're getting a lot of iron-rich foods around your cycle, or doing some sort of supplementation.

Anja: You absorb iron better when you eat it with foods that contain vitamin C. So citrus, and strawberries, and peppers, tomatoes, stuff like that will help you to absorb your iron better.

[0:45:50]

Amber: Thank you. I also want to talk about another book right now. This is one of my very favorite books of all time, which is saying a lot, and it's called [Sex, Time, and Power: How Women's Sexuality Shaped Human Evolution](#). The author is Leonard Shlain, and he talks in the beginning quite a bit about iron in an evolutionary perspective.

I remember one thing he writes about is the six ways that women lose iron, and I don't remember all of them, but, of course, there's menstruation, and childbirth, and lactation is one, too. But he's really making the point that, like, women lose iron, and men basically have zero pathways of losing iron. So it's kind of built into our anatomy over millions of years of evolution and is something that we need to be really aware of - the lack of.

Anja: Yeah, and another thing that I've — I love him, by the way. He's such an awesome author...

Amber: — Yes! I met him, Anja. Right after that book came out I met him in Sacramento at a book signing, and he died unexpectedly a year or two later.

Anja: Have you read his book, I think it's called *The Alphabet and the Goddess*?

Amber: [The Alphabet versus the Goddess](#). Yes.

Anja: *The Alphabet versus the Goddess*. Yeah, that book really opened my eyes to a lot when I was younger. He's a pretty amazing author.

Amber: He was a genius! It's so sad that he passed.

[0:47:14]

Anja: Yeah, but one other thing that I wanted to say about iron supplementation is that a lot of things can interfere with the way we absorb iron in the body; so calcium, tannins in foods, oxalates, like all sorts of stuff.

So it's really best to supplement if not taken with food. So if you are gonna take an iron supplement, you want to take it first thing in the morning before you eat your food, so you make sure you absorb as much iron as you actually need.

My supplementation, I make an iron syrup, and that's the way that I get a lot of my iron. And it's just full of a bunch of herbs and berries, and has vitamin C, and has spirulina, and molasses, and is just a really mineral-rich iron syrup. So that is a really nice way, if you make medicines, or have access to purchase herbal medicine, if you aren't really into supplementation, making an iron syrup, or taking an iron syrup, can be a really great way to get that iron in, too, and they're delicious.

Amber: Oh wow. Yeah, I remember looking at that product on your website recently and being like, "This looks AMAZING." So anyone who entered, or will enter our giveaway, that can be something, if you win, that you could get from Anja's shop.

[0:48:45]

Amber: So yeah, okay. You're just... you're so amazing. It's amazing how your mind works, and this business that you've built, and this consulting practice, and just a really impressive person. (*Amber laughs*) But you have this history of drug abuse, and I would love to hear, I just, I love hearing people's stories of growth, and transformation, and change, especially when it comes to addictive behaviors because so many people don't get out of that.

So would you mind sharing what that looked like for you, and how you changed?

Anja: Yeah, well, you know, sometimes when I think back about it, it's really a trip because it's really, at this point, such a different life. Like, it doesn't even feel like my life sometimes.

For me, I grew up — my mother was an alcoholic. So the majority of my childhood and into my early teenage years, my mom had a pretty severe drinking problem. So that was just really challenging, being a young person and in my early teens, dealing with that. And then the ramifications of having that in my family, it really started splitting my family, and I really wanted to fix everything and just make everything okay at that point.

I sort of reached a point where I couldn't really handle it anymore. It was just really, way too intense, and I'm also a pretty sensitive person and pretty empathic, and just seeing my family being split apart by this was really, really hard.

So I actually moved out on my own when I was 15. I was working two jobs and in high school and doing that. I think that, you know, I wasn't drinking a lot at that point because I was kind of jaded around that, but I just kind of turned to drugs and alcohol as a way to cope with and deal with the depression that I had, and just the sadness that I was experiencing from watching my mom spiral out, and just the area that I grew up in, that I had access to any sort of drugs that I wanted to get my hands on, and ended up in a bad crew of people, and just really spiraled out of control.

Probably from the time I was, like, 16 until maybe 21 or 22, I had a pretty serious issue with alcohol and with drugs, and kind of just — I was still working and had a home, and I wasn't on the street or anything — but I was definitely abusing alcohol and drugs on a daily basis, and just getting myself into really bad situations and it just really wasn't shifting. I didn't really have any desire. I didn't really know who I was or what I wanted to be. I was just in a constant state of being numb to the world, and I think I was just so afraid to actually face how I felt. So it was a lot easier for me to continue to numb everything out.

[0:52:28]

Anja: Actually, the thing that really pulled me out of it, interestingly enough, was my mom passing away.

So, she passed away when I was 23, and she died from liver cirrhosis, so basically, the drinking totally destroyed her liver. At that point, I just had sort of a huge awakening and kind of epiphany on how precious life is and how short life is, and we didn't know that my mom had cirrhosis. She was not telling us. Obviously, the doctors had told her, and we knew that, obviously, she had been drinking for a long time, and she wasn't in very good health, and it kind of happened out of the blue, and I was living in Oregon, and my mom was in Washington, and I got a phone call at four in the morning, saying that I needed to fly home, and I might not get to say goodbye to my mom.

By the time I got up there, she was, you know, not conscious again. I never really got to talk with her before she passed, but that whole experience, kind of looking back on it and reflecting, in a lot of ways was such a huge initiation in my life, and it really... it got me.

I quit my job. I moved down to Southern Oregon. I started farming, and I enrolled in herb school, and I just had to get out of being in the service industry and working in restaurants, and being around alcohol all the time, and just the friend groups that I had been surrounding myself with. All of it. I just had to do something else, and I really, as sad as that whole situation was, and as challenging as it really was, now I'm so grateful for that, and as much as I really wish that my mom was with me, I also really feel like I have her to thank for me being on this path, because I think I would've spent a lot more time in that space of continuing to kind of just not go anywhere and just kind of drink my time away. That was just such a huge wake-up call, and it was really the catalyst that shifted so much in my life.

At this point when I look back at that, I really am thankful that that happened. And, you know, I've always been a plant person, and I do feel like the plants would've called me in a different way and a different time had that not happened, but I think just the drastic nature of how my life shifted so completely after she passed away was pretty profound.

Amber: Wow, yeah, as a child of an alcoholic father I understand a lot of what you were saying, and I'm so sorry that you went through that. It seems like such a really hard time, too, in adolescence to really be reckoning with a parent's addiction. Yeah.

I was 12 when my mom first told me that my dad was an alcoholic, but I had no idea 'cause he was just kind of a quiet, inwardly drawn person, and it wasn't until, like, my college years that I started having really big feeling around it, and like, "Why are you doing this?" and "Why aren't we enough?"

Did you feel like that? Like, why is that more important than your family?

Anja: Yeah, and you know, it was just such, just such a heartbreaking situation, really, because my dad stuck around for a long time. My parents didn't divorce until I was almost 19. So my dad really stuck through for a good decade, and really tried to help. She was in and out of rehab, and I come from a family that we had privilege. Like, she had the ability to go in-patient rehab centers and all of... she had so many opportunities and so many people that loved her and gave her so many chances, and she was really, really just — my dad was her whole world, and as much as that was the case, she couldn't stop drinking. And so, once they finally divorced, it was just... she... as much as I think her liver gave out, I really think she died from a broken heart. She was so just totally devastated after her and my dad split. I always would try and talk to her and be like, "Well, you have me and Hunter (who's my younger brother), and you have family, and this could be a chance to start over," and yeah, just, we weren't enough. Her children weren't enough to fight and try and live, and that was a really, really hard thing to deal with at that point in my life, and she didn't pass for, like, another four or five years.

So I think those times were particularly really challenging and dark for me - just having that feeling of like, "This is my mother, and like, I am her child, and we are not enough of a reason for her to care about her life." So it was really hard; hard being at that age to comprehend that.

Amber: Yeah...

[0:58:08]

Anja: But knowing more now, and just being older, and having experienced life, I mean, there's so many nutrient deficiencies. You're basically incredibly malnourished when you're an alcoholic, and in that case, you're not creating any sort of neurotransmitters or things. You know, she was dealing with severe depression as well and malnutrition. And you know, there's a lot of things that make it really challenging for a person in that particular space to be able to recover, and that's something that I find really ironic and odd about just kind of detox programs or in-patient programs because they're still feeding people crap.

They're feeding them totally non-nutritious food, and they're not talking about nutrition. Really if you want someone that's in addiction to come out of that, you really, really need to make sure that they have the building blocks, like, the foundational materials to have a healthy brain chemistry, and it's just something that's not really talked about in the realm of addiction that much.

Amber: Oh that is such a good point. I think all the time, too, with my dad, who amazingly is still living. I cannot believe this man is still alive: 68, 30+ years into this addiction. He's been

hospitalized four times in the last four years. He has severe withdrawals when he tries to quit; has seizures; has fallen; there's blood all over his room. It's crazy!

But I think about, like, that he is so addicted to sugar, too. It's like a sugar addiction as well.

Anja: Oh my gosh. Yeah (Anja laughs). It's a massive sugar addiction, so there's a lot of dysregulation of blood sugar.

Amber: Yeah, insulin intolerance, and just our — whatever that phrase — yeah, and that's just so bad for you on its own. We know what type two diabetes does to people, and it's basically like you're in a constant pre-diabetic condition.

Anja: Yeah, and it's just something that's so interesting to me, as I've delved more into my path of health and also just really understanding brain chemistry and just the deeper ways that the body works. I'm still so blown away that we don't have more resources out there, or there's not more education around getting people's nutrient levels up before you start going through withdrawal.

There's actually a few — I've had some friends that have struggled with addiction — and I found a couple of rehab centers, only a couple, even after hours and hours of research, that you go in and they initially, like, take a blood panel and look at all your nutrient levels and give you vitamin injections for a week before they start you on your withdrawal process, so you can actually handle, your body can handle going through the withdrawal, and then you can start to be, you know, rebuilding the brain chemistry, then actually have the energy and the capacity to start to deal with the addiction.

Amber: Wow. Yeah, it seems so basic, right? And no wonder addiction is so hard to overcome when you don't have the correct nutrients to rebuild.

Anja: Unfortunately with a lot of addiction, there's a lot of lack of access. That's a huge — not always, there's definitely people who have access that are addicted but also there's also a lot of people that don't, and so, the foods or the nutrients that they have access to are not going to support them in their process towards not being addicted.

[1:02:15]

Anja: It's just... the whole thing is just so hard, but I definitely feel you and resonate with everything that you were saying about your dad, and that was very similar to my experience with my mom; just constantly in and out of the hospital, and broken bones, and DUIs and, you know, just on and on and on.

It's a really hard thing for people to live with, and to be a family member of someone who is an addict, but I also think that you know, I kind of think about it as sort of the archetype of Chiron, looking at the wounded healer, and really thinking about how our trials and tribulations, and our stories and our experiences really shape us to be the people that we are.

I think, as — you know, for both of us — as women who work with plant medicine and work with healing in different physical and energetic capacities, having gone through these experiences makes you so much more understanding and empathetic to a lot of things that people are experiencing in their life. At least for myself, I feel like I'm able to meet people where they're at, or

kind of, you know, I've walked in the dark side a lot. So I have a lot more understanding and patience and empathy with that with clients than maybe I would if I had not been through so many of those experiences myself.

Amber: Yeah. Yeah, totally. Oh, it's making me sad to think about right now. It's just, you know, how deeply an addiction changes a person. Especially when you're super far into it, and maybe especially with alcohol, I'm not sure, but alcohol is just so insidious, you know? And, oh man.

I just think about how my dad's just a completely different person than who he used to be. He was so fun and kind and compassionate and moral and considerate, and he really raised us to be that way, too, and empathetic, and now he's just, he's none of those things. Even when he's in the hospital, especially when he's going through withdrawals, he's a freakin' asshole to all the nurses! My sister and I were like, "Oh my God, Dad! You can't treat people like that! What? You specifically raised us to not treat people like that, and who even are you?"

His capacity for empathy is completely not present anymore. He's not a parent in any way, and even though he's still there, and he can still talk to us, "How are the kids?", and have some memories of things, it's just like you replaced one person with another person.

Anja: Yeah, I definitely experienced that. I think at a certain point your brain just gets pickled. Especially with alcohol, particularly. I mean, it really does shift so much brain chemistry that yeah, they're not the same person.

And that's really hard, too, you know? It's not only, even when someone's living, like your dad, you're still grieving the loss of a parent even though they're still physically here which is a strange, strange place to be in.

[1:05:47]

Amber: Yeah. Today is the three year anniversary of the day that I found out that my mom died.

So yesterday was the three year anniversary of her car accident, and my sister and I always talk about how we lost both of our parents, you know? And one really crazy thing, too, is the night that she died, my dad went into the hospital. They'd been divorced for a decade, or maybe more at that point. So we both just woke up and were like, "What? What? What? Mom's dead, and Dad's in the hospital, so it's even weeks before we can tell him that she died?" And he's just always been like, "Oh, so sad about your mom..." but no real presence or empathy with it.

And yeah, we just feel like, "Oh yeah, we're orphans." Like, he's still alive, but he's not.

Anja: Yeah. Ugh. It's so tragic losing your mom in an accident like that so suddenly. And I just don't think dealing with death is ever really easy, but I definitely, you know, even though my mom wasn't in the best of health 'cause she was drinking a lot, I definitely, you know, it's so shocking to get a phone call and to have someone just basically be gone. It's such a trip for the mind to wrap itself around; a concept like that.

Amber: Yeah, it is. My mom's husband left me a voicemail the night before, telling me what happened. And I remember getting up that morning and calling him back and being like, "So..."

what? What happened?” And then, you know, he told me about the accident, and I said, “And she’s... dead? What?”

Yeah. And yeah. I... it’s... I haven’t really talked about it much on the podcast, which is interesting. It came up in my conversation with Daniel Foor about ancestral healing, and I did so many posts and talked so much about it when it first happened, but I don’t know. It’s hard. It’s weird. It’s like the more time goes on, the harder of a time I have even trying to put words into what a huge experience it is to lose someone you love so much so suddenly.

Anja: Yeah. I mean, I still struggle to find the words to talk about it, and I’m coming up on nine years this year. And it’s just kind of, you know, I don’t know that you ever get over it, you know? I think that you get more familiar with the feeling of having that, but I really... (audio cuts out)

[1:08:48]

Anja: I think it was on one of the earlier podcasts where you had a guest that was talking about the green burial and the dying out loud.

I really, the man on there said something like, “I never plan on not grieving for the loss of my wife.” And that just struck such a deep chord with me, because in our culture it’s just kind of like, “Okay. Grieve and move on!” And I think it’s important to realize that it’s possible to grieve in a good and healthy way and that we’re never just going to get over it. That’s not really the way that it works.

Amber: Yeah, of course. It’s so crazy that we do take that for granted in this culture, that you get over it and you move through it. And yeah, that was episode five with Richard and Cari Leverage if anyone wants to go back and hear it. Cari died six days after we recorded that interview, and the one year anniversary of her death was just last week. It’s just a really beautiful look at death and facing mortality, and grieving and loving someone. It’s a beautiful interview.

Right here, too, I would like to talk about another book, which is [It's OK That You're Not OK](#) by Megan Devine and her website, [Refuge In Grief](#)). She is by far the most emotionally intelligent and competent person in the grief space out there. She lost her fiancé. He drowned in front of her. I think it’s been ten years now. I think it was 2008, and she had already been a therapist at that point, and you know, she writes about how she’s like, “I would like to apologize to ALL of my pre-2008 clients, who were grieving, who I tried to help, because I did not understand, and I thought that you would get over it at some point, and I thought our goal was to get you beyond grief, and now I know that you never get beyond grief. It’s just a matter of being companioned while you’re in it.”

So anyone who, especially is going through a sudden or traumatic loss, Megan Devine and [refugeingrief.com](#) is such an amazing resource.

So thanks, Anya, for sharing and letting me share myself. I’m PMSing and going through this anniversary, so it’s been a really heavy couple days, and I knew we’d touch on some similar things when we talked today.

Anja: Yeah, it seems like we definitely have some similar things in our path although, kind of different. It is nice to talk about it, and I think sometimes, even just with my whole story and past with addiction and what that was like in my life, sometimes I kind of forget that part, or it’s not

something I bring up often because, you know, unless it's really relevant, but I've really come a long way from there.

I think for me, kind of reflecting on what I was going to say today and thinking about what that meant to me in my life, I think the main thing that I really feel is like it's never too late to do something else with your life. Every day you have the chance to make better choices and different decisions and be a better version of yourself. And you know, it's such a trip now looking at what I'm doing in my life and how easy it would have been to continue on the path of drug addiction and unfortunately, a lot of the people that I knew during that part of my life are either passed away at this point or in jail or are still addicted to drugs. And, you know, just really looking at that and going, wow, I'm so glad that I got out. That I knew that I had a bigger purpose, that I had more to live for than that, and just believing that we can really make huge shifts in our life when we're really determined and when we believe in ourselves I think that's the main that I kind of wanted to impart on that story.

Amber: Yeah, totally. One thing I think about and have said before is like, you know, a year from now is coming, no matter what you do between now and year from now. Ten years from now is going to be here if you're lucky and you live that long. So you have this choice in what you fill that time with, and where it ends you up in those ten years.

I remember saying that to my dad regarding his alcoholism a few years ago. And he was like, "When did you get so much smarter to me?" (Amber laughs) And I was like, "Yeah, but if you would just listen, maybe you could retain your own wisdom, inner wisdom, that's been so... it's just been taken from him."

[1:13:38]

Amber: And yeah, you know, having an alcoholic father, too, made me really aware of not becoming addicted myself. I even start to get weird about when I notice that I'm addicted to coffee. I'm like, "Oh, I'm in an addictive phase with coffee. I don't like this."

I never want a substance to be ruling my life more than, like, my own self, my own consciousness, my own true soul being in charge.

Anja: Definitely, yeah. It's a great motivation not to do that, although you have to live in kind of the aftermath of what addiction can be in your life.

Another thing that I'm grateful for is plant medicine and natural healing, and for my own body, knowing how much I've been able to heal myself and how much damage I probably did over a ten year period of not taking care of myself. I definitely had some severe health issues after that, and I've been able to really turn that around, and really take care of myself in a way that I've come back from all of the damage I did.

So I think that's another important thing to realize, too, is that our bodies are so resilient. As long as we're providing them with good nutrients and herbs and rest, and we're really giving it what it needs, that it has such a capacity to rebuild and restore and repair the damage that's done. So I'd like to remind people of that, too.

Our bodies are just so miraculous.

Amber: Yeah, absolutely. That vital life force is stronger than any of this stuff.

[1:15:32]

Amber: I was also curious, something that you mentioned, is this great-great, or great grandmother of yours. Will you tell us about her, and what you learned about her life?

Anja: Yeah, so it's interesting because I really just found this out I want to say two years ago, but I've been into the occult, and I've been into astrology and tarot since I was fairly young. 15 or 16 I really started diving in to reading tarot and studying astrology and have always just kind of been fascinated with that realm.

I actually got a phone call from one of my uncles, my mom's youngest brother, a few years back, and he was like, "I have something that I need to tell you, and I feel like you're the only person that's going to understand, and I really, I just need someone to talk to about this." And I had no idea what he was going to say, and he was like, "I've been reading tarot since I was 15 and I really think I want to tell the family about it, but I'm afraid of how they're going to react, or how they're going to judge me."

My uncle, I had no idea. He just did not strike me as someone who kind of was interested in that, or I've never talked to him about that at all. I was just excited, of course, and we talked about it, and then he sort of made some sort of off-hand comment about my great-grandmother. So, my mom's mom's mother, that she was sort of the town, like, mystic and healer.

So they lived in sort of a small town in Germany, in Heidelberg, and she used to do tarot readings and do kind of different work like that. She would lock all of the kids out of the house and was making money for the family by being a mystic, basically, and I just absolutely freaked out when I heard that. I was like, "Why has nobody ever told me this?! I'm over here being the black sheep of the family, and you come out with this stuff."

And I think in that moment I had such a deep sense of belonging and really deep sense of just realizing that some of the things that we inherit are so much deeper, and kind of, yeah, just this feeling of so much gratitude that I learned that about my family.

And, of course, during that time, you know, in Germany during the end of World War II, that sort of thing was definitely frowned upon. So I think nobody in my family really talked about it because it was embarrassing and it was, you know, just hush-hush, and no one talked about it. So it's been interesting to kind of talk to my grandma a little more and hear more about that part of my life, but it definitely kind of confirmed a lot of suspicions I had that somewhere in my family there was more going on. That there was some witches in there.

I actually also found out after that that my grandmother was actually born in the Black Forest. So, you know, I've been really inspired in the last few years to really look at a lot of my family history, and really inspired by you and Milla, and just our different conversations, and wanting to know more about where my family's from and asking questions. I realized that I'd just really never asked very many questions, and now that I'm curious, and starting to ask questions to different people in my family, I've learned so much that I kind of thought was not there because no one ever talked about anything. I'm finding that the more that I ask, the more that I'm finding out, which feels

really precious because those people won't always be there and those stories will kind of die with them. It's just really important to ask.

Amber: Yep. Yep, that's just step one: ask the elders who are still living for practical info, like, names and dates and places, but also for the stories because once they're gone, those stories are gone.

And that's really profound, too, that it's your pure matrilineal line that this woman comes from. That's such a strong, unbroken line of women, you know? And I just think there's something really potent about the pure mother line.

[1:20:27]

Amber: It's interesting, too, that your mom was a product of that, and I wonder do you — was your mom a sensitive person? Do you think there was any sort of, you know, echoes of her grandmother in her?

Anja: Oh, my gosh. I think, I mean, 100% my mom was such a huge empath and such a sensitive person, and she was also, like, a triple Pisces, and I mean, I really think that the world was just too much for her. I think also things like being a highly sensitive person or being an empath, those, you know, those are kind of more coming to light now in our current day in age, but I don't know that there was always, like, a language for that or an understanding for that. And I don't think people always had the resources or the understanding of how to cope with the world when you are such a sensitive person, and unfortunately, I feel like my mom found that coping through numbing out.

There's a lot of interesting stories in my family, and both my brother and I have dreams about things before they happen. My brother and I are super connected, as well, and actually had the same due date, five years apart. My mom's water never broke with either of us. So we were both born in the caul.

Amber: Oh, yeah. Lots of heavy symbolism and beliefs around what that means, you know. Really special people.

Anja: Yeah, and it's just interesting because I feel like my mom had a lot of that, and I see a lot of that in my brother. He's very — has a lot of kind of psychic tendencies. And also, I see a lot of the overwhelm in his life, like, not really fully knowing how to handle or deal with it.

And I think that that is a big conversation for people that are really sensitive or have these different skills and kind of sensory gating channels that can be open in different ways. It can be really tough to exist in this world that tells you that this box is what normal is. And when you don't fit inside of that, where do you really fit?

Amber: Yeah, it's really similar in my family. My dad is so empathic and so sensitive, and all the Hills, his line, the men, especially are all the same way, or maybe I just knew the men. I didn't really know any women on his side very well, and then my sister and I are both the same way, and my sister, especially. And yeah, she's just straight-up psychic. She's so gifted, but she's so overwhelmed by the world, and it's really been a more difficult path for her dealing with those sensory gating channels.

Which, let's talk about another book now. If you want to learn more about Stephen Harrod Buhner's — what is it? — [Plant Intelligence and the Imaginal Realm](#), really, really takes a deep dive into the sensory gating channels.

Anja: Yeah, I absolutely— I mean, Stephen Buhner is one of my all-time, just, you know, idols, and I love everything that he's written and his teachings have really, really influenced so much of my life.

I can't recommend that book enough. It's so amazing and just really understanding the mechanisms in the brain of how we're perceiving information and how that can affect us is just... I feel like everyone should read that book.

Amber: Yeah, I'm actually, now that I'm saying this, I remember that we talked about that when he was on this podcast on Episode 8, as well.

Wow. Yeah. Thank you, Anja!

[1:24:40]

Amber: Okay, so in closing, let's circle back around to herbalism and nutrition. I'd like to ask you how you're shifting, what you're eating, or what you're doing in your life now that winter has descended?

Anja: Yeah, well, umm... So, you know, in Ayurveda we're really looking at the elements that are present in every season. The fall time tends to be really cold and dry and then in the winter, depending on where you are, but generally, it's -- the qualities of winter are cold and damp. And so, I really — I eat a lot of warming foods. I eat a lot of soups and stews and cooked vegetables, and a lot of warming spices, like, ginger and cinnamon, and cardamom, and, like, peppers, and all sorts of things that will increase blood circulation and warm up the "Agni", or the digestive fire, so we can kind of heat ourselves from the inside out.

And also, because a lot of people tend to get really dry in the winter, broths and soups and really liquidy foods are super, super nourishing. And also, just, I do a lot of grounding foods. I eat a lot of meat and stuff in the winter to really sustain me, and I can eat smaller portions and feel really energized.

I mostly just kind of try and shift. And also what's just available seasonally where you're at, there's so many squash and all of the root vegetables, and all of the things that grow in the ground are really nutrient-dense. Those are the foods that are typically, depending on what bioregion you're in, but those are the foods that are in season during the winter.

Those are the foods that I really like to focus on, and it is a time to eat a little heavier and denser because we need that extra energy, and we're kind of storing up over the winter, and then in the spring, we're able to kind of start to cleanse some of that and start to eat some of the spring foods that help us to move some of that heaviness that we've accrued during the winter, but in Ayurveda, just the broths and soups and the spices, and warming beverages, like golden milk and chai, and all sorts of stuff like that are really great additions to your winter regiment.

[1:27:22]

Amber: Yeah, yeah. I'm excited about chai and making bone broth, and doing a lot of root vegetable roasts, and really focusing on carminatives. So, you write about carminatives on your blog, and I just think this is such a simple category of herbs, and something everybody already has in their kitchen, and can help with issues everyone has.

Can you just give a little rundown about carminatives?

Anja: Yeah, so carminatives a group of herbs that are just really helpful for digestion. So, they can help stimulate bile secretion; they can help with gas or bloating or any sort of digestive upset, and they also just help us get our gastric juices flowing. And so, they're really simple herbs: things like ginger and cinnamon, fennel, all of those kinds of warming spices, like a lot of the spices that are in a curry powder.

Amber: Yeah, cumin, cardamom, black pepper...

Anja: Exactly. So all of those things kind of help to stimulate our digestive system.

So not only are they warming and nourishing and helping us to warm up, but they're also really helping our digestion. When we do eat these heavier foods, and soups and stews and things like that, then we're also getting these herbs that help us up-regulate our digestive system and help make sure that we're really breaking everything down well, and a lot of these herbs are really supportive to our liver as well. So we're getting the liver support and the digestive support.

You know, they are such a simple class of herbs, that you don't have to take a tincture or bitters or anything like that, when you can just add them, sprinkle them onto your food and really feel the effects of like, "Oh wow, my stomach was really upset. I'm gonna have some ginger-cardamom tea," or just adding those herbs to your chai. Not only is that a delicious drink, but it's also a really medicinal beverage that's doing a lot of stuff to support your digestive system.

So carminatives are definitely just really great in the winter. And I actually, I wrote a blog post a couple, a month or so back, on it, speaking a little bit more toward the autumn, but the autumn-winter transition in some sort of Ayurvedic tips and ideas around how to eat seasonally, and there's some good recipe sin there. So you can check that out on the blog if you're interested in that.

Amber: Alright. Awesome, Anja. Thank you.

And why don't you again, for anyone who didn't listen to the last interview, tell people where they can find you.

Anja: Yeah, well, you can find me on my website. It's manamedicinals.net, and I have all sorts of information on there for my private practice, for doula services, and also I do a lot of blog posts and writing and information on where you'll find me teaching. So you can find everything there, and also there's a link to my apothecary there as well.

Amber: You just reminded me, and I feel like I want to share this with you, that the first time that I ever heard about homebirth was in Women's Bodies, Women's Wisdom, and I remember it just

made me sob. I was so touched by it, and I was like, “I have to do this someday. I have to have my babies at home,” and then I did.

And at that time, too, I thought I would be a midwife. Like, I went to a Midwifery Today conference in Eugene, Oregon in the early 2000s and really looked into being a birth worker and it was because of that book.

Anja: Yeah, it’s so good! I hope everyone that’s listening to this gets themselves a copy.

Amber: Yeah, thank you for all the work that you do, including your birthwork, and thank you so much for talking with me today.

Anja: Yeah, thanks so much, Amber! It’s been great, and I really appreciate you having me back on here.

Amber: Anytime.

Anja: Alright. Talk to you soon.

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

[Closing]

[1:31:37]

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 my blog, handmade herbal medicines, past podcast episodes, and a lot more at MythicMedicine.love.

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

If you love this show, please consider supporting my work at Patreon.com/MedicineStories. There's some killer rewards there: exclusive content, access to online courses, free, beautiful downloadable e-books, coupon codes, giveaways, and just amazing gifts provided by past guests of the podcasts. All of that stuff is at the two dollar a month level.

For a little more, you can access my herbal e-book or my small online course, and that's all there as a thank you, a HUGE thank you from me and from my guests for listening, for supporting this work. I love figuring out what I can gift to people on Patreon. It's so fun. And I love that Patreon makes it so that you can contribute for such a small amount each month.

I'm a crazy busy and overwhelmed mom and adding this project into my life has been a questionable move for sure, but I love doing it, and I love the feedback I get from you all. And I just

pray that Patreon allows me the financial wiggle room to keep on doing it while giving back to everyone who is listening.

If you're unable to do that, or if you'd like to support further, I would love it if you would subscribe on iTunes or wherever you get your podcasts. And if you would review the podcasts on iTunes, too, it really helps getting it into other ears. It means so much to me when I read those reviews. It's, like, the highlight of my week when I check them and see new ones.

People are amazing. You guys are wonderful. Thank you so much.

The music that opens and closes the show is Mariee Sioux. It's from her song "Wild Eyes." It's one of my favorite songs of all time.

Thank you and I look forward to next time!