



Medicine Stories Podcast

Episode 38 with Lyla June

Healing our Indigenous European
Ancestors

February 4, 2019

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(Excerpt from today's show by Lyla June)

As European Americans, our task is to honor our ancestors and honor, as well, the pain that we have yet to truly process.

And that way we can be free and that way we don't have to perpetuate that to other people.

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

[0:00:23]

Amber: Hello friends! Welcome to the Medicine Stories podcast, where we are remembering what it is to be human upon the earth.

I am Amber Magnolia Hill. This is Episode 38, synchronistically being released the week of my 38th birthday, and today I'm sharing my interview with Lyla June. This is a really beautiful, meaningful and I think, really important conversation that we have today.

- We talk about how Lyla, raised to acknowledge only her Native American side, came to understand and honor her indigenous European ancestors
- What happens when people hate or feel massive amounts of guilt around their ancestors, their ancestry
- Making space for everyone's healing- permission to grieve all the ancestral traumas of all peoples
- Going way back in time to understand colonizer/oppressor actions

Lyla said, "You don't just wake up one day, drink your coffee and say, "I feel like creating genocide on a whole continent of people." And, of course, we are in no way excusing what has happened in the past between Europeans and the Native peoples of this land, people of Africa. Lyla and I are just talking about bringing a wider perspective into these really important cultural conversations that we're having right now.

- Lyla's early experiences with sexual abuse, alcohol, and drugs and how they informed her perspective on restorative justice
- Pilgrimage to the Sacred Motherland of Europe - She said, "These mountains may have lost their people, but that doesn't mean they don't need ceremony"
- Seeing through the thin wall of time that dominates our understanding of history & remembering that the vast majority of our ancestors lived before things got broken, before cultures and humans got broken, went awry, went away from our whole-hearted paleolithic, I mean, I don't even know the words to describe the kind of human I'm talking about. Before things got broken, you know, when people were whole and living in right relationship with one another and with the earth.
- Lyla shares this beautiful idea that indigenous languages are the sound of the land speaking through the people
- We talk about love is the only thing worth doing here, and how we can't heal in the absence of love
- And I ask Lyla, "Where do we go from here?" And her answer is, "It depends on where we came from"

So this conversation feels really important to have on many levels for many reasons, but I kind of broke it down into the three main reasons I wanted to talk about this, and I asked Lyla on. I've been following her work for many years, so inspiring. She is, like, clearly an actual genius. One of those people whose minds work in such a special way. And then she's filtering it through this loving, compassionate space. And she's an artist, as well, a poet and musician. And she's doing such good work in the world to help people, to heal cultures, to heal the things that have gotten broken.

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Amber: And so I asked her on because, in December 2018, she published a piece in Moon Magazine called "Reclaiming our Indigenous European Roots." And I was really struck by what she had to say. And so, even though we talk about that a lot in this interview, I cannot recommend enough that you read that piece. I'll put it, of course, in the show notes. You can also Google "Lyla June Moon Magazine."

So why I think it's important to be talking about this stuff is:

1. Because to be talking about this stuff and to be in right relationship with our European ancestors -- even though it can be hard for people who care about justice and want to make right what was wrong in the past, and who feel that ancestral burden of knowing that perhaps your direct ancestors or people of your cultural lineage who maybe you didn't actually descend from, but they're still, in a wider way, your people, feeling guilt about things that they did. Okay, I'm losing my train of thought -- but honoring our own ancestors keeps us from culturally appropriating other people's. Right? This is really simple, and this is what I've been talking about in the herbal world for a long time. That finding the medicine of your own people, working with the plants that are indigenous to the place that your ancestors were indigenous to, if you're a European-ancestored person living in the States or elsewhere as I am, is going to just align you that much more deeply with yourself and with your work in the world, and with what is already living in your blood and in your bones, and you're going to be less attracted to other people's medicine, to things that don't really belong to you. It's a whole conversation in itself with a lot of nuance that I'm

not going to get into fully here, but it's a really good reason to look to your own European ancestry.

2. If we don't know and love our ancestors, then we don't know and love ourselves, and we can never reach our full potential. We can never truly bring the gift that we have into the world. We can't help others heal. We can't right the wrongs. We can't repair damage in whatever way we can in our small lives and our small lifetimes if we are ignoring our ancestors.
3. Getting stuck in hate for them or guilt that we're descended from certain people or certain cultures, again, does not facilitate healing or forward progress on social issues. That's not the place to get hung up if you're trying to make real change and do real good in the world.

So, I would also like to say, as I've said before, that I cannot cover **every** aspect of **every** subject I talk about on this podcast. I can imagine since this is a somewhat heated topic, that some people are going to write to me and say, "Why didn't you say this? You guys could've talked about that. You could've brought this into it." And, for sure, like, literally there's an infinite number of other things that we could bring into this conversation, but time is limited. Time is limited. Mental capacities are limited, and this is the conversation we had. This is the intro I have, my 10 or 15 minutes I have to record right now. So, please hold that in mind.

[0:08:07]

Amber: And if you want to get deeper into some of the things we talk about today, Episode 27 of this podcast, [Anti Racist Genealogical Research for Everyone](#) with Darla Antoine is good. And also Episode 26: [Ancestral Reverence as Devotion to the Earth](#) with Daniel Foor. You know, I specifically ask him what European-ancestored people who know bad things in their lineage that their ancestors did some bad things to people, what they can do to bring healing. And he brought in the perspective of going farther back in that lineage to the **well** ancestors. The old folks. The people who were embodied before things got broken and working with them to bring healing forward through the lineage. And this is, that's Daniel's approach, in general, to ancestral healing. And you can find out more about that on [ancestralmedicine.org](#), if you want. I really like that perspective and think it's really valuable.

And Darla, also, in that Episode 27, talks about ideas for cultural reparations which I really loved. And then there's been other episodes where I've talked with people of European ancestry about reclaiming their indigenous knowledge from their way back ancestors, like [Episode 7 with Lara Veleda Vesta](#), and [9 with Ariella Daly](#) come to mind, and I know there's been more. That's just the first things I'm thinking of right now.

[0:09:56]

Amber: So let me tell you about Lyla:

Lyla June is a poet, musician, anthropologist, educator, public speaker, and community organizer of Dine, Cheyenne, and European lineages. Her dynamic, multi-genre presentation style has invigorated and inspired audiences across the globe toward personal, collective and ecological healing. She blends studies in human ecology at Stanford, graduate work in Indigenous Pedagogy, and the traditional worldview she grew up with to inform her perspectives and solutions.

Her personal goal is to grow closer to Creator by learning how to love deeper.

Okay, you guys. Let me also put in here that if you are liking what we talk about in this episode, then two episodes from now with Atava Garcia Swiecicki. I'm sorry, Atava, if that's not how it's pronounced. It's something close to that, and I'll know it, for sure, by the time that episode comes out. But, I just interviewed her yesterday, and we talk about many, many, many of the same things. It's really beautiful as is this interview, so let's hear it now: Lyla June.

[0:11:05]

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

Amber: Hi Lyla! Welcome to Medicine Stories.

Lyla: Thanks for having me. I appreciate it!

Amber: Yeah, I'm very glad to have you.

I was really struck by the piece that you published in Moon Magazine last month called, "Honoring our" -- "Reclaiming our Indigenous Roots." And what really struck me about it -- so let me, if I may, explain a little bit about, like, where I'm positioned in the world, and what got me about this.

Lyla: Yeah, go for it.

Amber: So, I'm an herbalist. I've been speaking, writing, talking about herbalism and ancestry and sort of the intersection of the two for years now. What I've noticed, especially in this last year, in these realms, in these spaces online, especially, is there's some tension around who gets to claim their ancestors. Who can rightfully revere and honor and cultivate a relationship with their ancestors. You know, mostly white people telling other European-ancestored people that they are bad if they try to cultivate a relationship with the people they came from because of what some people who came from Europe to Turtle Island have done.

And so, I was so struck reading your piece and your quote that "Our task is to honor our ancestors even those who caved beneath the weight of systematic destruction and became conquerors themselves." And this whole story of you coming to understand yourself as a European-ancestored person as well as Native American-ancestored person.

So I would like to ask you about that journey, how you came to call in this whole other almost half of yourself, how you grew up understanding yourself, and how you came to where you are now.

Lyla: Absolutely. So first I'll introduce myself in the customary fashion.

(Lyla introduces herself in Diné language)

I'm from the Black Charcoal Street Division of the Red Running into Water People of the Dine Nation. Also incorrectly known as Navajo. My mother, that's my mother's clan, so that's my clan. We're a matrilineal people. My mother's Diné, her father's the Salt Clan of the Dine people, so that's my che side. My father's mother, which is my third clan is Cheyenne, southern Cheyenne. And my father's father is unknown, but we definitely know he's European. And we know my father's mother is largely European as well, in addition to Southern Cheyenne.

So, as a Diné woman, that's how we first begin introducing ourselves. So I do have a large mixture of things within me.

Some of my family was very ashamed of being "white", and I think that was passed on to me. I have a brother who has the same mom, same dad as me, and he came out kind of white-looking, and I came out brown-looking. So I watched how the world treated my brother differently. And I grew up kind of on the Taos Pueblo community, which is a Native American community, so in that community, you actually don't want to be white because you get picked on and made fun of for being white.

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Lyla: And then in the Native community, if they go out into the white world, you kind of want to be white, because, you know, then you get all that racism and whatnot.

So anyways, I saw how silly skin color was, because, literally, my brother had the same parents, but he was getting treated a different way than I was. And so, over time I felt a tendency to not claim my European ancestry 'cause I was ashamed of it, 'cause my family told me, "Those are the colonizers. Those are the slave masters. Those are the bad people. You don't want to claim being white. Just tell people that you're Diné." SO that's what I would do. I would go around and say, oh I'm Diné. I'm Diné. I'm Diné. I'm Diné. I wouldn't **EVER** say, "Oh, and I'm part Scottish and I'm part Scandinavian." These days I do because I want to own it, and I want to honor it, and I want to reclaim it.

But there came a time when I realized that my family's hatred for their white side was actually corroding them. And it was hurting them, and hurting people around them. Because when you hate yourself, you aren't free for love to move through you as fluently as we're supposed to have it move through us. And some of our caretakers would actually harm us. For instance, sometimes they'd get really angry, or they'd be really frustrated, or they'd be easily irritated, and deep down what was going on was their own self-hatred. And so I saw how when we hate ourselves, like, some of my family members wish they could wipe the white off of their skin. They wish they could just, they would just go out in the sun and get really sun-baked and really try and not be white (*Lyla laughs*).

And I know we live in this era where people of color are getting really damaged. Black boys are getting shot by the police every 28 hours or some ridiculous statistic like that. And we live in an environment of intense racism against people of color. And so, that makes it very touchy and challenging to talk about white people hating their own race. Because it can be misinterpreted as us trying to distract the conversation towards, you know, the plight that white people are going through. That some white people are going through. It's like, "Oh, well you're privileged. You have all the money. You have all the power, so you're not allowed to hurt. You're not allowed to feel pain." But, you know, nevertheless, we're hurting and we're feeling pain.

So how do we... how do we make space for everyone's healing without making it seem like we're taking up too much space as European descendants, which is often what happens out there in the world, so people are very touchy about that as they probably have a right to be?

[0:18:17]

Lyla: But that reminds me of Germany where the Nazis were very harsh to Jewish people -- that's an understatement, **you know**, they killed millions of them. So then once Germany, once World War II ended, the Soviets moved into Germany and systematically raped **all** the German women. It was a TOTAL crazy show. The women, with the Soviet occupation, German women were getting raped way, WAY too often. And so, but, in the aftermath of World War II, the German women were not allowed to grieve that because they were "the bad guy." So they're not allowed to be like, "Oh I got raped." It's like, "Well, don't talk about that. Let's talk about the millions of Jewish people that died."

So this happens frequently throughout history, where people who are on the wrong side of history also get damaged, but they're not allowed to talk about it. And I know people aren't saying they're not allowed to talk about it, but there's this-- it's hard to really process it all. So, as an indigenous woman, I/European woman, I wanted to give European Americans permission to grieve. Because, where I come from, punitive justice doesn't work. If we say, "Oh you're a BAD white person" and "You're bad, and you gotta go in your cage and you gotta say 25 hail marys," you know, that's supposedly what Native Americans, we said, was too Catholic or too guiltig, you know? And what works better, we thought, was restorative justice. Our ancestors and our elders talked about restorative justice. How do we heal people who harm people? And I think we do that by giving them a space to feel how they were hurt themselves.

So I wanted to not only give other European Americans permission to grieve, but I wanted to give **myself** permission to grieve, as an almost-half-European person and say... and most Native people are part European. You'll be hard to find a Native American who's not part black or part white in this continent. So all of us Native people are carrying like this secret part of us that we don't want to tell anyone about (*Lyla laughs*). I swear. It's crazy. Like, I've heard it so many times, like, "Oh, and he might have a little bit of GERMAN lurking around back there." I've literally heard a father say that about his son, a Native father say that about his Native son.

So basically what I'm trying to say is that I wanted to give myself permission to grieve. They say, like, "Okay. I come from this lineage of European peoples. Yes. They massacred Native people. They did horrific, unspeakable things. And what happened to them to make them want to do that?"

You don't just wake up one day and say, "You know? I feel like having a cup of coffee and then committing genocide on a whole continent of people. That sounds fun!" You know? You don't just wake up one day and do that. Something has to happen to you in order for that to be normal for you, or for that to even be remotely desirable.

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Lyla: And so I really started researching and once I researched I found that the Welsh language was prohibited as late as the 1920s. If you got caught speaking Welsh, you had to put a block of wood around your neck, that said "WN" on it, which stood for "Welsh Not." The only way you could get the block of wood off your neck is if you caught another kid speaking Welsh.

So we have Indigenous-European languages being prohibited in the exact same way as Native American languages were. You have epidemics: about 98% of Native Americans were wiped out by disease. You have the bubonic plague wiping out over a third of Europe overnight. A third of

Europe, you know, is probably a conservative estimate. Not just dying in any old kind of way, but dying with, like, pus blisters popping off your skin, and then you die. You know, like, a third of everyone you know dying in that way in front of you, that's a trauma we, as Europeans haven't healed yet.

You have the destruction of the Earth in the same exact way. If I went to Devon, England, and all of the oak trees are completely gone, because the British Army came and turned it all to make their navy, they cut down all the oak forests, so there's like, one little tiny oak grove that still stands. And all of these oaks are what the "Druidic" cultures would tend and take care of.

So you have the destruction of the land in the same way, and, most heartbreakingly, you have the destruction of the women in the same way.

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Lyla: The American government would come into our Native communities and rape our women one by one. AND they would hold the men at gunpoint so they couldn't do anything about it. You know that's how they would kill the spirit of our women and our men at the same time is they would rape the women in front of the men.

Then you have the witch burnings, which is the same exact thing. You have women -- imagine getting your wife, seeing your wife get burned alive, seeing your daughter get burned alive, seeing your sister get burned alive, seeing your auntie get burned alive. This is what European men sustained. They sustained this kind of trauma. So it's no wonder European Americans have some issues, you know? They are carrying literally thousands of years of horrific trauma that they haven't even begun to deal with, and that's not their fault. I mean how can you deal with something that you don't even know how much of it you have to deal with. So I think that as European Americans our task is to honor our ancestors and honor as well the pain that we have yet to truly process. And that way we can be free. And that way we don't have to perpetuate that to other people.

It's pretty classic (it's almost cliché by now) "Hurt people hurt people." So I don't want to blab too much. You probably have more questions, but that's just a small insight into what I could probably talk about for hours and hours on why I think it's incredibly important for us, as European Americans, to grieve even when the world is telling us we're not allowed to because the world doesn't understand that they're actually **hindering** justice. They're hindering healing, and they're hindering change by disallowing us from grieving. And so even if all your cool social justice friends and anti-racist working friends are saying, "You're white. Get over it," just push them aside in your mind and say, "No, I have ancestors I need to connect with. I have ancestors I need to feel. I have pain that I need to grieve." And then once we grieve and feel that pain, we HEAL that pain. Because feeling is healing. And once we let go of that -- it's kind of like the only way out is through -- we have to **feel** what happened to our people, to our land, to our entire continent. I mean it was bad. It was horrific!

Spain has over twenty periods of documented bloodshed, you know? No wonder Juan de Oñate came over to Acoma Pueblo in New Mexico and cut off the foot of every man in the pueblo. Because he's coming out of THAT country, you know? (*Lyla laughs*) Twenty periods of documented bloodshed, war, you know, I'm talking **full out war** for thousands of years, that's where we're coming from.

So we must heal that, and give ourselves permission to feel that, and give ourselves permission to let Creator love us and hold us, 'cause restorative justice and giving space for the "bad guy" to heal is the only way that it's ever made change.

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Amber: What you're saying about healing I think is so apt. And you write in that piece that "If we do not wholly love our ancestors, then we do not truly know who they are." And I would add, if we do not know who they are, then we don't know who we are. And if we hate them, then we hate ourselves.

And so, in this cultural moment that we're in right now that people are waking up, it's so important to focus on that healing piece.

Lyla: It is. I mean, it's only everything. (*Lyla laughs*)

Amber: Yeah! (*Amber laughs*)

Lyla: Healing and, I should say, that a lot of what I talk about in restorative justice is inspired by my own personal experience.

I grew up in a home full of drugs and alcohol, which is very common for Native people because they imported alcohol into our communities to destroy us. So I started drinking when I was 12 years old. I started doing drugs when I was 11. I did everything. You know, I did cocaine. I did meth. I did heroin. I did ecstasy. Later on, I became a drug dealer just like some of my family members were. Some of my family members that's how they paid the rent was they sold drugs. Right?

So I grew up in a little poverty-stricken town in northern New Mexico. That's where I grew. And that was my upbringing. And there were some other types of abuse growing up. I experienced a lot of sexual abuse. And I mean, A LOT. Rape was so frequent that it was, I didn't even know it was rape. I thought this just was how life was. Rape was normalized on the movies when I was growing up, so I was like, "OH okay. This is what sex is." Right? But no, actually it was rape because I never really wanted to do any of it. It was all **have** to, not want to.

So, anyways, it all culminated when I broke my hip and my spine when I was studying abroad in Chile when I was 20 years old. I'm 29 now, and I was at Stanford University. Don't ask me how I got there with all the drugs and everything, but somehow I ended up there, and I broke my hip and my spine in the earthquake in Chile. And that's when I hit rock bottom because I started drinking even more, chainsmoking. Ecstasy was sort of my drug of choice. I would pop ecstasy pills like every week all the time. And I was a drug dealer. And I was also addicted to shoplifting, so I was like, you know, your classic criminal. Like, which is what the world always told my people, "You guys are criminals. You're nothing."

So I lived out that label.

I got down on my knees one day and I said, "Creator, can you get me sober? I can't handle this anymore. I think I might die if I don't get sober." And what Creator did for me was so beautiful. I mean, talk about restorative justice. Creator sent ALL these people to me that taught me all these things. One of the things they taught me was, it doesn't matter what happened to your body, Lyla.

You're always going to be sacred. And they taught me that rape wasn't your fault. Well, first of all, that that was rape. That was a big eye-opener. I was like, oh, that's rape. And number two: it wasn't your fault" And then they said, number three: if you want to help people, if you want to be my warrior, if you want to be a warrior for Creator you gotta put down the drugs. You gotta put down the alcohol. So finally, at age 23 I quit for good and I've been completely sober for six years. But that kind of grace that came into my life really proved to me what unconditional love for a criminal can look like.

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Lyla: It can look so beautiful, you know. It can be so precious to tell someone 'cause God didn't say, "Oh you're doing drugs, you bad girl, you're gonna go to jail!" Instead, she said, "I'm sorry you were surrounded by drugs when you were a little girl. I'm sorry you were raped since you were a little girl. I'm sorry that you've experienced these things."

And so, similarly, what I would like to do for European side of me, I would like to say, "Sorry all your women were burned alive. Sorry that your land was destroyed by the Romans. I'm sorry that the church created patriarchy in your community. I'm sorry that your women were drowned alive. I'm sorry that your languages were prohibited. I'm sorry that your people went into torture chambers. I'm sorry your people were publicly disemboweled while they were still alive," you know? "I'm sorry your storytellers, the bards of Scotland, I'm sorry they were buried face down so that their stories would die with them. I'm sorry the British Army did that to them." You know? That's what I would say to the guy wearing the Make America Great Again hat. You know? (*both laugh*) If I could. I would say, "I'm sorry that happened to your ancestors."

Amber: Yeah, Dr. Daniel Foor who works with Ancestral Healing when he was on the show said, "We don't arrive at healing by exiling those who commit harm."

Lyla: Yeah. And that one's hard, but it's so true. It's so true.

[0:33:46]

Amber: So you said that you want to give white people permission to grieve, but I think you also, through this piece, clearly want to give people permission to connect with their indigenous roots and what you call "The Sacred Motherland of Europe." And that's really taking it a step further, you know, to allow one's self to honor these oppressive cultures and what they were before, before things got broken, before all that happened.

And so I would like to ask how you personally have done that in your life? Like, what is your practice of connecting to the Sacred Motherland of Europe?

Lyla: Yeah. Well, the first time -- I had been to Europe a couple of times before I really realized I was European. (*Lyla laughs*). Like I said, I was so brainwashed to **just** be Diné and not acknowledge my European self that I, like, literally when I went to Europe the first two times I didn't even realize I was going back home.

I was like, "Oh cool. I'm visiting Europe." You know?

But the third time I went, I went to Switzerland. And I had this understanding now. I was like, okay this is where my people are from. Maybe not Switzerland exactly, but the Scandinavian side of me

could have intermarried. You never know. There's even parts of my European side I don't know where it came from. But I knew I was going to this continent that was sacred.

So I actually took the time to go onto a mountain, and I treated it as a pilgrimage, and it was so mind-blowingly beautiful to just lay down. And I took a piece of my hair, and I put it on the earth, and I just looked up at the sky, and -- I was going through the most god-awful breakup at the time. I was, like, dying inside -- and that mountain just held me. Held me, and held me, and held me, and was just really reassuring me that everything was going to be okay. I came to it knowing I was a daughter of that line. I was a descendant of that continent and that land. And so I just took some time to pray and I thought to myself, "Wow. These mountains may have lost their people, but that doesn't mean they don't need ceremony. They need their prayers. They need their reverence and they need us to come back to them and pray with them."

And, granted, there is still a lot of ceremony going down in Europe. There is a lot of people who haven't forgotten the way. But the dark worked pretty hard to obliterate the way out there, the medicine way. But it's incumbent upon us, or rather, it's our privilege to be able to go back there and pray with these mountains.

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Lyla: I recently went to Devon, England, and we had a full moon ceremony with all these women. And I kid you not, we were on this tour which is a sacred site. It's like a big naturally-formed tower of rocks. They're all over Devon. They're beautiful. And almost all of them have these gorgeous pools of water on top of them just naturally-forming pools of water. And I went up there and there's all these really cool indigenous European women there, like, with all these songs and they had their holly and their hawthorn and their mugwort, and all these medicines and they all just toss them in the pool. We were saying prayers for our grandmothers. And I kid you not, as the sun was setting in the West, the full moon was rising in the East at the exact same time, and I was just like, "Oh my God! I'm at a REAL ceremony!" (*Lyla laughs*) "I'm in a real indigenous European ceremony!" 'Cause these women knew what they were doing. They know who they are, and they know where they're from, and they're doing what their ancestors had done for millenia.

It was just so precious to come home, to truly come home because some of my ancestors are from that island, the UK. And so those are a couple ways that I personally try to go back home and really find myself. And I think that, obviously, it's a privilege to be able to go out there, given how much a plane ticket is and stuff, but if we can find a way to go home and really feel the land and ourselves, it would be very, very powerful for everyone.

Amber: Yes. That's beautiful! I just found ancestors in Devon yesterday.

Lyla: Whoa!

Amber: Yeah! (*both laugh*)

Lyla: Love it.

Amber: Something that I really like to talk about and remind people of is just how myopic we are in this culture, how short-sighted we are and how wrong our perception of time tends to be. Like, the fact that colonization goes back so much further than Columbus, Cortez, the Mayflower, you

know. We all have colonizer ancestors and indigenous ancestors somewhere in the hundreds of thousands of years that homosapiens have been roaming the earth. There've been so many displacements, and all the things you mentioned earlier that happened in Europe.

I really love that you wrote about that. You wrote about "Seeing through the thin wall of time that dominates our understanding of Europe."

[0:39:57]

Lyla: Yeah. Absolutely because these -- the history that we know is the history that our conquerors want us to know. Right?

They don't want us to know that a clay figure in the shape of a woman who represents fertility and the sacredness of women and the sacredness in the earth was being made in a place that's now called Germany 40,000 years ago.

Back in 2009, I think it was, they found this clay effigy in German soil, and it dated back 40,000 years old. This is the scale of time that we're being asked to think on, and even farther. We, in our heads, kind of go back about 2000 years, and then we just kind of stop looking, most of us. There are some historians and archaeologists that go way, way further, but a lot of us, that's what we're trained to think about is, "Oh yeah, there's..." how would you call it? "Jesus is born, and then anything before that we'll just not pay too much attention to." But 2000 years is a blink of an eye. It's nothing in the full journey that our ancestors have been through.

There's a really good book called *The Chalice and the Blade* which, it's a female archaeologist from Europe, and she documents the transition from a "chalice culture" which she defines as a culture of abundance, community, and equality, and fearlessness, and giving, to a "blade culture," which is a culture of defense, offense, conquer, be conquered. She talks about the fortification of cities in Europe and when that started happening, and she talks about various effigies depicting the feminine in Europe, and she really implores us to go deeper than what we normally think of.

One thing I learned recently is that Europe, itself, we should probably come up with a new word for Europe because Europe comes from Europa, who was a mythical character in Greek mythology, and she was, if I remember correctly, basically like she was collateral in a war between two male gods or two male figures, one of which was a god. So she was basically, like, what they were betting on. So you basically have the land being called a woman that's just an object to be, you know, thrown around by two men. And so, Europa, not only is that story, itself, problematic but also it's very Greco-centric, which also bleeds into Roman-centricism.

And just like, you know, we're in America. We talk about Eurocentricism, and we're like, "Why are these people being so Eurocentric? This is indigenous land. This is Native land.

Similarly, someone in Hungary could say, "Why are they being so Greco-Roman-centric by naming my land, Magyarország" --which means "the people's land." That's the real word for Hungary. "Why are they naming this Europe? Greece and Rome are way over there. They have nothing to do with my land. They are the ones who came and conquered my land. Why are we naming Europe in this fashion?"

So that's kind of a tangent, but I think it's related because it still locks us into that Aristotle, you know, kind of phase of Europe where we're just obsessed with that. Like you said, myopic a little

bit. And not looking deeper into the vast, wonderful, beautiful, diverse world of indigenous Europe before Napoleon, before King Louis, before the English crown and the British crown, before all the things we think of as European history, there was a lot going on and there's still a lot more going on than that in Europe today.

[0:45:00]

Amber: Yeah, it's hard to overstate just how many ancestors we each have. I think that people often forget as well that humans were hunter-gatherers for 99% of our history as a species. Agriculture is about 10,000 years old. Most of our people were hunter-gatherers. Most of our people were living in the old ways. It's so recent.

So when I see people get really hung up on what this or that ancestor did, or this or that lineage, or an entire culture that they have somewhere in their background, I just like to remind them to expand their scope. To do that as well as working on healing and calling in and cultivating a loving reverential with those ancestors.

You've said on another podcast once, you spoke about oppressed people becoming oppressors themselves, which is sort of what we've talked about. And it scares me because I feel like I'm seeing that in some people today. The people who aren't calling those ancestors in aren't honoring their ancestors and the ancestors of others, becoming oppressors themselves by acting out all the hurt and the pain of those generations.

And I also heard you say that, "Colonized people and colonizers is not who we really are, and we don't have to live this way anymore." I thought that was beautiful and wanted to ask you where we go from here? Where do we go from here?

Lyla: Right. Well, it depends on where you're coming from. Where you go depends on or what your role is in this huge, beautiful, chaotic orchestra of 2019 (or whatever that is, or whatever Gregorian name we've come up for it), but okay, if you're African American, your role is going to be different than if you're part African American and part Native American. There's a slightly different role.

Your role is going to be different if you're an indigenous kid from the Yurok reservation in California than if you're, you live in New York City and all of your grandparents are Italian, you know. Where we come from defines our role, and where we are defines our role. An Italian person in New York City has a different role than an Italian person in Italy, right? (*Lyla laughs*)

But let me sum it up with this story that my elder taught me that sort of is the philosophy that I kind of subscribe to:

So he said, he's a Diné elder, Dr. Larry Emerson from Hogback, New Mexico, and he said, "Lyla, in our Diné way when we go to someone else's land, we follow their ceremonies, and we follow their way of life. We, when we're back in the Four Sacred Mountains, back in our homeland, we have Four Sacred Mountains that circumscribe our homeland, then we do our Dine way." And he said way back in the day when there were **thousands** of tribes and **thousands** of languages being spoken on Turtle Island, 98% of us were wiped out. So however many you see today, times that by 50. That's how many there were.

So he said, "We had soooo many languages and so many people on Turtle Island! We had rules of engagement. We had protocols. We had ways of interacting with each other to maintain peace. And one of those ways was, if you go to another person's homeland, you follow their ceremony. You follow their way. And when they come to Diné, they're going to follow our way. We're going to teach them about the mountains and how to walk in respect for the mountains."

He said, "But Lyla, you're a Desert Woman. Your people, (*Lyla speaks Diné*), that is a desert land. If you go up to what is now Washington state, and you run into those Salmon People, you don't know the first thing about Salmon. You're not a Salmon woman. Those ladies are Salmon Ladies. They know about the Salmon. So when you talk to them, try and learn their language." "Because their language..." he said, "Our indigenous languages are the sound of that place speaking through us. So Dineh Bizad is the sound of the desert speaking through us. If you go to Washington and you hear Sliammon language, that's the sound of Victoria Island speaking through humanity. So learn that language. Learn what their creation story is. Learn how they walk. Learn how they interact with ecology. Learn how they eat 'cause they are experts. They've only been there for hundreds of thousands of years. They might know how to walk there."

[0:51:00]

Lyla: So that's sort of my philosophy is that wherever we go, follow the indigenous peoples of that land.

I was invited to speak at Bioneers in California. Keynote speech, you know, big speech. And I said, "Okay, Bioneers invited me, but did the Miwok invite me?" (*Lyla laughs*) You know? "Did the Miwok women invite me?"

So I went to the Miwok women and I said, "Hey they wanted me to give this big speech. What do you want me to say?" And they said -- or, "May I speak? May I speak on your homeland, and if so, what should I say?" And they gave me all these ideas. I said, "Why don't you guys say it?" So I brought them on stage with me, and they said their peace, and then I spoke about what I wanted to talk about. And so, wherever we go, honor the original peoples of that land.

I went to South Africa two months ago, and there were a lot of us there from indigenous women from all over the world. There was indigenous women from Mexico, indigenous women from Australia, indigenous women from Europe, indigenous women from Diné, and there was a woman there of African descent, and her people had been there for, phew, a long time, you know? (*Lyla laughs*) And so everything we did, I asked her, "What do we do here? Is it okay if I offer some cornmeal here, or is that not appropriate? Is it okay if I sing this song here? Would you give me that permission?"

And, of course, when we ask permission, we usually get a yes. It's not that we can't do these things, it's just polite to ask first. And she said, "Yes, daughter. That would be good." So when I go to Devon, England, I was just quiet when I was at that full moon ceremony, because I was -- I do not know the stories of this land! (*Lyla laughs*) Even though I have ancestors from here, I don't know what these women are doing. I'm just gonna, like, sit where they're sitting and do what they're doing and listen. Observe. 'Cause they have knowledge of the hawthorn. They have knowledge of the apple tree. They have knowledge of the yew tree. They have knowledge of the ash tree. They're so smart about these trees here in "England" that I need to listen. And so, that is what I would say we should do from here. Wherever you are, do your best to honor and uplift the

indigenous peoples of that land and listen to them 'cause they have things that western science can't even get close to yet.

[0:53:42]

Amber: Thank you for that, Lyla. And thank you for your constant focus on love. I find that it can almost be hard to talk about. Sometimes people want to, you know, make fun of the concept of love or belittle it in some way. And after my mother died in a car accident three years ago, I was so suffused with her love and really feel that I've just carried it like in every cell in my body ever since. Even, you know, my website is mythicmedicine.com. (*Amber laughs*) This is the only dot that's right for what I'm trying to do in the world now. And I really appreciate how unabashedly you bring that word, that concept, that feeling into the work that you do in the world, and I want to thank you for that. And thank you for everything that you do.

Lyla: You are so welcome. One time an elder told me, "Only love is real." And umm... I don't know. I didn't like the bitter way. No judgment for those of us who take that way, but I just don't like to go that way.

I was raised to be a militant, you know? Sort of in the AIM movement type of deal -- American Indian Movement. There was guns all in my house all the time. I had to ask some of my relatives, "Please don't bring your guns to Standing Rock." It's not that kind of deal. So I think that's another reason why I'm really into love, and I'm really into non-violence and really into peace because I was raised around aggression.

And you might even say, not warranted aggression, but, again, having an understanding of where that comes from in Native people or any people. Having a restorative justice lens on that, but I really felt how it feels to be a child among all that, and I just knew from the beginning that's not the way I want it to take. I'm only here for love no matter how many people laugh at me. (*Amber laughs*)

And I will never deviate from love, not to please the whole world, but because love is the only thing worth doing here. Not that I'm perfect. I slip all the time, but that's my ideal.

Amber: Right, and I don't mean to be like, "It's all love and light!" because it's not, and I actually hate that phrase, and I don't mean to gloss over the real oppression and the real pain, but if we are not bringing love into what we're doing then what's the point?

Lyla: Yeah, I'm right there with you, and I also know how hard it is to remember that. So I really forgive brothers and sisters out there who forget that. It's easy to forget out here. I just had that conversation with a friend before we had this call, but thank you for the love you do, and thanks for having me on the podcast.

My prayer is that hopefully it will help even one person, and, speaking of love, just to love ourselves. I think that's the most revolutionary thing we can do right now, and the most **effective** thing we can do right now is love ourselves fully, no matter what's been done to us or what we've done to others to fall back in love because every day is a new slate and every day is a new day to love yourself. So thank you.

Amber: Hell yeah. Thank you, Lyla.

[0:57:33]

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

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, and 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 by Mariee Sioux. It's from her song Wild Eyes which is one of my favorite songs of all time.

Thank you so much, and I look forward to next time!