



# Medicine Stories Podcast

Episode 58 with Kathryn Solie

Poisonous Plant Spirit Medicine

October 21, 2019

[0:00:00]

*(Excerpt from today's show by Kathryn Solie)*

*There's this major break in our ancestral psyche. We couldn't use these plants anymore.*

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

[Intro]

[0:00:14]

**Amber:** Hello friends! And welcome to Medicine Stories: the podcast where we are remembering that story is medicine, magic is real, and healing is open-ended and endless.

I'm Amber Magnolia Hill, and today I'm talking to Kathryn Solie all about poisonous plant medicine.

Of course, I'm thinking about Samhain coming up, Halloween, this very pivotal, very sacred time of year that I think no matter how you feel about either one of those holidays (which have come to be conflated into one) you can feel it. There's just something magical about October and late October and early November. Our ancestors felt it, too, and something I always recall learning about.

It was in the book [Witchcraft Medicine](#) that I read about 13 years ago when my oldest was a baby, and in the show notes for this episode, Kathryn and I have shared I think five awesome books about poisonous plant medicine. So that book is there. It's written by three German scholars. It's not like a modern, Wicca, Pagan book written by some 22-year old. It's really a neat deep dive into European uses of plants and, especially, in the old days and in the old ways, and in the wise women who were named witches, and sometimes persecuted, killed, burned alive for their knowledge of herb-lore, and healing, and control over big things like life and death.

And one of the things that I always remember learning about in that book is where this idea that we have today of Halloween witches flying around on their brooms came from, and it's really tied into the poisonous plants, many of which we'll talk about today, and how that these wise women would use them in ointments because, of course, you don't want to take these internally in any

regular dose that you would take for any other herb. Kathryn and I talk about that, so please, always consider safety first when working with poisonous plants; just essences, basically or topical ointments. Depending on the herbs they worked with, they would induce visionary states and that these visionary states were likened to flying. The broom association is being associated with the hearth and the home and taking care of everyday business and everyday life within the family, within the village, and the community.

You know, it's really fascinating looking into the history of witchcraft in Europe and the witch trials and the burnings and it's just... it goes so deep, and really, there's this huge association. It wasn't just that these were wise women and healers (though, of course, there was that, too), but with Christianity and patriarchy coming down so hard, it was specifically this accusation that these women were engaging in sexual contact with the devil, himself. Which is... it just sounds so absurd and insane to us today because it is.

So you can really, you know, when you realize that this was what these church fathers were believing, writing books about, or sharing about, you can start to understand why they came down so hard on these women who had knowledge of healing plants.

So I just wanted to start this off with that tiny little history lesson. There's a million books, podcasts, things you could dive into if you want to know more about it. It's hard to learn about. It's really sad.

**[0:04:26]**

**Amber:** You know, I don't use the word "witch" for myself. I know a lot of people just love it, and it feels so empowering for them to reclaim that word, and I get it, like, it's fine. I see the beauty and the power in that word, but just knowing so much as I do about the history of the Christian persecution and that word is just too heavily weighted for me with that. And again, I understand the reclaiming that people are doing around it, but I cannot untangle it from the history that I'm aware of. So I just continue to be an herbalist, be a mother, be someone who's interested in healing with plants of all kinds, including the poisonous plants. So I'm really excited about today's interview.

**[0:05:15]**

And I want to tell you about the two Patreon offerings that Kathryn has made available for patrons of this podcast, and actually, it's a giveaway again. So giveaways are always available to everyone, not just patrons. You can find it and enter the giveaway at [Patreon.com/medicinstories](https://Patreon.com/medicinstories).

Oh! By the way, it just hit over 1000 patrons last night. It was 1006 last I checked. And that's amazing! That's a big turning point. It feels so good, and I'm so grateful. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

So Kathryn is offering two different things, and three of each of these two different things. So six people will win.

One of the offerings is three spots in her Introduction to Poisonous Plant Medicine online course. In this three-hour online workshop, you will get an introduction to practices of plant spirit medicine and poison as medicine. We will discuss the history, lore, and medicinal use of poisonous plants and fungi, such as belladonna, mandrake, datura, the yew tree and fly agaric. Through the lens of

plant spirit medicine, you'll experience their medicine and messages without having to ingest them.

The second thing is three bottles of her essence blend called "Shining Darkness", a poison garden blend. The Shining Darkness is an essence blend designed to guide us through the dark circuitous passages of our own being. For it is in these dark chambers that we find our wholeness. These plants won't do our work for us, but they can help us discover deep levels of sensuality and embodied communion and connection with life.

The ingredients are:

- Essences of Datura stramonium
- Datura inoxia
- Henbane
- Hellebore
- Belladonna
- Yew Tree
- And water hemlock in brandy.

And I love this Joseph Campbell quote she has here in the listing:

*The cave you fear to enter holds the treasure you seek.*

[0:07:26]

**Amber:** So Kathryn has dedicated her life to the study and practice of non-duality and inner work. She is the author and illustrator of "Here you Are", a collection of original, minimalist tantric paintings and straight forward non-dual writings, designed to guide you into the present moment, into your body, and into your heart.

She teaches classes on topics such as meditation, poisonous plants and myth. Kathryn also works one-on-one with people looking to remember their authentic selves through the use of tarot readings, dream interpretation, herbal medicine, intuition building, mindfulness, shamanic journeying, creative expression and meditation. She graduated with a degree in Fine Arts from Naropa University, a Buddhist-inspired university in Boulder, CO, and did a sacred plant medicine apprenticeship with the Gaia School of Healing in Putney, Vermont.

She recently finished a training in Hakomi, a type of mindfulness-based, body-centered psychotherapy.

Okay, before we hear the interview, I just want to let you know that I've been going through some things in my personal life. I don't know if I will share them. It was actually hard for me to record the intro up to this point. I had to stop because I felt winded. And I'll be fine. I'll be fine soon, it's a short-term acute thing that will pass. And I'm also dealing with stuff from my alcoholic father, who's been hospitalized a few times and I need to go take care of some things around that soon. So I don't think that I will have an episode out in two weeks. It might be a month. Hopefully less, hopefully, three weeks. But I can't commit to anything while I heal myself and take care of all this logistical adulting stuff with my dad. Oh, and so, before we get into it, too. I just looked up the name of this book I was trying to remember, [Malleus Maleficarum](#), usually translated as "hammer

of the witches.” It was, it is the best known and most thorough treatise on witchcraft (I’m reading from Wikipedia’s page right now). It was written by the discredited Catholic clergyman, Heinrich Kramer, and first published in the German city of Spier in 1487. So I mean, what a cool name, right? Malleus Maleficarum, hammer of the witches.

If you’re interested in diving more into this history then you probably don’t actually want to read the book. It’s, like, you know, written in Latin 500 years ago, more than that. It’s really dark and hard to read, but diving into a little more of translations of it or how people are reading it now is really interesting. And there is a podcast episode with ... I think the name of it might be Hammer of the Witches ... by The Stuff to Blow your Mind podcast. It’s years-old now. Many years ago I first listened to it. But it was what first made me aware of some of the demonic aspects of the history of witches in Europe. NOT the actual history, but the way that the church interpreted what was going on. So I’ll put that in the show notes. It’s very interesting. I’ll add a link to one of the best books on like, global witchcraft that I have as well. Lost of links in the show notes. You know I always want to send you deeper into the subjects you’re interested in.

So without further ado, let’s listen to this interview with Kathryn Solie.

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

## [Interview Begins]

[0:11:14]

**Amber:** Hello Kathryn. Welcome to Medicine Stories!

**Kathryn:** Hi Amber! So happy to be here.

**Amber:** Good! I’m so happy to talk to you. It’s pretty cute because of the way I found you was through my husband, Owen. *(Amber laughs)*

**Kathryn:** Oh!

**Amber:** And I know you guys chat on Instagram a lot and he was just like, “Are you following Kathryn? Are you following @persephonespath?”

And I was like, “No, but I love that name.” *(Amber laughs)*

**Kathryn:** Oh, that’s so sweet. Yeah, we have that plant spirit connection.

**Amber:** Yep. Yeah, he’s always updating me on what you’re posting about and what you’re doing.

**Kathryn:** *(Kathryn laughs)* Aww.

**Amber:** And yeah, I’m grateful because things get so easily lost in these online realms, so it always tunes me back into what you’re sharing, which is this aspect of plant medicine that is so often

overlooked, and that, really, only a handful of people are actively sharing and teaching about, and this is the poisonous plants.

So, I'd just love to begin by asking you to share how you came to walk the plant path, first of all, but then into this really specific realm of plant medicine.

**Kathryn:** Well, I'm someone who was talking to plants when I was a little kid.

**Amber:** Oh, you're one of THOSE. (*both laugh*).

**Kathryn:** Which, I don't know really where that came from because my parents are, like, material, reductionistic -- my dad's a straight-up atheist, but I think it's just natural that kids just do that when they're left to their own devices outside.

And it never fully really left that connection to plants and the interest plants, but I didn't really get into herbal medicine -- I mean, casually, here and there. I lived in places where herbal medicine was commonplace.

**Amber:** Like where?

**Kathryn:** I lived in Boulder, CO for about 10 years, which it's like, yeah, herbal everything, herbal medicine, and very, I guess, progressive in a lot of ways. Yeah.

But I didn't really seriously start studying until my mid-twenties, and that time period from... well, I, in my mid to late teen years was really a difficult time in my life; just like, very dark, very self-destructive, painful, and very disconnected. But even in those times I still had my tree friends, like, trees and plants that I would go -- I feel emotional just thinking about it -- just go, and sit with, and talk to, and kind of speak my troubles to. So there was always this kind of outlet, and always this sense of support and safety, and, like, I had elders and teachers around me (trees, plants) that were so lacking in my life, the rest of my life.

In kind of response to this darker time period in my life, I got into meditation and Eastern philosophy and spent many years very deeply entrenched in that world, and that perspective really informs the way that I work with the plants now. A lot of that work that I was doing, I was still kind of working with the same energies. Like, I was doing a lot of work with "wrathful deities" who, in Eastern religions are -- a lot of people are probably familiar with Kali -- it's these kind of archetypal figures that cut heads off and wear necklaces of skulls and drink blood and live in the charnel grounds and dance in the charnel grounds.

**Amber:** What's that?

**Kathryn:** Oh, like, cremation grounds, where the bodies are burning, and then a common image you'll see is these cremation grounds with a deity, you know, deities having sex (*Kathryn laughs*) in this cremation ground with dead bodies. Usually, dead bodies aren't depicted, but it's known that that's what's happening.

**Amber:** This is kind of familiar to me from my religious studies days. So are these mostly, is this mostly an Indian or Hindu thought?

**Kathryn:** It's in Hinduism and in Buddhism. Tibetan Buddhism is the part that I'm familiar with.

**Amber:** Okay.

**Kathryn:** Yeah, and then when I went to herb school, the first weekend I think it was, I ended up meeting a poisonous plant there, and it feels like it's been a continuation of this work of going into these "darker places" but doing so consciously.

[0:17:14]

**Amber:** Were you aware -- first of all, which plant was it? -- and then were you aware, as you felt a pull toward the plant and towards the poisonous plants, like, "Oh this is kind of a continuation of the work I've been doing with these deities?"

**Kathryn:** It was hellebore, which is a really, really, sweet, has these sweet little flowers. It's also called Christmas rose because they bloom in the winter, which is really magical. Like, they'll have flowers and new leaves coming up even as there's snow on the ground.

So I'm trying to remember what your question was... (*Kathryn laughs*)

**Amber:** Were you aware of that as a continuation of what you had been doing before?

**Kathryn:** Yeah, I think I was. It was... it's kind of just like the air I breathe, so I don't think I consciously was like, "Oh this is the same thing as wrathful deities" until later. Especially as I started to meet other types of poisonous plant spirits, who are more wrathful, then hellebore is pretty sweet and gentle.

**Amber:** (*Amber laughs*) You're **also** pretty sweet and gentle. At least that's how you come across. It's funny the way that we perceive people, and the stories that we spin around them, and it's always funny when people tell me, "This is how I think you are," and I'm like, "Oh. Well, that says more about you than it does about me."

[0:19:01]

**Amber:** But I'm curious, like, if you think that you are that way, and if so, like, what was the connection to the wrathful deities? Why was that important to you?

**Kathryn:** Oh, it's such a good question. I do.

I feel the sweetness in myself, and I've actually thought about this a bit because I think it's not a coincidence that I'm this vessel right now that's sharing about poisonous plants. I'm very non-threatening, very gentle, very sweet.

I think it can be hard to hear some of these messages if it's coming from a place of, like, intensity or aggression, even just a mild, subtle aggression. I think that we need that sweetness with the poison.

**Amber:** Yeah. I like that a lot because I can think of some other poison plant teachers who I may have come across early in my herbal wanderings who just, you know, they really, like, project the

image of like, “I wear **black** and, like, I’m a witch!” or you know... just that is going to resonate with some people.

**Kathryn:** Right, right. It’s kind of just like preaching to the choir, and I feel like right now the plants, these specific plants want to have a deeper reach. Not just that they want to, but that it’s, like, necessary in our evolution, that if we’re going to survive as a species, we’re going to have to face our shadows. We’re going to have to acknowledge that we all have trauma. And the plants I feel like are such a safe and loving gateway into that world, the plant spirits.

When I say “safe”, I don’t mean it’s safe to ingest them. (*Kathryn laughs*) Please don’t.

But their spirits feel, to me, very safe, and the students that I’ve had, the people that I’ve guided in doing this work., I’ve never heard anyone have a negative experience or an experience where they felt unsafe with these plants.

[0:21:30]

**Amber:** Yes, remind me, if you think about before we end, to talk about how you’re working with them and that safety piece.

But first I would like to hear more about this trauma piece and how your framework for working with the poisonous plants is going into the darkness and really like being with the trauma and transforming it. Llek you said, we can heal on both the individual and collective levels.

**Kathryn:** Yeah. I mean, everyone, I’m sure, is very aware of the fact that we’re living in very dark times, and kind of scary times.

And I think a big part of that is that we’re now in a culture where there’s not space to integrate traumatic experiences, and that we’re having a lot more traumatic experiences than maybe we would’ve had in previous generations.

Even just, just being aware at all of what’s happening in our world is daily traumatizing, and there’s so many things that we’re constantly being exposed to that it’s overwhelming. Like, the things that we have to hold in our bodies and in our systems. That is just one layer that we’re all exposed to, but then we still have our own interpersonal traumas.

We have “big T” **T**rauma: things like accidents, or war, or death, or assaults, like, the things that we think of as big traumas, and most of us have at least one of those. I would kind of venture to say probably all of us have at least one of those experiences, but then there’s also “little T” **t**rauma, can be a constant chipping away at your sense of self-worth just like what I was speaking about; seeing the news all the time or being advertised to constantly, being told something’s wrong with you, something is wrong with your body, something is wrong with your skin, with the way that you hold your body, with whatever. Just constant, constant advertising: “Something’s wrong with you. Something’s wrong with you.”

Even in herbalism there can be this kind of “You **HAVE** to have these herbs, or you’re gonna die.” (*Kathryn laughs*) Not that dramatic, but “You’re not going to be good enough, and you won’t be loveable. You won’t fit into this world.”

[0:24:36]

**Amber:** Is this trauma aspect of working with poisonous plants something that you learned from others?

Are other people talking about this?

Is this is a common approach to them, or is this specific to your experience and what you've learned?

**Kathryn:** I haven't really seen other people talking about this.

I think that what I have seen with the poisonous plants, the way that people are relating to it tends to be not this, (*Kathryn laughs*) which I understand what that is. I think it can be (*Kathryn sighs*) overwhelming.

I am just imagining people even listening to this, listening to me talk, it's like, there's probably a part of you all who is overwhelmed even just hearing this: "I don't want to hear this. This is too much. I don't have trauma. I'm fine," or wanting to turn it off. That kind of feeling.

So I understand why it's not really talked about.

But I also think that the plant spirit piece is missing. I haven't seen the plant spirit piece worked with much in the poisonous plant community, so I think once you open the gate to plant spirit communication in relation to poisonous plants, I can't see how you couldn't make this connection.

It feels so integral to these plants, to like, their energy, their spirit, to what they're putting out.

[0:26:30]

**Amber:** I am thinking about... so Owen and I watched a video you did, an online course. We weren't able to watch it live, so we watched it later (and we'll talk about those more at the end, too), but so this one was sort of an overview of different poisonous plants, and you also have a course that goes more deeply into some of them, and I know you do plant journeys in that course, but in this one it's really brief; like a minute or so to kind of close your eyes and hold this plant in your mind or something.

So the plant was belladonna, which I have no relationship with, knew nothing about, and it was literally, like, a minute to just sit there, right? And I immediately feel the presence of an ancestor that I work with, ancient, through my matrilineal line, grandmother, and just kind of understood that she was going to be making this introduction, which is a very shamanic figure.

She is just, like, living in between worlds, hardly even really embodied on Earth. She's so interesting, and she just sort of, like, pointed to my belly, which is a part of my body I am currently having issues with since having my second baby three years ago, and I just, like, relaxed into it so quickly and felt this red light sort of glowing in that area. And it was like, wow. That was a pretty powerful experience of just 60 seconds of sitting there.



And you start speaking in the class, and you're like, "Okay, what.." I think what you said was, "What's one word you would use to describe your experience?" and I was thinking, "Embodiment." I just had such a clear sense of, like, "Be in your body, and love your body."

And then you start talking about belladonna, and that's **exactly** like what you had gotten, and so many other people, especially women, you say the message they get when they tune into the spirit of this plant.

So I would just love to hear about your relationship with belladonna and your understanding of this plant.

**Kathryn:** Ohhhh belladonna! So I want to say, first, though, just to speak to that plant spirit connection you had. It still blows my mind doing that, what you did of just one minute of dropping in, but also when we do a full journey which is like 20-30 minutes and just how there's just these threads that so many people experience the same images over and over again. I've talked about this before, so I kind of think this projection of belladonna might be tainted for people coming to the course, potentially. If they've listened to me on other podcasts.

For a long time, people were experiencing belladonna, and this is how I first met belladonna as this woman, like, anthropomorphized woman, in a field dancing by herself alone at night or in the forest. That she had very little interest in interacting with people, and she would usually give, like, a very small amount of advice about embodying femininity or something like that, sexuality, or embodiment. Things like that. And just, to have that same imagery come through so many different people, who didn't know that that was going to happen ahead of time, just... I think about how I think a lot of people think that plant spirit communication is not scientific, but (*Kathryn laughs*) but seeing the results that this happens, there's something there.

I taught a class last weekend where we journeyed with belladonna, and this time there was this thread (no pun intended) with scissors and threads and cutting of things, and that was coming up for almost everyone who shared. And it just clicked in with me that the second person that shared, I was like, "Oh this is the Latin name of belladonna: Atropa belladonna," and Atropa comes from one of the Greek faiths, Atropos, whose job it was to cut the thread of life.

**Amber:** That's amazing. (*Amber laughs*)

[0:31:26]

**Kathryn:** So it's, I don't know. It just blows my mind. It's amazing.

It also just shows me that the plants are so willing and ready to be working with us that they want to share these messages. They want us to be getting this.

And belladonna is usually the first plant that I teach about in any class because I feel like so many people are drawn to datura right now. There's a huge explosion of datura. But I have a feeling that belladonna's coming up. Like, that healing is needed. I think datura is like -- I can't even not cry when I just think about datura, and I know you've talked about datura before on this podcast -- but just a sweet, loving, grandmother, and so needed right now.

Belladonna, you're asking to come back to the initial question of "what's the energy of belladonna?" I feel like belladonna's really here, at this moment in time, to help us, to guide us, to show us where our wounds are around femininity, which is very -- I don't know what word to use, but -- "dishonored" right now in our world.

And by femininity, I don't necessarily mean gender. I mean, like, that crying is not okay. That being embodied is not a part of our culture anymore. Being sensual, like, enjoying the sensuality of life without it having to be sexual, like, that there's a difference. That we can get that kind of pleasure that's pretty much the same kind of pleasure from sex, but just by being alive: from eating, from just enjoying, seeing the beauty all around us, that that helps us become more ourselves. It helps us become more embodied, it helps us to get more grounded here on this earth, enjoying the beauty all around us and sensing it, really feeling it in ourselves and our bodies, and that really needs healing right now.

**Amber:** Yeah, it's just like, so simple, and one small thing in a vast field of things that need healing, but just if that one thing got healed, right? Sort of the collective feminine and then how individual women relate with their own bodies, and their own experience of embodiment, how much could change.

[0:34:20]

**Amber:** Go ahead. Were you going to say something?

**Kathryn:** Well, I was, I also have so many thoughts about Belladonna. Well, one that has been surprising to me, that I have a belladonna flower essence, and most of the people I notice who buy it, the name of the shipping, is male names. Like, it's men buying this medicine, which has been very interesting to me and surprising. It makes me really happy to see that.

The other thing's not... we'll let that go. (*Kathryn laughs*)

**Amber:** I was just going to say, for anyone who has not been blessed to sit in a plant medicine, herbal class type setting where people do either journey with the spirit of a plant or physically sit with the plant. I mean, it happens every time that people have similar experiences. I've never seen it **not** happen in a class that I've done.

And it's so interesting, too, what you're saying about the message or the thing that people are getting with belladonna shifting a little bit with your last class. Like, you're saying, these conscious, sentient beings are willing to work with us, and they're evolving as we're evolving, and the interplay of the human and the plant is evolving.

So just imagine if we were all in a more conscious connection with these plants and what we would be learning, and how we would be guided at this pivotal point in human history.

**Kathryn:** The world would be completely changed.

**Amber:** Yeah, so there's just one more little piece of what we can do.

[0:36:16]

**Amber:** I'm curious, too, if you would like to share just a little bit more about datura because it has been spoken about on this show with Sophia Rose in episode 3, and Mariee Sioux, who learned

about it through Sophia Rose, in episode 49, and yeah, just with this HUGE explosion in popularity with that plant.

**Kathryn:** Well, datura's just a very powerful plant spirit. A lot of people are familiar with datura through Carlos Castaneda, and, unfortunately, a lot of people are familiar with it through hearing horror stories of people trying to get high off of datura and blacking out for days (*Kathryn laughs*).

These are deliriants. A lot of these plants, they can have psychedelic effects, but they're deliriants. It's not like taking psilocybin or LSD. It's not really something that should be used recreationally outside of ceremonial setting and outside of people using it with someone who has experience, like, generational experience; not just your friend that tripped on datura one time and now is showing you how to (*Kathryn laughs*).

I feel like that's important to say because I get a lot of messages from people asking, "How can I trip on datura?" and don't.

**Amber:** Yeah. Can I interject real quick?

I just read a random Facebook comment. I don't think it had anything to do with an herbalist friend or anything, but someone was saying that they were moving, and their husband, just by moving their datura plant into the car, driving it to the new house, and putting it somewhere, had to be hospitalized.

**Kathryn:** Oh my God. From breathing it in while he was in the car?

**Amber:** Yes. Yes! So this is how powerful this plant is.

**Kathryn:** Yeah, I sometimes tell this story: it's Brugmansia, which is very similar to datura. A lot of people think it's datura. It's also known as "Angel's trumpet." It has similar bellflowers, but bigger, and they point downwards. For me, if I just smell a Brugmansia plant, I'm high for the rest of the day. (*Kathryn laughs*)

They're very powerful. I've had many accidental journeys, (*both laugh*) so we need to be really cautious when working with these.

[0:39:01]

**Kathryn:** But, you know, when I started working with poisonous plants I -- because I had a little sense of, had heard stories about datura and how intense it was, I was like, "No, I'm never working with Datura. Datura's not for me. Not interested. No thank you," and Datura was like not having that (*Kathryn laughs*) and just kept showing up over and over again.

I think because I felt so cautious and moved so slowly and respectfully and gently, I've never had anything but pure, loving, grandmother spirit from Datura. I think the reason that datura shows up, and is showing up so much right now, I think it's a beautiful gateway plant into shadow work and into underworld work.

I think it's the only (it's probably the only) poisonous plant that I feel also has this kind of (for lack of a better word) angelic energy. Like, it's not just this, like, underworld-shadow-work-healing

trauma. It has that, but it also has divine, angelic, kind of energy that is uplifting and heart-opening and so sweet and so gentle and so beautiful.

And I think for a culture that is terrified of innerwork (*Kathryn laughs*), datura is the perfect gateway between those two worlds. Like in the self-help and new age world right now, it's all "Light and love, light and love. Just think positive, and you'll only get positive experiences, and if you have something bad happen to you, it's probably because of some negative thought pattern that you have."

And I don't think highly of that perspective at all.

**Amber:** No. (*both laugh*)

**Kathryn:** It's...what happened I think is that there's truth in that, but I think it's bastardized, and turned into pithy slogans that don't really work. It just causes people to repress things, and just be like, "No, I'm fine. Everything's fine."

**Amber:** Yeah, leads to spiritual bypass very quickly.

**Kathryn:** Yes, spiritual bypass and it's very damaging to the person doing it and also to the people around them. It can be. So I think even to a light and love kind of person, Datura is a great opener.

**Amber:** Yeah! So beautiful, too. Like, you cannot be not touched in the presence of that flower.

**Kathryn:** And the smell. Heaven.

**Amber:** Yeah, I messaged you after I smelled it for the first time (*Amber laughs*) because it was the smell that, yeah, it just transported me.

**Kathryn:** Yeah, and in the smell, there's the message is in her smell. It's like divine, sensual, darkness. (*Kathryn laughs*)

**Amber:** Yeah, for me I just immediately had this vision of a wormhole or a portal. Or just, and it was kind of like, umm, this is what's possible here as you deepen into this relationship. But it was only the smell that brought that vision to me. It wasn't looking at it or even sitting very close to it for a while in a meditative space. It was as soon as I stuck my nose in it.

**Kathryn:** That makes me a little teary-eyed.

And I think examples like that prove how strong that spirit is, that particular plant spirit, like, how deep their reach is and how ready they are to work with us. We don't necessarily have to do that much to meet that spirit.

[0:43:52]

**Amber:** I wanted to ask you, so this is a big conversation in herbalism, the gendering of plants and the pronouns we use, of course, related to this larger conversation we're having about human people.

And people have different arguments for different things to say. Like, I still see people using “she.” Of course, it’s mostly she. We hardly refer to any plants as males, which is interesting. Seeing “she” a lot, and I just tend to still say “it.” But then, there’s the school of thought that de... not dehumanizes, but gives this like inanimate...

**Kathryn:** -- objectifying --

**Amber:** ... Yeah, objectifying sense to the plant, and I get that too. So you are one of the many people that are using the gender-neutral “they’re.” So I’m just curious how you came to do that, and, like, why that feels right to you.

**Kathryn:** It was actually henbane that opened that more up to me.

To me, Datura feels, I always meet Datura as a kind of a grandmother, like, a more feminine energy. Belladonna usually experiences more feminine energy. So a lot of times, I use “she” when I’m talking about them.

Lately, I’ve been kind of moving out of that, I think, but it doesn’t feel wrong to me to use “she.”

But henbane was just... I’ve never met henbane in an anthropomorphized form. Henbane always just kind of comes as this -- I don’t know. I don’t even know how to explain it -- this is kind of vision (and henbane is a poisonous plant, in case you don’t know).

But it didn’t feel right to use gender pronouns when talking about henbane because I didn’t have an experience of either masculine or feminine energy from henbane. So sometimes I use “they”, or I use “it” a lot still, which I think about. I want to stop using that, but it’s so engrained and into language, it can be hard.

**Amber:** Yeah.

**Kathryn:** It’s a process: unlearning.

**Amber:** Yeah, and I mean, language and English, especially, is just an imperfect medium. It just is, you know? There’s problems with all of the things we just talked about and ways that they’re imperfect, so I just try to not get too caught up. And if I’m using “it” I’m doing it in a loving way in which I totally recognize the being-ness of this plant.

**Kathryn:** Yeah, I don’t think the plants feel offended by whatever pronouns we use. I think it’s more for the humans hearing it that they want inclusivity, but the plants, they don’t. You know. They’re like...

**Amber:** (*Amber laughs*) They’re like, “Please. We’re beyond language.”

**Kathryn:** Yeah, exactly. It doesn’t make sense, I’m sure, to them. Even the idea of pronouns is like, “I’m not a pronoun.” (*Amber laughs*) .

**[0:47:10]**

**Amber:** So, since you are working with and teaching plant spirits, and people working with poisonous plants will use essences you make, or some people will make creams or topical

solutions, but a big aspect of your work is journeying. It's so useful and helpful but can feel intimidating for people or hard to get there.

For me, it's taken many years of practice and building that muscle. I was really thinking about that when I had that one minute vision. If I hadn't been doing this for a while, and trying to do this with my ancestors and with other plants, I'm not sure if that would've happened so quickly.

So I always... I've talked about that many times on this podcast. Just keep trying. Just keep going there. Keep doing whatever meditation is feeling right for you, and it really is a muscle that you grow.

But you have written about the work that you're doing with the poisonous plants is in part, also, to help revive these lost visionary lineages from your European, and my European ancestors, and these ways that were stamped out.

So, yeah. I guess I just want to hear you talk more about that. For you, has it been a muscle that you've built over time? How do you find that people come into that work?

**Kathryn:** Yeah. It's umm.... like I said, I was talking to plants as a kid, but it was not journeying, really. It was different.

I think that having years and years of meditation practice, before I started journeying with plants, is why I was able to do it so easily. I recommend at the beginning of any class that I teach -- I have us do a meditation. -- I recommend, you know, everybody, if you're going to be working with plant spirits, having a mindful practice I think is really important. For a lot of reasons, but I think it can help, also, not only to quiet down the mind, but it can help you differentiate what's projection and what's the actual plant communication. In that same vein, I also recommend crosstraining, doing inner work with psychotherapy, body-centered psychotherapy, because it can be really easy to project our desires and our wounds onto plants.

Your other thought about the lost shamanic lineages, which I think about a lot, I think that's also part of why poisonous plants are coming in strong right now. It's because -- I'm of European descent, mixed-European, all white. I'm white (*Kathryn laughs*), but all kinds of European descent. -- there's a lot of trauma in that lineage. We've been the traumatizers in modern times, but, you know, where does that -- I think you had another guest on this podcast talking about that; that traumatized people...

**Amber:** Yeah, it's come up a few times, but Lyla June, especially.

**Kathryn:** Yeah, so... and I think it's especially, hmm, I almost want to use the word "dehumanizing." I'm gonna use that word. It might be kind of big, but to be disconnected from our spiritual lineages.

So when Christianity came in and stopped the indigenous religious practices or shamanic practices, there's this major break in our ancestral psyche. We couldn't use these plants anymore.

(*Kathryn exhales*)

I feel really sad saying that.

[0:51:56]

**Amber:** Well, and so many of the poisonous plants that we're talking about, and that you teach about, were specific to Europeans.

**Kathryn:** Yeah, I feel that these plants are reemerging right now because there is such a longing, a lot of cultural appropriation, and there's such a longing to reconnect with entheogenic plants, with shamanic lineages.

Although I would definitely say these plants are entheogenic, their lineages are gone. Like, they're broken. Like, we're not going to get those back. We don't have documentation. There's not, like, lines passing down the knowledge of how these were used, how things were mixed. When you think of ayahuasca, there's a lot of things that go into that brew. There's... and I imagine it was similar with plants in Europe, as well.

So, I think, me, myself, and I see other people, also, trying to figure out how do we work with these plants. I think it's going to be a slow rebuilding process, but as that's being rebuilt -- not to say that plant spirit medicine is less than taking in the plant. I don't believe that at all -- but we have that plant spirit medicine available to us anytime. We don't need to even have the physical plant with us. We don't even have to have ever seen a plant.

A lot of times when I lead my journeys, most of my classes are online, so I'm not in-person with people, and we do the journey before we talk about the plant. A lot of times people have never seen what belladonna looks like, and then they have journeys where they still receive the medicine of belladonna.

[0:53:58]

**Amber:** So I think you have a pretty active dream life as well, and (which is not surprising) at least that you have had some big dreams and some plant visitations in your dreams.

You specifically mentioned *Amanita muscaria*. I would love to hear more about that.

**Kathryn:** Oh. (*Kathryn laughs*) I also feel so much love for that little mushroom!

So that was similar to *datura*. I was like, "I'm never working with this mushroom. It makes people really sick, and I'm not touching it."

And then I dreamt about it (*Kathryn laughs*) repeatedly. It kept showing up in my dreams. I would have all these dreams where I was out foraging and gathering these mushrooms; gathering them, but with the knowledge that I don't know how to use this, and I think I finally decided to work with this mushroom, *Amanita muscaria* (also known as fly agaric), when I had this dream where my real-life garden gnome gave me two dinner plate-sized *Amanita* caps and told me it was safe to ingest them.

But that mushroom, they show up in my dreams a lot in all different kinds of ways. I mean, all of these plants do, but I think the *Amanita muscaria* the most.

And I think it makes sense that that happens because a lot of... when you are actually taking the physical mushroom, the, I guess I'll use the word "shamanic" experience with them often comes through sleep; through prophetic dreams that you have. I suspect that you're not really asleep, but that's how it's described.

So you take this medicine. You have an intention of "I want to understand something. I want to get more clarity about something. I want to meet another layer of myself," and then you inevitably fall asleep, and through the dreams, you have images that give you your answer. That's one traditional way of working with them.

So it makes sense, then, that they would show up in my dreams.

**Amber:** I'm just having a really neat experience right now. I'm not usually playing around online when I'm talking to someone, but I was like, "Oh yeah, what does the angel's trumpet look like?" Which, that's such a beautiful name, too, for that plant. What was it again?

**Kathryn:** Brugmansia.

**Amber:** And then I was like, "What does belladonna look like again?" And then there's this gorgeous piece of art, and I click on it, and it was my friend that painted it, Ben Vierling. He lives here in Nevada City.

**Kathryn:** Oh, I know his paintings! He did the cover of this book about poisonous plants.

**Amber:** Yes.

**Kathryn:** By Daniel Schulke?

**Amber:** I'm looking at "Veneficium."

**Kathryn:** Yeah, yeah. With all the daturas.

**Amber:** Coming out of a human heart. (*Amber laughs*) These are gorgeous! He also painted the cover of Joanna Newsom's album Y's, which is amazing. Yeah, he's amazing. I'll put links to his work and this photo, probably, in this episode on my website.

[0:57:57]

**Amber:** So then you did go on to work with Amanita?

**Kathryn:** Yes.

**Amber:** (*Amber laughs*) Which I still have never done, and it's, being that I've never met in the wild growing. I literally think, like, all the time when that day is going to happen, when I'm finally going to come across 'cause it doesn't grow here. But someday.

**Kathryn:** You might have some variety there.



**Amber:** We do, and I've never met the other variety either, but it's not the red, not the iconic Amanita.

**Kathryn:** If... they're very similar. I can't remember which one grows in California, but they're supposed to have... I notice I'm hesitant a lot to talk about anything involving ingestion of these plants because I get worried about people misusing.

**Amber:** Oh yeah, be careful with amanita! (*both laugh*)

**Kathryn:** I've never heard of -- I don't think there's been reported deaths, but they can cause damage to the body, and also just be generally unpleasant if you're not using them intelligently.

**Amber:** Yeah, I talked about this in episode 6 with Amy Woodruff, for anyone who's interested.

Yeah, and it's, yeah, I'm interested in ingesting that mushroom someday in a very careful way, but more, it's almost just the mythic and iconic love for it. All my favorite children's books, and the association with Santa Claus and Christmas time, and having Northern European ancestry, and just really... I can't wait to finally meet it.

**Kathryn:** Yeah, I hope you do soon.

**[1:00:01]**

**Amber:** So, let's before we close out and talk a little bit about the safety of these plants, I really love that, like I said, your Instagram name is Persephone's Path (@persephonespath). It so fits with what you're doing. I love talking to people about the myths that they resonate with.

So what is it about the Persephone story that aligns with you and your path?

**Kathryn:** Well, I think (*Kathryn laughs*) just from the first time I heard that myth as a kid it always just stuck with me. I think a lot of people have myths like that; those myths that just stay in your mind and you just know it, and the Persephone myth was that for me.

I went (*Kathryn laughs*), I've had **many** Persephone journeys, like we all do. We're all having these journeys. I much prefer the model of the Persephone's journey versus the Hero's Journey. Like, the Hero's Journey where you XYZ and you win. The Persephone's journey is cyclical; that we have periods of light; we have times of dark; we have times where everything's, like, flowing beautifully and it's springtime, and there's new blooms, and life feels fresh and good and renewed.

Inevitably we have times where things are painful and difficult and we experience loss and it's just the natural cycle of life. The natural ebb and flow of life, and I think we all need that medicine. Speaking about light and love, it's half of our life experience, roughly, is that springtime, that light. It's inevitable that we're also going to have difficult times.

I guess that myth, it wasn't really prominent for me during really hard times as a teenager, but later it helped me to kind of sift through and see that that was okay. That was just a part of my process, and just a part of my becoming, and it informs so much of my work. Whereas, if I took the notion of the Hero's Journey, or a "Light and Love" approach, then I would be considered, like, damaged.

Like, oh I did something wrong, or something's inherently wrong with me. I had "bad karma", and it's just not true.

We all have these difficult times, and it's totally normal. It's part of being human. It's part of being alive, and Persephone shows us that. That we can still blossom and bloom even in the darkest time of the year.

**Amber:** It's a reminder of the cyclical nature of everything; of the seasons and of our own lives and our inner experiences of living.

**Kathryn:** Yeah, and like any good myth, it can be interpreted a million different ways.

**[1:04:01]**

**Amber:** Yeah, I think it was two years ago, now, my now 13-year-old daughter was Persephone in the play at school, and I was just, like, crying the entire time because of these elements of change, cyclicity, dark, light, and then her mother desperately trying to find her and bring her back, and you know, my mom had just died at that time, and I just love my daughter so much...

So this mother-daughter element was something that I just really tuned into when she was in that play, and it's really stuck with me since then.

**Kathryn:** Yeah, that's an important part of the story for a lot of people. Actually, I had my mom -- She had never come to any class I taught or anything, and she came to one class earlier this year in the poisonous plant class. I was teaching it in-person in New York, the six-week course that I do, and week 3 is about the Persephone myth, and she came to that class.

So she got to hear me tell the story, and it was kind of surreal to have my mom there.

**Amber:** That's so cool.

**[1:05:24]**

**Amber:** So I think, you know, people hear "poison" and I think that a lot of -- something I didn't realize is that these plants have different effects on the body. Like, Digitalis or Foxglove stops the heart. Poison Hemlock slowly paralyzes the nervous system going up the spine, so you die because your lungs can't expand anymore.

**Kathryn:** (*Kathryn laughs*) That's the one that I don't want to die from.

**Amber:** Exactly! I mean, it's so funny, because when I was first getting into herbal medicine and just thinking about the state of the world, the thought I sometimes have is "What would be the best way to kill myself if it was that or some horrible death?" And I was like, "Oh, I'm an herbalist now. Poison Hemlock would be cool," you know?

I was trying to teach myself how to identify it so I could harvest some, and then I learned about how it kills. And then I was like, "Oh, nevermind." (*Amber laughs*)

**Kathryn:** Not that one.

Go with like... well, nevermind. I'm not going to give you any ideas (*both laugh*), but I've thought about that, like, "Well, if I **had** to die, which one would I use as a poison?"

[1:06:26]

**Amber:** So, I just wanted to put that out there.

And that's just a really interesting way to learn about the plant, too. Like, digitalis affects the cardiovascular system. Poison hemlock - the nervous system.

So... yeah, go ahead.

**Kathryn:** Can I say something else about that? What's also interesting is that the digitoxin is in, like, the leading heart medication.

When we use these medicines in really small doses, like, in the poisonous nightshade plants, like datura, henbane, and belladonna, and brugmansia, and mandrake, they have tropane alkaloids, and those are used for things, all kinds of things in "modern medicine"; like, pupil dilation for drying out the mucous membranes before surgery, for motion sickness, for all kinds of things.

So in the right dose it's medicine. Literally. Physically. (*Kathryn laughs*)

**Amber:** Right, and then nightshades also includes tomatoes and eggplants, common food plants for us.

**Kathryn:** Tobacco.

**Amber:** Yeah, yeah. Umm. So just, a final word on safety: if you want to be working with these plants, don't take them as tinctures.

Don't eat them.

Don't make a tea.

You can work with the spirit of the plant, and you know, it's so important what you say, the plant doesn't have to be physically present to do that.

Or essences, like the ones that you make, or the essences some people make and sell like salves and creams. I've never done that.

Is that something you do?

**Kathryn:** Yeah, yeah. It's safe.

It's not something you want to overdo or do everyday, but yeah, there's oils and ointments made specifically with those nightshade plants that people use for pain management for insomnia for headaches for menstrual cramps. Belladonna is great for menstrual cramps. Nerve pain. All kinds of stuff.

[1:08:40]

**Amber:** So yeah, let's end by telling people about your online courses and your shop and like, anything else, where they can find you.

**Kathryn:** Aww I don't want to end.

**Amber:** (*Amber laughs*) I know.

**Kathryn:** Like, we just started!

**Amber:** Totally. But this is why your courses are so great because people can really go deep into these things.

**Kathryn:** Yeah, thank you.

So I teach a 6 week course, one is happening right now, but I don't know if it will still be going when this comes out, but I'll teach another one early next year, where each week we go into one or two poisonous plants, and we talk about the history, the lore, the mythology, the medicinal uses, and we do plant spirit journey every week.

And I also do a one-day workshop, which is a couple of hours, which is what you and Owen did, where we just do a brief overview of a couple of different plants and introduce the philosophy more deeply of plant spirit communication and poison as medicine, which is essentially what we've been talking about today, but we go a little more deeply into it.

**Amber:** And then you have your shop.

**Kathryn:** Yes, and I sell a lot of different poisonous plant essences. Which, essences are really safe. You don't have to worry about poisoning yourself with them. It's a good way to work with the spirit of the plant, and yeah I don't sell any ointments or oils, but essences and other non-poisonous medicines as well.

And I'm on Patreon as well, where I do classes every month, video classes, and tarot readings on there, and herbal medicine packages and things like that.

**Amber:** And it's all under the name Persephone's Path, if people are looking for you.

**Kathryn:** Yeah, and on Instagram I'm @persephonespath. My Patreon is Kathryn Solie. It's interesting. It's so hard. This is like the hardest part to talk about, promote myself.

*(both laugh)*

**Amber:** Yeah, it gets easier with time I've found. And just trusting that people are, like, with you because they're interested in what you're doing. They want you to promote yourself so they can find more of your work.

Thank you, Kathryn. I'm really excited for myself to keep learning from you and just going deeper with the plants and with my own abilities into having these journeying experiences. So thank you so much.

**Kathryn:** Thank you, Amber.

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

## [Closing]

**[1:11:41]**

**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 past episodes, my blog, handmade herbal medicines, and a lot more at [MythicMedicine.love](https://www.mythicmedicine.com). We've got reishi, lion's mane, elderberry, mugwort, yarrow, redwood, body oils, an amazing sleep medicine, heart medicine, earth essences, so much more. More than I can list there. [MythicMedicine.love](https://www.mythicmedicine.com).

While you're there, check out my quiz "[Which Healing Herb is your Spirit Medicine?](#)" 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 and the medicine that you already carry that you can bring to others.

If you love this show, please consider supporting my work at [Patreon.com/MedicineStories](https://www.patreon.com/MedicineStories). It is so worth your while. There are dozens and dozens of killer rewards there, and I've been told by many folks that it's the best Patreon out there. We've got e-books, downloadable PDFs, bonus interviews, guided meditations, giveaways, resource guides, links to online learning, and behind-the-scenes stuff and just so much more. The best of it is available at the two-dollar a month level. Thank you.

And please subscribe in whatever app you use, just click that little subscribe button and review on iTunes. It's so helpful, and if you do that you just may be featured in a listener spotlight in the future.

The music that opens and closes the show is Mariee Sioux. It's from her beautiful song "Wild Eyes." Thank you, Mariee.

And thanks to you all. I look forward to next time!