



Medicine Stories Podcast

Episode 64 with Ayana Young

When We Slow Down, Earth Heals

March 20, 2020

[0:00:00]

(Excerpt from today's show by Ayana Young)

I do think that how we are responding to the crisis is part of the crisis, and I don't think that we can solve the problems of corporate capitalism, imperialism, colonialism, -ism, -ism, -ism, all down the line with the same type of rushed, urgent mentality that created them in the first place.

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

[Intro]

[0:00:29]

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

I am Amber Magnolia Hill, and this is Episode 64, which happens to be one of my favorite numbers, and today I am sharing my interview with one of my favorite people and fellow podcasters, Ayana Young.

Woo! This is a big one, of course. I am releasing this on March 19th it looks like in the— no, March 20th, oh, right on the Spring Equinox and my friend, Suuzi's birthday. Happy birthday, Suuz! — but right in the midst of coronavirus, self-quarantines, big unknown, big question mark, what the future holds.

When Ayana and I recorded this a few weeks ago, it wasn't what it is yet. That was in late February. It hadn't hit the States like it has; everything has shifted in the cultural landscape since then. And yet, what we talk about, and what Ayana focuses on in her work and in the For the Wild podcast is all related to this. And this is something that Stephen Harrod Buhner made me aware of when I first read his book, *Herbal Antivirals*, which I highly recommend. I've been recommending it for

years. Stephen was on Episode 8 of this podcast, and we did talk about viral pandemics. We did talk about everything that's going on now, two and a half years ago.

I hadn't realized until I read his work that viral pandemics are really a reflection of greater ecological instability: overpopulation, ecosystem disruption, deforestation, climate change, income inequality, fragile and non-local global supply chains, etcetera. They all intertwine and converge to create viral pandemics and/or make them worse.

So these are all things Ayana covers in her work so brilliantly, and I'm just feeling like the timing is so right with this episode coming out right now because folks are waking up, right? This is one of those moments in a species or a culture's history where everything changes, and that's good. In a really good way, I saw a post on Instagram, the poster's name is just Holly:

This is a new normal. It will not go back to the way it was, and that is a statement of hope.

It's just exactly, exactly how I'm feeling, and I hope you are, too. Another amazing post, this woman her name was Gina Mayor on Facebook:

Since the lockdown, Venice's canals have become crystal clear; Italy's coasts have dolphins coming nearer and nearer; Japan now has deer roaming free in the streets; and Thailand, the same with monkeys. China has record-breaking pollution cuts. The Earth has already begun showing signs of amazing things that are happening in the absence of human pollution. What if, and hear me out, what if the entire human population used this as an opportunity to restart society on a greener, more environmentally conscious foot? What we're seeing in the span of a couple of days is amazing.

[0:04:18]

Amber: And so, as you'll hear on this interview, a few weeks ago Ayana brought this idea to my attention that when we slow down, the Earth slows down. I truly thought she was speaking metaphorically when that sentence first came out of her mouth, but then she explained exactly what she means, and oh no, it is **literally** true, and we are seeing that **right now** through this pandemic! And it is so beautiful, and it gives me so much hope. I really am just so excited to share this interview with you.

I'm thinking about just what a huge question mark everything is right now in this liminal space that we're all in together, and really, like, we're all in it together. This is truly the most unified that the collective global consciousness has ever been and while in that there's a lot of differing opinions and different conspiracy theories and misinformation, at the same time, paradoxically, at the same time, we're all living this big shared experience together which is beautiful, and, again, gives me hope.

I hope that we are realizing how interconnected we really all are, and that it helps us to take the bigger threats, like climate change, facing us as a species and as a planet more seriously right now. In the outro to the episode with Charles Eisenstein, I spoke at length about human hubris and our seeming unwillingness to learn from the past, and how we tend to think that we are just the peak not only of all species on earth, but of our species; that **we're** the smartest, and we're the most special humans that ever lived, and we're superior, and, you know, those things that happened in the past, the Great Flu Pandemic of 1918 (which, by the way, was much worse than this as far as

fatality rate), and even, like, the Dust Bowl, the Great Depression, wars - we think we're above those or beyond those, and we're not. In fact, we're more vulnerable today than any past generation because of the disharmony that we've created on the planet.

[0:06:43]

Amber: If you would like to check out more of just my thoughts and what I'm really paying attention to through this coronavirus pandemic, I have a coronavirus highlight on Instagram, so I'll put a link to that in the show notes. My Instagram name is @MythicMedicine, and I'm just really consciously sharing things that I think are important right now. A lot of those are focused, of course, on herbal medicine and staying well, but then also really focusing on these bigger themes of the lessons of this time and what we can do with those.

If you are one of the many people interested in what's going on with our extra potent elderberry elixirs, you can imagine there's quite a high demand. We're doing our best to pump out new batches. They're selling out in about three hours when we list them. Really, what I've decided I'm not announcing it anymore through the newsletter or even through Instagram (maybe I will at some point), but you'll just have to check out the website, mythicmedicine.love, click on the **Shop**, and you will be rewarded for going the extra trouble of actually getting to the website yourself. And that also kind of slows down the flow of sales and lets us stay on top of shipping, which has been ... we've just swamped which I recognize is a very different economic-financial place that we're in than a lot of people are right now.

So we will continue to try to get new batches of elderberry elixir out, and when those are sold out we do have elderberry tincture and mushroom medicines and herbal body oils for your nervous system. Hopefully, you're really focusing on food mostly, and I've been posting about that, you know. The kind of foods that we are looking at that we are consuming right now and the kind of foods we are **not** consuming right now.

So these are also in highlights.

[0:08:47]

Amber: So this Patreon for this episode, bless Ayana and the For the Wild team for offering three different goodies for the patrons at Patreon.com/medicinstories. These are all, of course, available at the two-dollar-a-month level. They are offerings that were first given to the For the Wild Patreon community. So, check out their Patreon as well. It's beautiful as is their podcast.

The first is a bonus clip from one of their favorite episodes with Donna Haraway, which aired last summer. That episode was entitled "On Staying with the Trouble." So this is a 10-minute bonus from that, and it's amazing. She's an amazing woman, and I feel super honored to be able to share her extra ideas with you all.

The second bonus, these are all gonna be in the same post there on Patreon, is a transcript from another remarkable episode. This is probably my favorite episode For the Wild has ever done. It's with Dr. Bayo Akomolafe, the episode is called "Slowing Down in Urgent Times." So you just have to listen to that, and then, as I've spoken about before on this podcast, I really enjoy taking in ideas that are important to me in multiple ways. So being able to listen to that podcast, and then also read this transcript is such a gift.

And on that note, I have somehow never shared that we have transcripts available now for about half of the Medicine Stories episodes, mostly the latter half, but a few from the early days have been transcribed, such as Episode 8 with Stephen Harrod Buhner because it's been so popular. Lovely woman named Meghan has been doing an incredible job transcribing, so yeah. They're at the website, MythicMedicine.love in with each different episode's post.

And the third offering there at Patreon.com/MedicineStories is a link to their exclusive For the Wild Moon Phase playlist. This is number 4. It is a soulful and atmospheric monthly music playlist curated by their music supervisor, Carter Lou McElroy, and I am really, really enjoying it. I'm not just saying that. It's perfect for these self-quarantine times, and I do not do a great job of seeking out new music on my own. Mostly I listen to what my 13 year old is listening to as far as new music, but this is much more my vibe. (Amber laughs) So those are all there.

[0:11:33]

Amber: I know so many of you deeply adore and admire Ayana, and those of you who don't already are about to. So it was really an honor to have an opportunity to get some of her personal medicine stories, get beyond her work in the world and her brilliance as an interviewer on her podcast, and get a little deeper.

Ayana Young is a podcast and radio personality specializing in intersectional environmental and social justice, deep ecology and land-based restoration. Graduating summa cum laude with an undergraduate degree from Loyola Marymount University including a double major in Art History and Theology and a minor in Philosophy, as well as education through Columbia University in Ecology and Eastern Religions and Restoration Ecology at the University of Victoria, Young has a strong academic background at the intersections of ecology, culture, and spirituality. She was studying at Columbia when the Occupy Wall Street movement began and amid the burgeoning resistance in Zuccotti Park, she co-created the Environmental Working Group.

Post-graduation, dividends from her early career allowed Young to conserve 500 acres of coast redwood and salmon habitat in Northern California, where she has been living for over five years. Living for the first years, in a tent with no electricity or running water while she established a homestead, and broke ground on a native species nursery and research center, including the establishment of the 1 Million Redwoods Project, which was acclaimed as the most-backed farm project in Kickstarter history.

A budding filmmaker, Young is no stranger to the medium having spent her childhood as a prolific working actor, working alongside the likes of Steven Spielberg and Meryl Streep. Young's debut film, When Old Growth Ends is an ode to the complex interweaving of the irreplaceable Tongass National Forest during its last stand as a distinctly wild place in Southeast Alaska. As Director, Producer, Narrator and Featured Cast Member of the film, Young wore many hats in midwifing this compelling and poetic story of struggle and beauty surrounding the Tongass National Forest.

Young leans into her vast experience on the other side of the camera, along with her intersectional approach to ecological restoration to guide her process as the Founder and Executive Director of millennial media organization and nonprofit For The Wild. Learning

deeply from the critical dialogue she's shared with over 100 guests on the For The Wild podcast, including Chris Hedges, Sylvia Earle, Vandana Shiva, Jill Stein, Winona La Duke, Terry Tempest Williams and other thought leaders (including some of the brightest activists, political thinkers, and scientific minds of our time) Young approaches her mission with For The Wild with critical thinking, deep reverence and artistry.

- Taken from Ayana's Bio on [For the Wild's website](#)

And a little paragraph [here](#) about the podcast:

At For the Wild, we discuss the critical ideas of our time and parlay them into action for the defense and regeneration of natural communities.

Key topics include:

- *The rediscovery of wild nature*
- *Ecological renewal and resistance*
- *And healing from the trauma of individualistic society*

Join host, Ayana Young, as we dive deep into Ancient Forests, align with the struggles and ways of Earth-based people, and rekindle the mysteries of intuition. We will join today's brightest visionaries in this momentous work of reimagining a world where humanity can find it's way back into the web of life.

[0:15:16]

Amber: This is the work of our times, y'all, to reweave the connections the previous that previous generations of humans and settler-colonialism and toxic capitalism have destroyed; connections with one another, other species, and the Earth. We are not meant to be zombie consumers, brainwashed by the television. Seriously, please, please, get rid of your TV — and this slowing down that is being forced upon us right now is just such an amazing opportunity.

So Ayana and I both live in the woods. (*Amber laughs*) She, like, lives way deep in the forest, so the connection was a little shaky. By the time you hear this, my genius sound guy, Matt, will have cleaned it up a little bit, but it's still probably going to be imperfect, but that's okay. We embrace imperfection on the Medicine Stories podcast.

One final note is that this week I am a part of a really, really beautiful new offering called [Matriarch Collective](#). We go behind the scenes with 29 world-renowned women leaders and visionaries. We'll dive deep into entrepreneurship, conscious parenting, ancestral healing, sacred sexuality, ritual design, herbalism, photography, abundance mindset, food as medicine, and more.

So matriarch collective is a virtual village and mastermind community for women creators. Created by Katia Nova of Nurturing Novas and the *Honey Talks* podcast. It's kicking off with an incredible week of inspiring talks, giveaways, and surprises on March 24, and you can join for free from anywhere.

I will, of course, have the link down in my show notes.

[0:17:14]

Amber: My interview with Katia is entitled *From Plant Allies to Podcast and Patreon: How to Reconnect with the innate Earth wisdom that lives in your bones, and build a brand on your terms*. So this is the most honest behind the scenes look at my business that I've ever given. Umm, I cried twice throughout the interview. It was really, really potent and beautiful. My usual right-side pain pattern was activated when we started and by the end, it had completely disappeared just sitting in this beautiful two-person community with this woman and diving deep into these topics. We get into so much more than what it says in that title as well; a lot of ancestral healing and matrilineal connections and pelvic healing and so much more.

And at the end of that interview, I share the one thought, the one thought that has been an anchor for me when I start to get panicky or sort of start to spin out in fear. This thought has been keeping me grounded.

There are three other women who have been guests on this show that are a part of MAtriarCh Collective whose exclusive interviews you can see and hear there:

- **Rachelle Garcia Seliga:** Her talk is called *A Matriarch's Rites of Passage: Emerge Empowered and Exalted*
- **Yaya Erin Rivera Merriman:** *Plant Spirit Medicine for Challenging Times: From a Kitchen Witch and Taino Priestess, Artist, and Mother*
- And **Emilee Saldaya:** *Matriarchy in Action: Why Living in Birthing in Your Power is the Most Dangerous Thing You Can Do.*
- Also, one upcoming podcast guest, **Nadine Artemis:** *Your Mighty Microbiome: The Vibrational Medicine of Plants and Renegade Beauty Secrets from a Modern-Day Matriarch*

And there's many more, what, 25 more talks in that in all sorts of categories of interest.

[0:19:22]

Amber: You know, it's just something I really learned from my first teacher, Kami McBride, who's been on three previous episodes of this podcast, is that when women gather, magic happens. And truly this is much-needed medicine in these unprecedented times of social distancing and uncertainty. So, instead of panic, let's make a conscious decision to grow and lift each other up, and you know, since you're self-quarantined at home anyway, here is something free that you can do to fill up your time with something positive.

Again, join for free from anywhere, and the link for Matriarch Collective will be in the show notes.

This was a very long intro. Thank you for sticking with me. I really just have so much love for all of you and for every being on the planet right now. Just... we're all learning and growing together in this moment, and I find a lot of beauty and hope with that.

So without further ado, let's listen to this interview with Ayana Young.

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

[Interview Begins]

[0:20:36]

Amber: Hi Ayana, welcome to Medicine Stories!

Ayana: Hi Amber! It is so, so good to be here with you, and see you, and just be present with you. I'm so glad we're doing this.

Amber: I am feeling the same. It's been years since we've been together in the physical. Like, 2016, I think, probably at Spirit Weavers?

Ayana: Yeah. I think you're right.

Amber: And then the year before as well. We met in person for the first time the year before, and I think we first connected on Instagram.

Ayana: Hmm. Yeah, I'm feeling little pins and needles about that time, when I think back to meeting you.

Amber: Aww.

Ayana: It was such a transitional time in life and yeah. It's crazy to think of all of the things that have happened since then.

Amber: Yeah! You were really — you've grown so much in your offerings to the world and what you're doing since then. But I mean, that seed was so strong back then, too. Your vitality and passion were so obvious.

So I was thinking, and I've always thought this, spending those many weeks with you over those two years was really fun. You're a really joyful and effervescent person, and I'm not sure that always comes through in your podcast because you're so damn intelligent (*Amber laughs*). In the podcast, like the questions, you're just so well-spoken and even-keeled, but you have this beautiful effervescence about you that is so lovely to see in a person. A lot of us are missing that or left it behind in childhood I think.

So I've always wondered about your childhood and how you grew up. Was there anything in your childhood that predicted what you'd be doing now, and just the general "tell us about your path" question?

[0:22:32]

Ayana: Well, thank you for saying that; that I was effervescent.

And I do feel like I'm still a very passionate person, but there are times that I don't feel as bubbly as I'd like to; just the heaviness and the day-to-day BS. On a day like today, it feels really good to hear that reflection and tap back into those other parts of my self.

I feel like, you know, just as everybody else, we all have however many millions of facets of who we are. *(Ayana laughs)*

Gosh! The childhood questions - there's so much there, but I definitely wasn't raised to be an activist or an Earth-defender, or even to be a plant person *(Ayana laughs)* or "dot-dot-dot".

Any of the things that I feel really connected to, who I am today, wasn't the way that I was raised. I was definitely raised to be ambitious and to be strong, and to be able to communicate and connect with people, and I think there are little strings of my childhood that have prepared me for being able to do the podcast and being able to do the Redwoods Project.

I think... I remember thinking back to these memories of my mom when we'd be going on our adventures together, and she'd always tell me to "push my belief button." She'd be like, "Take a deep breath and just push your 'belief' button and have the confidence that you will be able to do it."

I think that part of my childhood really stuck with me because even when I've been so nervous to do things that I've never done before — like the podcast, honestly, everything that I've done up until this point that people know me for — these are all things that I really leaped into with complete uncertainty and faith, and there was no rule book; there was no guidebook. *(Ayana laughs)* There was really not a lot to ground myself on other than that inner confidence that I think my childhood (and really, my mom) instilled in me.

[0:24:50]

Ayana: But yeah, I'm definitely not activist-nature-background, but I always did have a feeling that there was something else out there that was calling me, and that consumer-capitalism was not right, and it did not feel good, and it was intuitional. It was like a I remember feeling lethargic a lot as a child, and when I was in the endless suburbs of Southern California and feeling, yeah, claustrophobic, lethargic; like a lack of deep, deep connection, and I am a very intensely connective person. *(Ayana laughs)*

I was with a friend the other day, and I think they maybe had said that I was "emotional" and I was like, "Wait, I am?" and then I almost laughed at myself. Like, of course, I'm a highly emotional person, but I never really think of myself like that.

I think for those of us who are highly emotional, when we're *(audio unclear @22:48)*... so disconnected from intimacy and community and the earth, it feels like crap. And so, I did always have this kind of underlying feeling that there has to be something else than this life that I see around me.

So I've been a real truthseeker. I've been... I have these rebellious, revolutionary sides of me that I always fed, and I never shied away from going against the grain, or being outspoken, or just going for whatever I believed in. And I think, in indirect ways, my childhood has helped me do that.

(Amber laughs)

That's a little bit. I know it's really broad, but yeah.

Amber: "We'll push the belief button!" That's amazing! I'm never going to forget that now! And that is what you have to do. When you're building something, you just have to pretend like you know what you're doing *(Amber laughs)* and push forward.

Believe.

Ayana: Yeah.

[0:27:03]

Amber: That's beautiful.

And so, I know at some point in 2011 you were at Occupy. What drove you there and how has your work since then grown from that? Was that kind of your initiation into an activist life?

Ayana: Yeah, well, I would say in my high school years (and I went to a performing arts high school), so in terms of also having a type of confidence to perform, I've been trained for, really, my whole life in that type of "Push your believe button: Go on stage and sing or do something silly and just be okay with whatever happens" and then kind of get into that — what do they... We used to call it something. The ZONE. Yeah, getting into "the **zone**." — and I kind of think we all know that feeling inside of us.

In high school, as I was doing the performing arts stuff, I had a lot of — I feel really grateful for that time because I had a lot of friends that were also pushing the boundaries of the convention highschool way of being. A lot of us were just wild, out-of-the-closet at a very young age, and really feeling safe to be our netty-selves in front of each other.

So there was one friend, Lorna, who we would hang out after school because we rode the bus together, and we'd go home and we'd watch Michael Moore documentaries, *Super-Size Me*, and we would look at *Adbusters* together, and that was kind of the moment where I started to feel those little openings of, "Wow, the world is really f-ed up, and I'm really into this!" Not that I'm into the world being f-ed up, but I'm into being angry about it. I'm into being pissed off about what's happening.

And her and I, I remember, gosh. I was 16, because I had just gotten my driver's license, and we were driving around this little neighborhood that we lived in, and there was two guys at the bus stop, and I rolled down my window — and now, this was during the, gosh, this was the first Bush-Cheney elections, and so there was, you know, it was an intense time in the country with the Presidential elections (which it will be again soon) — and I rolled down my window, and I said, "Hey! You guys like Bush?!" *(Ayana laughs)*, and I just did not even realize how that sounded *(Amber laughs)*. It could be taken a few different ways. *(both laugh)*

"Hey, you guys like Bush?!"

And then they were like "WHAT?!"

And I said, “Are you into the President or whatever?” I say.

And they’re like, “NO!”

And then I’m like “Okay, well then get in the car!”

And so, then me and Lorna, and these two random dudes were going around stealing Bush-Cheney signs off people’s lawns. And then we had this big bonfire where, actually, the cops came up, but luckily we kind of hid the signs before they saw what we were doing.

[0:30:13]

That’s just like a little memory from the beginning of who I have grown into being. And then I’d say since those years in high school, I still follow those threads, but when I went to undergrad I was studying philosophy, and art history, and theology. I thought I was gonna keep studying some type of performance art or theatrical something or other, but I really didn’t want to do that. I was... I have a very curious mind and constant need. I’m a researcher. I’m a digger. I’m, like, I can’t get enough. And not even to say that I’m looking for answers or I’m looking for solutions because it’s not even that. I’m actually just really curious about life.

And though I was in undergrad and I was super fascinated with religion, which I had never. I grew up really secular. We never celebrated any of the holidays other than just the consumer part of it. And I had never really studied art or philosophy in those ways. So, even though I was studying things that weren’t about activism or weren’t about the environment, I was able to understand the humanities through this other lens, which was through this revolutionary lens.

I remember when I was studying art history of, let’s say Italy, and I was like, oh my gosh. It took **all** of the old-growth forests of Europe to create these monuments, and was this really worth it? Was it really worth having the Sistine Chapel or the big — you know, I don’t even remember all the building names — and I’m like “Was this worth taking down all the mountains for it to have these relics of the past?”

And so there were these deeper questions that would come up, and even in the art market, I was like this is... the art market is this big fetishized, consumer-capitalist model that some people get to put their money in, and that’s why those people happen to be in the museums. It’s not because they were the best artists; it was because this was a system. This was a corrupt system even back then and even now in who gets to be on the walls and who doesn’t.

[0:32:20]

Ayana: And so, even when I was studying the humanities, I was still always questioning why? Why? Why? Why? And how was this creating suffering in other parts of the world?

Then I had graduated, and I was really confused, and then I was like, you know, I really want to study environmental science. And so, by a real fluke, I got into Columbia, and I honestly don’t know how (*Ayana laughs*). So I was so happy because I got to go to New York City, and all my musical theater friends were out there already. So I started studying at Columbia, but honestly, I was so bored studying there. I was like, “What the hell am I even learning?! This is not... we’re not talking

about intersectional justice. We're not talking about colonialism. How are we even talking about environmental science if we're not talking about all these other things? This doesn't make sense!"

And I kept just sitting in these classrooms, and I also studied things like Buddhism and neuroscience, and I was studying things that seemed really interesting, but they weren't, to me, getting at the core. They weren't getting at that fiery ball that I needed to be touching all the time.

[0:33:27]

Ayana: So Occupy started, and I was like, "Whoa, what's this? This seems interesting."

So I remember I got on my little bike with my dog, Wooshy-Bear in my basket. We were going through downtown Manhattan, and I got to Zuccotti Park and this was the first week and it was pretty mellow still, and you could still move around the park, and there was people, but it wasn't so jampacked at that point.

I remember talking to people, and it, honestly, Amber, it was the first time, except from my talks with Lorna, that I was actually with people who were as enraged, and passionate, and fiery, and interested, and curious about these things that had been, gosh, just **burning** inside of me all of these years. And I was like, "Oh my gosh. There are other people who want to talk about these things."

Because before, anytime I would bring up my anger of what was happening in the world, whether that was pollution or whatever I thought about at the time (which definitely isn't as deep as what it is for me now), I remember hearing, "Ugh, here comes Ayana, the one who's going to be a bummer at the party." Nobody really wanted to listen. My parents didn't want to listen. My family wasn't interested, so I didn't have people who were willing to sit with me for four hours and talk about industrialized farming and being so ramped up at it.

So Occupy was this place where I felt so much of myself come alive because I felt seen, and I felt like I was seeing other people in our essence and what we actually really cared about rather than what we were just sold to care about. Yeah, it was a huge turning point, and I miss it. I miss that time, but I've tried to hold on to those. Like, I never want to lose that passion.

I never want to do the work for so long that I become immune to the eros of it.

Amber: Have you read *The Overstory*?

Ayana: Oh my gosh. I **have** to read it now. (*Amber laughs*) Someone just asked me and I have to read that book! I haven't yet.

[0:35:59]

Amber: Okay. (*Amber sighs*).

So, the *Eros*: I'm glad you said that word because I was really intrigued.

A few months ago when you were posting about feeling the erotic moving through you, and I know it's a thing that has been discussed on *For the Wild*, and yeah, I want to hear more about that because so many people get "tapped out" doing the forms of activism that you're so engaged in,

especially as fully-immersed in it as you are, but you seem to have something that's keeping you afloat and keeping you going, and keeping you in it, and would you connect that to this sense of Eros?

Ayana: Phew. Absolutely. (Ayana inhales deeply) Gosh. Where do I even begin?

Well, first of all, I do want to say that I have gotten burnt out. Like, I'm not immune to feeling the exhaustion. I'm not immune to being overwhelmed, depressed, just completely on my knees in shock and horror, (*Ayana laughs*). I feel all that, too. Also, at times I feel completely hopeless, and so, I do want people to know that because I don't think that anybody who seems like they've "got it all together" have it all together. I don't even think that's what it's all about.

Yeah, lately even, the burnout has been so intense that I've had to shift the way that I have been working with this work. For a long time, I just didn't have a personal life, and I honestly was almost proud of that. I was like, "You know what? It's great! I'm just gonna do this 100% of the time, and I don't need to have self-care, and I don't need to be happy, and I don't need to have joy, and I don't need anything because I am just going to be a working machine because that's what I deserve; because I'm a human who has f-ed up so much, and I have so much shame and guilt and pain about it all that I'm just going to do nothing but this," in a sense of, like, repenting of my sins of who I am and how I am relating to this Earth.

[0:38:36]

Ayana: For a while, that did feed me, and I had a type of energy that was shocking, you know. (*Ayana laughs*). I cannot even believe, looking back, how much I was able to put out. And then at some point I just realized — well, I realized a lot of things — about where we are with climate change and the Anthropocene and how we're not changing as a collective in the ways I'd hoped we would have, and I also realize, with the burnout, almost giving to the point where I'm — I don't want to say "killing myself" because that's overdramatic — but pushing myself so far isn't necessarily going to bring the Earth back. It's not correlated with one another.

I think hard work is important, but me burning myself out wasn't like, "If I just burnt myself out, if I just worked hard enough, then the Earth would be okay." And I really had to break that cycle in myself, whether it was savior mentality, mixed with the guilt/shame, mixed with just feeling so much grief about what was happening, and not really allowing joy to come in.

And then, when I wrote that post about the erotic, I was feeling a lot of joy, and it was amazing because there was a turning... turning... (*Ayana laughs*) a turning the page (*Amber laughs*). It felt so good. I started to be more embodied. Maybe I even started to be more aware of my sexual self, and not that I wasn't, not that I didn't know of my sexual self, but it was more like there was a moment I actually felt proud of it. I was like, "Yeah! And you know what? I am erotic, and I am sexual, and I am full of these kinks, (*Ayana laughs*), and all of these things and all these things allow me to do the work in a way that I do it."

And even though I don't present those parts of myself often, I want to nurture them, and I want, yeah, I want to be proud of all of those pieces, and I think I've also just had a lot of friends who have been so confident and pushed their belief button in their sexual presence, and I was really getting off on their confidence of who they were in their embodied self, that I was trying it on for

size. It felt great, and I really loved that moment, not that I feel that way in the moment now, but I loved feeling that a few months ago.

And then to speak to the Eros piece: regardless of how burnt out I have felt over this December and January, the Eros never went away, and the Eros is what has been able to feed this fire inside of me that's allowed me to do anything that I've done. It's something that is so primordial and so deep and so connected to something that I can't even describe and it's so big and it's so... it's as if the overwhelm of the Eros is as big as the overwhelm of the grief. It's the same type of bigness inside of me: this love, this fascination, this, gosh, *(Ayana laughs)* it's amazing. It's amazing.

And honestly, probably, if not the thing I'm **most** grateful for, definitely **one** of the things I'm most grateful for about being alive is being able to feel this type of intense, almost obsession with the Earth and the land, and craving to be with the land all of the time.

So the Eros of that, it's like that feeling: what wouldn't you do for a lover? What wouldn't you do for your child or a parent or whoever that you're so in love with, what wouldn't you do for them? And that's how I feel for the Earth, and I love it. I love working from that place, and I think it's precious, and I think it's precious, but it's not fragile, and I'm very grateful for that. It's not something that I've felt fickle about.

Ever since I decided to dive into the deep end of this work, there's never been a moment that I've hesitated or wondered, like, "But is this really what I should be doing? Or is this really what matters?" I never have those questions about the essence of what I'm doing.

Now could I, have I questioned if the system that I'm working on within this project work? Like, no, *(Ayana laughs)*. There's been a million ways I've rearranged up and down and all around with how I do what I'm doing, but that, yeah, that umbilical cord hasn't broke.

Amber: It seems to me, probably, that the more we trust the call and dive in to what our soul is telling us we're here to do the stronger that erotic flow of energy through us will be.

Ayana: Mhmm. Yeah.

[0:44:20]

Amber: Yeah. So do you get to spend — you know, obviously you're spending a ton of time on the computer doing your interviews and coordinating things and talking to people and in the technology space we all are — but are you also spending a lot of time with the land and on the land and just outdoors and unplugging from everything and being with that which you love in which you are dedicating your work to?

Ayana: *(Ayana laughs)* Oh goodness. This is a question I've been sitting with myself, asking myself, "Am I spending too much time on the computer?" And, well, so, yes. Yes, I'm definitely not spending enough time with the land, and I'm spending too much time hooked into technology world, and I would say, that I even come up with against my addiction to this technology at this point, and I'm not scared of it, but I definitely am aware of my addictions, too.

Like, I was just holding my phone the other day. I was **just** holding it. I wasn't looking at it. I was literally just touching my phone, and I'm like, "Ayana! Don't touch your phone! Like, do not touch

it! Stop!” It was so weird, and then it was weird. It was just so strange how this comfort — it’s like a blankie or something. Like, touching my phone - it’s like you’re my stuffed animal. So this is something that I’ve really worked on within myself because with the work of *For the Wild*, not just the podcast, which, of course, there’s a lot of computer time with that, but being the executive director of the non-profit, and managing all of the stuff. There’s so much stuff between the taxes and the emails and anybody who runs any kind of business knows exactly what I’m talking about. It’s one thing... (*audio unclear @46:20*)... it’s another thing to coordinate all of the pieces that go into the creation of the product, whatever that is. So it’s been full-on. The computer time, the phone time, has been insane!

It’s funny because I live deep in the woods. Especially in comparison to this modern, industrialized world, I live pretty far out by today’s standards, and I live off the grid, and I don’t have a bathroom, and all of those “things” I don’t have. So in a way, I’m like, what the hell? I literally feel like I’m a person who lives in the city, but I just happen to live in the woods with a bucket as a toilet, but (*audio unclear @47:06*)... in San Francisco, and I really have to start questioning that.

[0:47:12]

Ayana: And then with the One Million Redwoods project, there was so much coordination and research and development that I felt like I wasn’t connecting enough with the soil in my own fingernails. I know that I can’t do my work with the integrity that it needs to have if I’m not spending more time with the land.

Luckily, there are things. Like, I don’t have electricity where I sleep. The little 120 sq ft. wagon, and it’s candlelit, and it’s amazing, but the horrible thing was I used to not have cell phone service at all. And I just happened to have LTE and one bar in my wagon, and I’m like NOOOO! (*Ayana laughs*) Here I got to my little haven with no electricity, but somehow I have LTE one bar! How? I really had to tell myself, like, you don’t get to be on the phone anymore. You have to put your phone on airplane mode. Maybe I would justify it, like, ‘OH but I have to do these emails, or I have to make sure this post about this protest is going out, or I gotta make sure that this....’ It’s just like any excuse in the book, whether it was good or worthy, it was still these reasons to keep me connected.

So I’ve had to hold some pretty strict boundaries with myself in 2020. This has been part of my new year’s resolutions, where I’ve really had to set aside my week and say, okay.

I guess I’ve just had to create “working hours” which I never did before, and I think for a lot of us who are creators outside of somebody else’s 9-5 boundaries, it’s really hard to stop working because life becomes work and where does it end and where does it begin? So I’ve really had to say, “No. I’m actually **only** going to work between these hours, and these days of the week I don’t do any computer work. And this time of the day I don’t do computer work.” And I can say that I, the amount of joy that I have been able to receive by having that spaciousness has been incredible.

And I’ve also noticed that I’m not more productive if I’m always hooked in, and that was real. That was something I had to break: this belief system inside of me that I would be more productive and I would be a better activist if I was hooked in 24/7, and now I’m realizing that’s not actually true, and I can get just as much done when I give myself a lot more spaciousness to be on the land and to be with the woods and to leave my phone behind.

[0:49:59]

Ayana: The last thing I'll say about this because I don't want to keep blabbering on too much is I've had a lot of amazing conversations with people on the podcast and friends, like, the episode with Bayo Akomolafe on slowing down in urgent times or even thinking back to my episode with Brontë Velez, I don't know if it was on the "Pleasurable Surrender by White Supremacy" or the "Necessity of Beauty", but I remember talking with Brontë a lot about this as well about this idea of slowing down. And I think I probably heard about that a few years ago, but I was like, no, no, no, no, no. The people who are saying, "Slow down," don't get it. No, we are in urgent times, like, the earth is going down. We do not have time to slow down!" And I really didn't believe that, and I have definitely changed my tune where I've been having these inputs from people that I love and trust and been in deep conversation with it.

I do think how we're responding to the crisis is part of the crisis, and I don't think that we can solve the problems of corporate capitalism, imperialism, colonialism, -ism, -ism, -ism, all down the line with the same type of rushed, urgent mentality that created them in the first place.

[0:51:15]

Ayana: So I'm really trying to, in a revolutionary, subversive way actually know, instead of bulldozing ahead and making things happen at any cost, whether that's through the Redwoods Project through reforestation, or the podcast or whatever, I'm going to keep my diligence. I'm going to keep being in sheer devotion working really hard, but the way that I'm doing it, and the ability to do it and breathe slow and really make decisions like they've been thought out and massaged is so much more (I think) productive in the long run.

And also for the health and the sanity of myself and everybody that I work with. So, I don't know if I said that as clearly as I wanted to, but hopefully it just came across.

Amber: Oh, I'm so glad that we went there. This true methodical, medicinal slowing down has really been a lesson for me this past winter, too. It came through really strongly in the fall. I talked about it in an intro to this podcast. I don't remember which, but I truly realized, like, I **have** to slow the **fuck** down. Hard and, like, permanently. (*Amber laughs*)

You know I was so stressed all the time, running my business, my podcast, the kids, and just this same thing; I feel like I'm doing what I'm meant to be doing, and there's a sense of urgency to help as much as possible, and so much of that means sitting on the computer, and I feel like I'm hearing this from a lot of people. This is really a collective lesson coming through on slowing down.

I haven't listened to that episode yet. Will you say the man's name again? The "Slowing Down" podcast?

Ayana: Yeah, Bayo Akomolafe. Slowing...

Amber: — And what was the title again?

Ayana: ... "Slowing Down in Urgent Times."

Amber: Yeah, sorry there's a slight delay in Skype.

I was looking at that today, and I was like, oh, next on my queue is that episode. Even reading that description and being given permission that it's okay, even with the urgency right now, that it's okay and necessary, actually, to do this slowing down.

Thank you for bringing that through, and I can't wait to listen to that episode.

Ayana: It's so good!

[0:53:46]

Ayana: I think, too, when I think about slowing down, and I think what turned me from being a non-believer to a believer in the slowing down part is that what I realized is that when we slow down, the Earth slows down. The Earth basically gets to relax. Like, **we** slow down.

And what I mean by that is, if I'm doing a million things, usually those million things take resources to do each of those million things, and the faster I go, the more fuel I burn, the farther I travel, the more that I use the internet, the electricity, the stuff, the stuff, the stuff...

And then when I realized that, I was like, Oh my gosh! If we all slowed down, if we all did less, bought less, traveled less, like, less, less, less, but more living, the Earth would be able to be like *(Ayana exhales as Earth)*, "Okay, 'cause you don't need to keep mining me so much, and you don't need so much from me to fulfill your stressed-out lives, then I won't be needing to give so much of my resources so that you can keep being stressed out about all the things that you're doing." That really just was a direct correlation that I felt so connected to.

So, when I think about slowing down now, yes, it's for **my** health, and it's also when I think about how does it correlate to the health of the earth because ultimately we know at this point that even when we're in the debacle of climate chaos and Anthropocene is because we've done too much. We've extracted TOO much. It's just too much. That's the bottom line.

If we didn't use as many resources, we wouldn't be extracting as many resources, and we wouldn't be polluting as much and so on and so forth and down the line. And I think it's like slowing down and not doing as much is also, in a way, not needing as many options or choices either. It all comes together. It's like everything we do is fueled by something that the Earth gives us.

So I've really been sitting with that. In no way do I feel like I have perfected the slowing down or the lessening of my resource extraction, extractive-ism. I think about it every day and I'm trying really hard to understand how I can be a modern human, how I can create work that matters and community, but with using a lot less resources, and yeah, it's a really deep question that I have yet to figure out, but I will keep you updated when I somehow learn that. *(Amber laughs)*

[0:56:48]

Amber: Yeah, speaking of personal growth:

I was curious as a fellow podcaster, so you having your podcast, too, when we first connected was certainly inspirational to me. Do you remember what I asked you when we first met there in the redwoods?

Ayana: I remember you, and I remember the trees around us, and I remember the general gist, but I don't remember the specific question, and I'd love to hear it.

Amber: I asked how you got Stephen Harrod Buhner on your podcast! (*Amber laughs*) because I told you how I wanted to do one, and I totally wanted him to be a guest (*Amber laughs*). Then, when I started, I just asked him and he said, "Yes!"

Ayana: Mhmm. He's so great.

Amber: He is so great. So I always definitely think of you when I think of the inception of me starting my podcast, and feel that connection, that gratitude that, yeah, just you being like, "I just asked him, and he came on," and then I was like, "Oh. Yeah, okay."

So I'm curious, like, pushing the belief button, how has your approach to podcasting or even how has the podcast itself changed since you've started? How has *For the Wild* evolved?

Ayana: Oh my gosh. So much change and evolution.

Well, at the beginning it was definitely a believe button pusher. I mean, there was... I had no skill in podcasting. I didn't even know what a podcast was six, seven years ago. I was like, "It's a radio show on the internet I think?" I didn't know about Podbean. I think I knew what iTunes was, but, like, I was definitely as green as they come with production.

As you know, the production — there's so many pieces between getting the guests, coordinating the guests, looking for the guests, researching who they are, getting them to say yes, getting them to come on at a certain time— and then, the editing and the uploading. It's a lot. It's a lot of pieces.

Also, at the beginning, it was just me and March, and I would do the coordination...

Amber: — and March was your partner back then, right? Whom you built the tiny house you live in out in the middle of the woods with? So he was there at the inception of the podcast as well. I didn't realize that. Okay.

Ayana: Yeah, well, we were — how I even learned about podcasting — was it was my first camping trip ever. March and I had met at Occupy Wall Street. We started the Environmental Solidarity Working Group Together. We basically fell in love within 24 hours. It was passionate. It was intense. It was all of it. All those things.

He had lived in Peru for five years, and I had wanted to go down to South America. So as Occupy got destroyed by Homeland Security, basically — meaning Zuccotti Park got trashed and it just got taken down — we decided to go to South America and travel down through Patagonia.

Patagonia is quite wild, and here I am, first time camper, in these wild places where we were on dirt roads for months, and we had these kind of anarchist-left, end of the world, apocalypse podcasts at the time with these white, older dudes, who were spewing their knowledge, and I was into it. I was really into it, and March and I would listen for hours because we were in the wilderness, going down dirt roads. There was no towns. There was no service. There was no radio. So we would just listen to hours upon hours of this stuff.

Honestly, I would get really scared. I would just listen to all this horrible news about what was happening, and I was freaked out. Then we came back state-side. We were driving across the country because Fukushima had happened. We were living in Oregon, and I was feeling so much fear of the cesium-137 coming down, the rain, and just being contaminated by the nuclear fallout that we left for the East Coast.

As we were driving through Arizona, we were listening to one of these apocalyptic shows, and I think they were like “Call in!” or something, and I started dialing, and I got on the phone, and March was like, “Who are you calling?!”

And I’m like, “I’m calling the Progressive Radio Network!”

And he’s like, “Wait. Why are you calling them?”

I’m like, “Because we should have a radio show.”

And he’s like, “Wait! Wait! What are you talking about? About what?!”

And then right as he was like, “But...but...” the guy was like, “Hello?”

And I’m like, “Hello. I’m Ayana Young, and I want to have a radio show.”

And he’s like, “Oookay. About what?”

And the thing is I knew that that network, in particular, didn’t have a very young crowd.

And so, I was like, “About millenials.”

And he’s like, “Huh. Okay. Well, you know, if you’re going to be in New York City anytime...”

And I’m like, “Well, actually, I’m driving to New York City right now.”

And he’s like, “Well, okay, you can come in on Tuesday with your pitch and we’ll give you a shot.”

Honestly, that’s how it started, and I went, and I got a little dressed up, and I went to the Upper Westside to their radio building, and I had all my little sheets and my paperwork, and I did my little schpiel, and he’s like, “Okay, this looks really interesting! Send me your show in another month, and we’ll see what we can do.”

I left and I was like, “Oh my gosh, March, they’re going to give us a show! We just have to make a show in a month!” (*Ayana laughs*)

And I’d probably say that that month was probably some of the most intense, like, lots of fighting, lots of frustration, and we didn’t know anything! (*Ayana laughs*) We were literally like, “What is a microphone?” You know? “How do we plug it in? What do we record on?!” (*both laugh*) And I didn’t know how to get a guest.

I mean, there was nothing. There was nothing that I had figured out at that point.

[1:02:57]

Ayana: The funny thing was is I ended up having to tell the guy, “Hey, we need a little more time. We need a little more time,” and for the next year and a half this guy just kept leading me on, being like, “Oh, okay.” I’d send him something, and he’d say, “Well, we’ll see if we can fit you in,” and I kept trying.

But what was so beautiful is because he never said no, I kept building the podcast, building the podcast, hoping that they would pick it up. In the meantime, as they didn’t pick it up, I was just calling radio stations. I was really looking for trends.

I remember when I saw Charles Eisenstein’s *Sacred Economics* video, and this is back in 2011-2012, I was like, “I need to get this guy on the show,” ‘cause I knew. I just had this sense, even with Joanna Macy, I didn’t even know who she was, but I pinned an article, and I was like, “Okay this lady is important,” and I kept having these intuitions of who I needed to have on.

[1:03:57]

Ayana: So, yeah, March and I for the first few years. And then, the thing is March is — I would say we are both artists— but he is the type of artist who doesn’t like deadlines, and I am the kind of artist who can deal with deadlines. So at some point, it was just like, okay. We cannot keep doing this as two people, loving and fighting like cats and dogs trying to get this podcast out. I needed to build a team.

This was, what, back in 2016-17? I remember putting a call out on Facebook, being like, “I’m looking for my right-hand woman,” and three people got back to me. Well, maybe more, but three people I ended up bringing in. From there, that’s how the For the Wild team started building. You know, I didn’t have the non-profit in place, and I didn’t have... I really... it was so, yeah, it was so seat-of-the-pants for so many years.

And at this point, I have an incredible team that’s able to support each other in all of the myriad of pieces of pre-production, post-production, production, social media, outreach, all of the stuff, website, and we meet together every week and we discuss what themes are important, how we’re gonna represent material, who... I mean, gosh, it’s... I could just spend hours talking about our process as a team of how we get it done, but there’s been so much evolution and growth.

And I guess something I feel extremely grateful for is through all the trials and tribulations, and ups and downs, and moments where I didn’t think it would happen, or I couldn’t do it, or somebody couldn’t do it, (*Ayana laughs*), or whatever that it is, all of the real emotional rollercoasters that’s gone behind the production of it, I’m really happy to be where I am now and feel extremely driven to still do it. Like, I haven’t gotten bored, I’ve never been like, “Ugh, you know what? I’m just over this. This isn’t that exciting anymore. I’ve asked enough people enough questions. I think that I’m done.” (*Ayana laughs*)

There’s never been that moment. There’s still so many people that I want to talk to and beings that I haven’t covered.

[1:06:15]

Ayana: In a way, I feel like the podcast is the school that I never got to go to. I get to have all of this intersectional information with people that I respect so much, and I get to go exactly where I'm trying to go rather than sort of dealing with superfluous stuff that I don't care about. So I'm totally obsessed with the podcast, and I think it's only going to get better and stronger, and yeah. I'm looking forward to 2020.

Amber: Yay! Yeah, I really paid attention to how it's evolved as someone who's either going to have to quit or grow her own team at some point, but you guys do such a phenomenal job. I really encourage people to just head to your website, if they haven't been there yet, and look at how beautifully each episode is presented. It's like a delight to the senses, really, to take it in, which is important because it is such — the topics can be challenging and heavy and sad. So, too, even just the aesthetics of the way you guys present it, brings me into like a still dropped-down space that makes it easier for me to be there.

I could ask you questions about your podcast forever, but I'm not going to ask too many. I mean, just from the production point-of-view, which most people won't be interested in, but can you think of an interview or something that someone said in an interview that, like, really surprised you, or... I'm sure every interview changes your life but was there a moment that someone said something that really just, like, *POOF!*, turned your attention in a way or set you on a new path that you hadn't even dreamed of before?

Ayana: Well, definitely, the Bayo episode on "Slowing Down in Urgent Times", for sure, that's been one of my latest podcasts that has really affected me, but what I've also realized is that (*audio unclear @1:08:12*) has done a year ago, or a month ago, and maybe at the time I may have thought, "Oh, that's interesting," but I didn't really see how it was infiltrating my day-to-day.

And then all of a sudden, I'll be talking about something, and I'll be like, oh, interesting. That was from this conversation on the podcast six months ago, and it's really, actually embedded in me now. So I'd say honestly, every episode shapes me. Even episodes that I may not feel *as* connected to, there's still gems in there that kind of get me to see the world in a different way, and I always want to see it that way.

[1:08:59]

Ayana: How I see it is that my devotion is unwavering, but I'm very flexible with how I understand things because I think I need to have a lot of flexibility in the way that I connect to the issues that are happening in the world.

And so, I would say, yeah the Bayo episode really stuck with me, the Dr. Max one, her episode on, gosh, I'm forgetting this full title, but it's something about "Living in a Plastic World", and she's an anti-colonialist, marine scientist, marine plastic scientist.

Because I have been so steeped in forestry and science through the One Million Redwoods Project, I kind of over the last few years have gotten really, (*Ayana sighs*), really turned off by a lot of science. I'm like, what is this? What is this? Who is paying for this study, and why is **this** what is being studied? And why is this even being said as the thing that is real or true?

Amber: — Right. Why is this the only...

Ayana: ... This is just some person. —

Amber: ... Right, I think about this all the time, recently, too: why is this the only form of knowledge that we consider valid in our culture?

Ayana: Mhmm. Yep.

Amber: Aside from all the corruption, as well, that can be there in the science.

Ayana: Oh yeah. I was just getting really turned off to Western science even though I was trying to, in some ways, be a scientist or be within the scientific community, I was feeling just so turned off by the way, honestly, the human supremacy behind it. Like, it used to be the church, but now it's Western science. Like, **that's** "the Word", and you can't question the Word because it's science, or something. But I'm like, we made this up! We made science! (*both laugh*) Like, we made this. This can be questioned.

So Dr. Max Liboiron, the way that she goes about her scientific practice is so deep and with so much integrity, also so much honesty. Like, really, she's not trying to sell solutions. She's not trying to market her form of science because she's trying to get more funding for something that doesn't actually support communities. Even the way that she connects with communities on **what** is actually being studied in their area, like, actually asking people, "What's important for **you** because you live here? So what's important for you to be studied?"

[1:11:45]

Ayana: She really, ugh, she was so wonderful, and the whole plastics debate is really up right now. I know a lot of people are questioning recycling at all. Does recycling even matter? Is China even taking our recycling anymore?

And something that she broke down for us that I really appreciated was what is even plastics and how do they get recycled? And she was saying there's not just one plastic. Like, plastics: that's what it is. Every plastic container, or whatever, is made up of all these chemicals. Some of those chemicals are known, and some of those chemicals are patented, so you don't even know what's in them. And then if you try to melt them all together, it's just going to create some weird blob because they don't all melt at the same time. They have all these different properties.

And that, to me, I was like, thank you. Thank you. I really needed to understand that because I was feeling just really frustrated by just not understanding what the plastic problem really was.

And even she was talking about how to clean up the oceans, and she has this really good method. She was talking about, "Well, you know, if we were really going to clean up all the plastic in the ocean, I mean, one, it's seemingly, nearly impossible and probably on some level, just the amount of ships to get out into the middle of the ocean to try and get these plastics, it's kind of an impossible feat."

But she was saying that we really have to go upstream. She gave this metaphor of if we have this bath, and the bathtub is running over, do you grab the mop and start sweeping up or mopping up the water that's on the floor? Or do you go and turn the tap off first, so the bathtub stops running over? And **then** start cleaning it up?

And so I thought that was a really important point because it's like, yeah, we can try to clean up these plastics, but if we're not stopping the production of plastics in the corporate global model, it's like a moot point.

These are just some things that come up for me, but honestly, I could spew so much about so many of the interviews that I've been able to do, and gosh, I'm just wrapping my head around.

[1:14:03]

Ayana: Oh, the other person I'll mention, the last person I'll mention right now, is Dr. Kyle Whyte on "The Colonial Genesis of Climate Change", and I really was connected to what he was saying, especially around the environmental crisis because for the first few years of my work I was really... I really believed that we would create solutions. I really believed that we could do things, and I thought it was more about the **doing**. I was like, "Okay, we gotta **do** this. We gotta **DO** that!" It was very physical, and it was very forward-thinking, and it was very linear.

What I realized is that the crisis that we're in is a spiritual crisis. The crisis that we're in is so much deeper than what can we do on the day-to-day level to curb our consumption. Now, of course, I think we should be doing those things, and yes, we should be investing in community-oriented support systems, but when I think about this crisis as a spiritual crisis, it really changes the way I work within it. So something that Kyle Whyte was talking about, we were kind of discussing how we are going to get out of this mess, or what will it take for us to get out of this mess and this environmental, social unraveling.

He had said something like, "It will take as much time as it takes to build trust, consent, and reciprocity." Something like that. That has completely shattered me and built me into another type of, yeah, I feel so shifted and moved by that because we can keep mopping up the water, but until we build relationships and turn off that sink — (*Ayana laughs*) I'm kind of going back and mixing the metaphors — we're not going to really see the change that we need to see in order to protect what is left.

Although it's not linear to build relationships, and I think that's the consent and the trust and the reciprocity part, I think why people **don't** try to do that, and they just try to go solutions first, is because it actually takes a lot more time to build relationship and to build consent and trust with people. It's slow. It's not instant gratification. You don't get to be in control of it because it takes two to tango, and there's all of these things that as a dominant culture that we live in that's very much wanting to be in control, and wanting to just be able to do what we want to do at all times and do it at our speed, to be able to be like, oh, actually, this is going to take a long time, and you're not in control of it, and you just have to keep coming humbly, humbly, humbly to the feet of these relationships. That is a completely different way of seeing how to relate to this situation.

I feel completely taken by that type of process at this point, and I **still** believe that we can be doing things. It's not to say we all just need to give up and stop planting trees, or stop going zero-waste, or something like that. I think it all matters, but it only matters as much as we can reckon with the spiritual crisis and the disconnection that we have with each other, ourselves, and the Earth.

Amber: Yeah, just like the slowing down idea, the absolute necessity of getting back into community, is something that's just is coming up over and over. It was even in the cover story of the Atlantic this month was "The Nuclear Family was a Disaster", or something like that, but it speaks to this same idea, you know.

And I am just feeling really grateful right now for you (*Amber laughs*) and these ideas that you're bringing forward through the podcast because they're both, like, comforting and hope-giving, you know? I know you do know. I know you do know that it can feel so hopeless and scary, but to think of them, to reframe them in these terms, just thank you. And I put all three of those podcasts in my queue this morning, so I can't wait to listen to them.

[1:18:48]

Amber: As we close out, I wanted to, I'm just going to get you to briefly tell people what the Million Redwoods Project is, and then kind of the big closing question I'm going to give to you right now so you can just run is what is your highest vision for your work? If it is **wildly** successful beyond your dreams, what will it have accomplished?

Ayana: Oh! That was a big one. I will think about that as I give you some stuff on the Million redwoods.

So, the redwoods project, okay, I want to speak of it quickly but thoroughly. So, it is a way to, okay, (*Ayana laughs*), hold on because I want to get really wordy.

Amber: No, I'm not in a hurry. I'm not in a hurry.

You are the one who has something to do after this, so go at your own pace.

Ayana: Oh good, okay. Then I can start to breathe in a little more.

So, to back it up, I, obviously, am a fierce lover of the forest. I had spent a lot of time between old-growth, clear cut, second growth, third growth, and I was constantly talking to the forest, asking them how-what can we do about this? How can us humans support you in your regeneration? Mix that in with climate change. Mix that in with the Anthropocene extinction; losing 200 species a day; having knowledge that the biodiversity of these places are really dwindling.

And so, I was sitting with these questions because I was so in love with these places, and at one point the forest came to me in a moment when I was at the confluence of these two waterways where I live, and they said, "Protect us and plant our children." So — what is this now? — for the next five-six years, I've literally been, "How do I protect you and support your children and support the next generation of your communities?"

With that question, I went into knowing that I wanted to plant trees, but it wasn't enough to **just** plant trees. I also wanted to focus on the understory plants. And I knew **that** wasn't enough because I also knew the fungi needed to be a part of it because I was really looking at reforestation through a holistic lens, and then the more that I was working with intersectional, climate, environmental, social justice, I was like, well, I also know that it needs to be connected to the

community that's living in those places and to have an indigenous consultation of it so it's not just another white savior project.

[1:21:40]

Ayana: So I've been kind of in this tornado of learning and pushing away and bringing in different ideas, different ways of forestry, or of working within forestry and reforestation because what was a real big bummer is I had so much excitement to do a reforestation, and I studied restoration ecology, and then I realized throughout the process that the reforestation or the restoration industrial complex is alive and well. And I didn't even think that existed because I was like, well, what's bad about planting trees? That just seemed all good. Well, what could possibly be bad about this?

And then, yeah, I realized that so much of reforestation has been created by the logging industry. So the way that millions of acres are being reforested in the moment has been created by industrial systems that want to extract. So you could just imagine if those are the people, and those are the models that are creating the systems for regeneration, it's probably not that regenerative.

So I have been trying to push against that, and I do want to work in a big way, but I also know that working locally and working communally is really the way forward in my belief system. So, how do I balance those two?

[1:23:07]

At this point, I've been... I don't even know... I'm in neck-in, neck-deep?

I've been doing a lot of work with the reforestation initiatives and building a living library or a native — I call it a living library — but otherwise you could call it a native species nursery where I live. Just in the past couple of weeks, I've been doing probably, oh gosh, thousands of clippings for propagation: different native species, whether that's black cap raspberries, willows, redwoods, and I've been cloning redwoods, which I kind of didn't know that at the beginning because I was really focused on the seed, but the germination rate is so small, but what logging companies will do with redwoods, for instance, is they'll — The cloning mechanisms are really, they're not genetically diverse. So you could imagine if there was, like, thousands of acres of a cloned forest with a few different types of trees, over time, that's not really going to give the diversity it's going to need to withstand any kind of issues with climate change, or things like that.

So I've been going out in the woods and looking for trees and plants that are growing on rocky hillsides or growing with very little soil, even, because I know that most likely these areas will get drier and drier. So, picking plants out for climate resilience has been an important part of the project, but yeah.

It's been so, it's been really humbling to work with plants in this way because, again, these relationships take time, and it takes time to learn and how to go about it with integrity and not to just blaze through it with all this urgency and making decisions that I don't want to disrupt the forest. I don't want to make a fast decision about some kind of genetics of a tree, and then realize that that could have repercussions down that line.

[1:25:10]

Ayana: And I think that there have been a lot of repercussions to how we've been doing forestry as a whole.

So, yeah, the project is beautiful and it's very deep, and it's a different type of way of working with the forest, and I feel like, kind of like my prayers that I could be an herbalist for the Earth and an herbalist for the forest and go in with medicines and slowness and relationship and really learn how to go into either highly devastated areas, that mining or logging has occurred, or areas that have been logged or mined within previous years, and give a boost of biodiversity through the understory and the fungi and plant more trees it will sequester more carbon for climate stabilization, and yeah.

So a little bit of a messy answer there, but it's a really it's a very challenging project, much more challenging than the podcast is for me, and I just keep showing up every day, and it's felt so good, too, like we were talking about at the beginning of the show. So much of the work with the redwoods — there was a lot of land work at the beginning — but then it became a lot of computer work with coordination and research and data collection. So the fact that I've been able to be outside the last two weeks as spring is coming and work with propagation feels like a miracle.

Amber: Remind me how much did you get on the Kickstarter for that? Because that was just one of those beautiful, incredibly successful Kickstarter campaigns. I contributed. It was like, even the minute I saw the name, I was like, "Oh. Yes. Oh, Ayana's doing something called 'One Million Redwoods'? I will be donating."

But it was clearly so well-done and so well-researched and a project with so much potential that people were just stoked to do it, and I loved watching how that Kickstarter unfolded.

Ayana: That Kickstarter was amazing. Again, it was like seat of the pants, just, going for it, going off spirit.

So we were, we made, I think, it was like \$124,099 and the Kickstarter takes their 12% from. So, \$100,000 plus.

And yeah, it's been really instrumental in doing what we've been able to do so far. It felt so right 'cause you know with that money, if I wasn't really thinking things through, I could've squandered that really quickly in the first 6 months of the project, and just be like, "YEAH I'M GONNA BUY ALL THESE POTS!" Like, pots alone could've cost me 300,000 dollars, just to buy the pots that are created **for** forestry.

So I've been really frugal, and I've been really thoughtful, and I've just (*Ayana sighs*)... You know, it's really challenging, the dominant narrative: bulldozing through projects at any cost, and for me, the thoughtfulness and going, "Wait a minute. This doesn't make sense, or this doesn't feel right. I'm going to not walk forward. I'm gonna stay right where I am, and I'm gonna look into this more. I'm going to ask people I trust before I take the next move."

[1:28:43]

Ayana: That has felt really good, and it's felt really challenging because, like I said, this culture just wants us to do, do, do, and be successful, and be big, and go, go, go, and not stop and have

results right away. And it's like, well, what would it actually take to have results right away? What would that actually entail to be able to have something like that?

So I've had to deal with my own ego and also really work with the pace and the timing of the forest in saying, "No." Actually, the more for me to have the most integrity I need to have, I really need to be extremely focused on how to do every single step of this project. And so, even, like, for a year I did trials on different pots, and it was crazy. And I was just like, "Oh my gosh! I just want to be doing something else!" But then I was like, no, why? Am I going to buy a million pots for 340,000 dollars that are going to last 5-7 years and then all go to a landfill? Or am I going to use these pots that I thought were going to great from plants that were made with spinned spruce trees, and then they fell apart, you know? They couldn't hold up to being watered.

So there's all these things that have gone into the project that have been frustrating, but ultimately, at this point, I feel really excited because I've found — we've made like 10 different tools that we've been testing out to create — basically, like, in-soil pots. So we are compacting the soil into the ground and it pushes and compacts the clay around it so that we don't have to use pots, which I'm so excited about.

And we're not importing soil, which I didn't want to do because potting soil, like, the perlite and the lava rock, that's all mined from somewhere. It's like, why am I going to destroy a mountain somewhere else in Hawaii, so that I can have, like, a nursery in the Redwoods? It doesn't make sense. Like, this is what I'm talking about! This just doesn't make sense.

So it's pretty exciting to see these redwoods now growing in these in-ground pots that also take a lot less water because pots evaporate like crazy. A black pot in the sun, it's like she's watered, and then you need more water.

Amber: That's so cool, Ayana! That's what successful people do is they innovate the solutions to their problems as they go along. That's amazing that you're doing that, and I'm curious:

[1:31:16]

Amber: Are you doing updates on the project as you go? Like, things like this. I'm sure my husband is going to hear this and be like, "I need to see these in-ground pot things! What is Ayana doing out there?!"

Ayana: (*Ayana laughs*) I am going to get better at that. I started to do some Instagram stories about it, and a few updates through Kickstarter, but I was actually just thinking that the other day because I was talking to a friend who's helping me. I'm like, you know, I really want to share this stuff because a lot of organizations, they don't share all the trials and tribulations. They're like, "Here's the campaign, and however many years later, here's what we did." They don't tell you about all of the rollercoasters that it took.

And the thing is, I actually want people to know the rollercoaster because ultimately, I want a **lot** of people to be growing plants. I want a lot of people to be planting trees. Like, this is not a ... the point is: this needs to spread. I want more people to be working with the land in this way, and so I was thinking, yeah, I would like to be able to actually share this information so people can learn from, and they don't have to spend a year looking at things and all the crazy crap that industrial streams sell to you. Like, this is the way you have to do it, and I've read through all the manuals. I'd

love to be able to tell people, like, “Hey, this is what I did. This is what I looked at. Learn from this and make it your own.”

Amber: Yeah, it’s important.

Ayana: And I’m totally open-sourcing it.

[1:32:54]

Amber: I can’t wait to see how you’re doing it. You have another interview in 10 minutes, so give us your highest vision, and then we’ll get going.

Ayana: Yeah. Okay.

So, the highest vision for For the Wild:

Well, in terms of the Redwoods Project, I see millions of trees and plants and acres not only being replenished but also protected through local community organizing. And I can imagine walking through the places that have been protected and healed by humans and all of the ways that the plants work together and the symbiosis of that. So I definitely see a lot of land protected and revitalized and being strong as we go into times that will be very uncertain with the climate.

And that would be, gosh, yeah, getting millions of trees and plants into the ground and being able to do it in places that will be protected and will have some type of legal standing that they will not get cut down into the future would be my greatest success.

I’m also working on a cantine in Alaska to stop a mining project at the top of the river delta. So success would look like raising the funds and putting a really strong conservation easement in place where the title of the land would be held by the native conservancy. And I definitely see that happening. I’ve had visions saying it will. So I’m going to keep following that thread.

With the podcast, I want it to be a beacon for those who are feeling lonely, and feeling lost, and feeling like they want to connect to people and connect to these narratives that aren’t easily found through media or even maybe through their communities. I know that podcast for some folks who have written in, they’re like, “Thank you. Where I live nobody wants to talk about this stuff, and I feel so ostracized. I feel like the ‘bad kid’ or I feel like the person nobody wants to hear from.” And I’d love For the Wild to be a web for folks and that’s a huge success for me.

Also, just being able to do digital community organizing, digitally, and on the ground. And that’s success to me, to be able to be a weaver of people and say, hey, we hear your story, and we know you need help, and we’re going to do whatever we can on our end to direct people to helping because I think it’s like when we know ways that we can help, there’s a type of fulfillment and ease that comes with that. It’s like we can put our creativity and our energy and our love and our vibrancy and our passion into supporting causes that we care about and we need to know about those causes.

So I think that the more For the Wild can direct people to projects and folks that need that support, that's going to be a huge success. But, you know, I never want For the Wild to be Green Peace or Sierra Club. I never want to be that big. I really always want to stay small and nimble and flexible and grassroots. I never want to take corporate money. I never want to become tied up in some bigger entity. I always want to stay independent. Yeah, it's just really questioning what does success look like? How to be successful and also small at the same time and also slow at the same time, and also full of integrity and all of that.

So, to me, it's like really feeding the respect of the work and the relationships. And then, you know, being able to keep things funded. That's definitely what I love about, too, For the Wild, we're not trying to make money just to keep making money. I feel like a lot of corporations which is like, the whole idea is to continue making money always. Where, for us, we just need to make enough money to pay people to keep doing the work. So they can keep paying rent and putting food on the table. So I think I do feel really grateful that we've been able to garner enough support at this point where we can keep going on the week-to-week.

So yeah, I say, success is to keep going in a way that feels regenerative, healthy, and connective, and all the other stuff I mumbled earlier. *(Ayana laughs)*

Amber: Okay, thank you so much, Ayana. If it FortheWild.org?

Ayana: FortheWild.world.

Amber: World. I knew it was something different. And of course, the podcast is For the Wild, and Instagram @FortheWild. Yeah, thank you so much. And you do, you have to read the overstory.

Ayana: It's a must.

Amber: It's a must, and that goes for you, too, listener. I never recommend novels, but I'm recommending this novel to you all.

Okay, Ayana, just such an honor and a blessing to speak to you and to see your face for the first time in so long, not in a still frame on Instagram. Thank you.

Ayana: Yeah, you too, Amber. Thank you.

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

[Closing]

[1:39:17]

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. 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.

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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!