



Medicine Stories Podcast

Episode 70 with Amy Mea Woodruff

I Forgive You: A Story of Loss and Transformative Healing.

July 24, 2020

[0:00:00]

(Excerpt from today's show by Amy Mea Woodruff)

But to open that up for both of us and for him to go there and reflect on that day in those moments, and, like, really sit with that is really powerful for him.

And he's doing the work, and he's learning to forgive himself. And he's learning to forgive those around him that had caused him pain and abuse that led him down that path.

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

[Intro]

[0:00:31]

Amber: Hey, y'all, welcome to medicine stories. I'm Amber Magnolia Hill. This is Episode 70, and today I'm sharing my interview with Amy Mea Woodruff, who has been on the podcast before Episode Six, one of the very first ones.

It would be not a bad idea to listen to that one first — or maybe afterward — but you know, first, it will make more sense because she tells the entire story of the murder of her best friend, Cheree, and how she was pregnant at the time, and knew immediately upon getting the news that she could not hold on to hate for the drug-addicted, homeless man who killed her friend. It's very powerful, and we talk about a lot more than just that in that episode as well.

Like, I think you'll absolutely love the part about naming your lineage. It's not just about naming your ancestors, but naming the land that raised you, and the waters that raised you and really situating yourself and where you come from in a wide perspective. So it's just a beautiful episode number six. Check that out.

And then this is a follow up. This is being released on July 24th, 2020 which is the 10 year anniversary of Cheree's death. And what has changed since Mea and I recorded that first podcast is that she found — thanks to that first podcast episode that we did together — she found the man who killed Cheree, and they've been in touch. And that's the story that she's telling today.

So it's a true medicine story, just kind of a relax and let it seep in type of story. No need to take copious notes, like some of the last few episodes that have been really, really information dense. This one hits the heart, not so much the brain.

[0:02:46]

Amber: On Patreon for free for everyone, you don't have to be a patron to access this, but over there at Patreon.com/MedicineStories Mea has provided a resource of Instagram accounts and podcasts that look at the prison system in America, and what's going on right now, which, as you'll hear is something she's been learning a lot about, since she has been in touch with Omar in prison, and something she's becoming passionate about, advocating for, advocating against, you know.

You know, the prison system is so, so deeply fucked up, and such a reflection of the corruption and greed and racism and classism that defines the rest of America; a horrific microcosm of the culture that we're all finding ourselves in right now. So that's there, and her email address is at the bottom if you have any other resources that you would like to share with her, because she's really on a deep learning journey on that.

And so there's something else on Patreon, too. At the end of this interview, Mea and I very unexpectedly and kind of randomly start talking about uterine fibroids, castor oil packs, cleansing, fasting, and digestive health, and sharing some of our personal stories on that. So the conversation really takes a turn, but we are all multi-dimensional beings, and I know many of you will appreciate what we talked about. So that's at the end here.

And then I recorded just a solo, kind of follow up that's on Patreon for listeners at the \$2 a month level. Thank you so much. I'm talking about my experience more with fasting. It's kind of a controversial subject amongst people who have not done any research into it, but it's something I've been experimenting with for many years now and just had some beautiful healing, and I love the space that it creates in my life and the pause that it gives my body and the time it gives my body to self heal whatever is needing to be tended to.

[0:05:08]

Amber: So you'll hear me say at the end, I was on day four of a recent juice fast during this conversation, I ended up going nine days and had some really profound insights and shifts happen. So what is there on Patreon is just me talking about that, giving you some resources to learn more, some things I really highly recommend watching and reading and checking out, and talking about the difference between juice fasting and water or broth fasting and just all sorts of other things related to the amazing regenerative powers of the body and this toxic world that we are all living in. So that's again at Patreon.com/MedicineStories. And that's it. That is it.

I am really deeply honored that Mea chose this podcast to share the story on. It touched me so much. And I remember, as a kid, I read an article, I think it was probably in Reader's Digest because my mom subscribed to that, and I've always, even since childhood, been someone who would just

read any printed word that was put in front of me, so I probably read every word of every Reader's Digest through the late 80s in the 90s.

But there was a story about a woman who forgave the man who killed I think it was her daughter, and I was blown away. I didn't even know that was possible. I was so touched, I thought it was so beautiful. And it always stuck with me, so I feel just truly like a deep sense of honor for being this podcast being a conduit through which Mea shares her journey with Omar and coming into relationship and healing forgiveness for him around the depth of beautiful Cheree.

So in honor of Cheree, let us listen to this interview with Amy Mia Woodruff.

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

[Interview Begins]

[0:07:24]

Amber: Mea, thank you so much for being with me today. And I'm really looking forward to hearing the story that you have to share.

So why don't we start by having you tell folks, who haven't listened to Episode Six, where we first talked about some of the things we're going to talk about today, about Cheree and your friendship with her.

Mea: Hey, Amber, thank you for having me back. I feel honored to be here and honored to sit and share this story about my friendship with Cheree and our past together and where it has brought us in this moment in this here and now.

Cheree and I met when we were 18. We are working at the mall together (*Mea laughs*). And she worked at a clothing shop across the way, and I was working at a hair salon, and we had both recently split with our boyfriends. And I would go in there and shop, and so I was familiar with her, and one day we just started talking and realized that we had both just parted with our boyfriends, so we were like, "We should hang out!" And so we did.

And she was really fun and loved good music, and she was, like, a little fairy, she was small. I think she was probably maybe 5'4-5'3. I think she was 5'3; she's smaller than I am. And yeah, we just connected immediately and just, like, started spending all of our time together and going out together and going on adventures together and going down to the beach a lot, and going to clubs, dancing, and going to concerts and shows, and that was really the foundation of our friendship was just, you know, being young together, and, you know, had just had come out of high school, so there was a lot of freedom. And yeah, so that was kind of the beginning of our friendship.

And then we moved in together shortly after that, we moved down to Newport Beach. We were Both living in the Inland Empire at the time. And we moved to Newport, and we bought a house down at the beach, right at the beach. We lived down there for a few years together, and she met

her first husband. He was Australian. And I ended up going to Europe for a few months, and she moved to Australia to be with her husband.

So we were apart for about two years, and she came back to the States, and I was back from Europe, and I was living up in San Clemente, and so we moved back in together then, and that I think we were we lived in that house together for a few years, and then I moved to New York for four years. She moved down to LA. She was working as a stylist, and she'd always been in the fashion industry. So she was working down there. And I moved back from New York, moved to LA, we moved in together again. So we lived in seven different houses together over a period of 13 years.

[0:11:19]

Mea: And you know, she I think she was the first woman that I could truly look into her eyes, and and tell her that I love her — and I'm going to pull up a picture of her that I have here. You know, we just had a bond that I had never experienced and shared with another sister before. And it was so special, and anyone that knew us knew how deep our bond was, and we were always together, and it was just rare.

And so yeah, after we had lived in that space in LA, she met her fiance, Adam. And so she had moved in with him, and they were living in Los Angeles, in Studio City. And I met Augustine, and Augustine and I moved to New Zealand together.

And we, after a year in New Zealand, we had gotten pregnant with Naia. So Cheree and I were still talking a lot when I was in New Zealand, and I remember I called her from a payphone from the South Island, and I was gonna tell her that, you know, I was pregnant. And when we got on the phone together, she was like, “I have to tell you something,” and she shared that she had become engaged, her and Adam. And so then I shared that I was pregnant. So we were both just like, celebrating these monumental moments in our life.

And I was getting ready to come back, to move back to Hawaii. And then I think we went back to the islands for a bit, and then I came to the mainland for my blessing way. And Cheree was getting married in September, and I was due in October.

And so I came back in July to the mainland, and we spent the last week of her life together. She came out to my family's house, and we just caught up, because, you know, I'd been living in New Zealand for that year and just had a really beautiful, beautiful week together.

And at the blessing way we went went around in a circle with all of the women there, and just kind of reflected and shared about our friendship, and when it got to Cheree, we just had no words to share with each other, and we just stared into each other's eyes, and I asked everyone to take a breath for us. So we all took a breath together, and I just said, “Sometimes there's no words.” And I walked over to her and we just hugged.

And then she passed that next weekend, which is coming up on 10 years so July 24 2010, which is also the birth date of my grandma, Lena.

Yeah.

[0:14:52]

Amber: So that's just so special that you had that moment of fully acknowledging one another and who you were to each other. Like, how amazing? How many people...

Yeah, most of us don't get that when our loved ones pass, and I didn't know that that was your grandmother's birthday also.

So tell us about Cheree's death and about Omar.

Mea: So, Cheree and her mom had went out that day to look for her wedding dress, and they had found a dress for her, and they had came back later that day, and it was close to evening. She passed around 7:30. So, um, they came back to her house and Adam, her fiance, was there. And Cheree went outside to walk her mom to the car to tell her goodbye. And then Adam came out at the same time, and he said he was going to run to the store really quick, and he'd be back in like 20 minutes. So Cheree went back inside the house.

And Omar was a transient man, who was homeless on the streets of Los Angeles, and he was addicted to meth and crack cocaine. And he broke into — he came through the back door, and he came in to rob her. He didn't know that she was in the house. So he came into to rob the house.

He went into the refrigerator, he drank a beer, and then I believe that she was in her back room. I think she was cleaning or doing something, and he came in there, and she scared him, he scared her, and he stabbed her to death with a shank. And recently I found out that he also had a pipe. So he said that it was a kitchen pipe. So he had the shank and the pipe, and then he sat their house on fire.

And he was still in the house when Adam came home, and Adam came through the door and saw him, and Adam chased him for a long ways, and he couldn't catch him. So all that they ever had of him for nine months was just a drawing that Adam, like a composite drawing, that Adam had shared with the police.

And so for a long time, we just had this drawing of him, and we didn't know who he was. And he did end up dropping an iPod that he had, and that's how they ended up catching him nine months later was through the fingerprints on an iPod that was dropped and found.

Amber: So he was already, like, in the system? They had his fingerprints.

Mea: Mm-hmm. And yeah, he had several other charges of robbery and some like abuse of women, they were like, ex girlfriends, maybe.

Amber: How old was he?

Mea: He was the same age as Cheree and born very close to the same day. So Cheree was 36 when — let's see — 35. Cheree was 35, and he was 35. And they were both born in the same county within days from one another.

Amber: Wow.

[0:19:22]

Amber: okay, we on the first interview, we talked a lot about how you took the news of Cheree's death, being very pregnant with your daughter, and how beautifully you held that in yourself, knowing that you were carrying this life inside of you, and how you honored Cheree, while also honoring yourself and your baby growing inside of you.

And so, I'm going to tell folks to just listen to that because it's so beautiful, Mea, the way that you held everything; the way that you held death and life so strongly at the same time.

But during these nine months, were you... how did you... was it unsettled for you that he hadn't been caught? Did you have anger towards him during that time? Or were you already holding a space of loving forgiveness?

Mea: Umm, I was scared. I was afraid. I remember just feeling like eerie. Like I didn't want to see him. I wanted him to get caught. But like, I feel, I feel that you know, just thinking back of, like, Cheree's biggest fear was what happened to her, which is another thing I think I talked about that on the podcast.

She was just like, really careful and didn't ever want to go out at night. I'm like, you know, like, if we were at home or whatever, like, late night, not go to the grocery store or something like that. You know, like always locking the doors and just feeling like just kind of, yeah, she just had a fear around, um, I think just around the same exact thing that happened to her.

And so I thought about that a lot during that time and reflected a lot on; that if that was something that she knew was going to happen to her, or if that was something that she manifested through her own thoughts, you know. So I think I was just afraid to actually see him because then it made it more real, where it wasn't just a drawing of like someone.

Amber: But to actually see the human who made your best friend's worst nightmare come true.

Mea: Mm-hmm. And then once he was caught to see him and all of his different mugshots and like, see all the different charges that he already had against him, and he was on parole and was supposed to be checking in, and he wasn't. So yeah.

He ended up fleeing to Mexico, which is where he's from originally, and he was caught in Tijuana. The federal agents were looking for him there, as well. And so he was caught there. And so, of course, there was like, it felt good to know that they had found him, and that he wasn't out there on the streets because, you know, he was a danger to society. And so I think that felt good for everyone to know that he had been caught.

He was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole. And I remember I didn't go to any of the hearings because I was in Hawaii at that time, and I had just had Naia, and I know that he took a moment and shared with Cheree's family and friends, "If I could give my life for her, I would," and he apologized to her family.

And that was it. And so, you know, I've thought about him so much over the last 10 years. And I think, you know, I shared in that first podcast, that I just had to move into a place of forgiveness right away because I was carrying, I had a baby, a child that was growing within me. So I was

dealing with life and death at the same time, and I was working a lot with death and reading a lot of Krishna Murty and his teachings on death. And so I felt like I was almost preparing myself for that. But I always have thought of him.

[0:24:24]

Mea: I started to kind of dabble and search for him in the system. And just curious about his whereabouts. And so I looked for him a lot. Starting probably, like, three or four years after she had passed, I started looking for him, and it turns out I had the wrong birthdate. So her birthday's December 10, and I was told that they have the same birthday, so I was searching for him under her birthday as well.

Amber: Okay, I thought I heard that.

Mea: Mm hmm. Yeah, so his birthday is actually December 2, and so yeah, I would, like, pop online and search for him every now.

And then last May I was at my family's house. I was getting ready to come up to Oregon to start the summer here, and my parents had redone their will. And so they asked if all of us kids could come to the house and meet with this man who is going to— he had been helping them redo everything and shifting people in and out.

And so yeah, we met with my family that day and this man — I forget his name now — but he was a really amazing human, and we ended up talking for a long time and really connecting. And he told me that whenever he works with families, he always looks them up online just to kind of see who they are to see the families that he's working with.

So he told me, he was like, "You know, like, I looked you up online, and I came across this podcast that you had done," with you, Amber, and he's like, "I listened to it." And I was like, kind of surprised at first. And I was like, huh, interesting, 'cause he's an older man. And he said, "You know, I really appreciated the story that you had shared about the man who took your best friend's life." And he's like, "I... you share that you are having a hard time finding him in the system. So if you are still interested, I can maybe help find him." I think he might, you know, have some connections or something. I don't know. And I was like, "Wow, okay. Yeah, I'm definitely interested."

And I had my computer in front of me because we were like Docusigning stuff for the will. And I went on to the same website, like right in that moment as we're talking, type in his name, type in the information, and he shows up right there. And I'm just like, wow, like here he is after like looking so many times for him. And so that was big, of finding him, and then seeing that he was in Chuckawalla State Prison, which was just three hours from my parents house.

There's a beautiful butterfly that's flying by right now, which is always the way that Cheree shows up.

Amber: Aww.

Mea: Yeah. *(both laugh)*

So yeah, it was just three hours from my family's house. So that was a really big, finding him and knowing where he was.

[0:27:41]

Mea: So that summer, which was last year, I just started feeling into what it would look like if I wrote to him and if I got in contact with him, so I started looking into it. What, you know, how do you approach this situation? I had never wrote to a prisoner before.

So just what I had found online was just like words of advice was, you know, don't write too much the first time you write to them because you want to respect where they're at, you don't know where they're at. And so start out simple. And then if they, you know, allow them to respond back in whatever way they need.

So I had planned to write him, and I was at my friend Paz's house in LA, and she had this book called *Symbols*. And it's like a really thick book, and you put your hand on the front, and you just kind of tune in and ask a question or just sit with it, and then you open the page to whatever one of these symbols. And so I put my hand on it, and I was with a bunch of my friends, and when I opened up, I opened to prison. And everyone was just like, "Prison? Like what is that? I've never seen like..." And I, you know, I'm like, "I know exactly what this is." So that was kind of the first sign.

And then I was driving up to Oregon and I stopped at the co-op here in Ashland, and on, out front, there was a billboard that said, "Write to a prisoner." And it was a paper that someone had put up there, and it just shared like, "You know, it's very lonely in the prison system. Oftentimes, we don't have connection to the outside, if you feel called to write," and it was like a list of people that you can write to. Women, it was all women actually. And so I was like, wow, okay.

So I wrote to him the first time last July around this time, actually. And so, keeping in mind what I had learned about writing to them, definitely didn't... I couldn't do it because as soon as I started writing, just so much was coming out, and I don't even remember what I wrote to him that first time. I remember a little bit, but I know it was about five pages.

And I know that what I did write to him, and what I wanted to know about his life. And I wanted to know about his connection with his mother, and his connection with his father and his family, and what led him to that day.

And I had shared a bit about my process with it all and my friendship with Cheree, and where I was at when it happened — like, where I was at, you know, mentally and physically, that I was carrying life — and I told him right in that letter, "I forgive you, and I forgave you from the moment that happened, and all that I could think about this whole time is just what led you down this path. And what happened in your life that brought you to do something like this?"

And I think I even told him that I loved him. And that I was here, and that I was open to talk, and that I felt that as part of my healing journey, his healing journey that I wanted to start this dialogue, and if he was open to it, then I'm here and if he's not, then I respect his decision and that was that.

[0:31:46]

Mea: So about a month later, I got the first mail from him, which was crazy and wild, just so... you went to the P.O. box and opened it and there it was, and this is the letter.

So I went down to the river, and I opened it and I just read it and cried. And so at this point now we've been writing to each other for a year, and there's been so much, and it's been such a beautiful, deep healing journey for both of us.

And his response back in that first email was that he was raised by his grandparents in Tijuana. And he said that he was raised poor, and he was raised selling his grandmother's tamales in the streets there. And he said that he loved his grandparents, and they were very good to him.

And when he was about 10 years old, he was sent to the States to live with his birth mother and stepfather. And he said, that's when he first started to experience abuse, was through them. So he said that those years of his life were very hard.

And when he met, he met his high school sweetheart. And he ended up moving in with his high school sweetheart, and he said that was the first time that he had ever experienced love like that since living with his grandparents. And so he said her family really took him in and were good to him. And then he started college, and he said that's when he found drugs and alcohol.

So, you know, when he told me that I just thought about, like, that's what so many of us do. You know? It's such a common thing. And we all know people who have been addicted to drugs, and who have even tried meth, you know, and just... he's a victim of drug abuse, and which is what led him down this path. It really was. He got caught up in drugs and alcohol and abuse of the substances.

And so, for 20 years, he was addicted to crystal meth and crack cocaine and alcohol. From the time that he was 20 up until three years ago. So he's been sober now for three years, and he's going on four years.

[0:35:01]

Amber: So that means he was using in prison?

Mea: Mm-hmm. Which is, you know, of course we weren't led to come into each other's lives until now. You know, it totally makes sense that we've connected now, after he's been sober for, at that point it was three years, now it's gonna be four. Yeah.

Amber: What spurred him to get sober?

Mea: I haven't asked him that, but thank you because that's a really good question.

He's learning to smell, to taste, to feel again after 20 years. Like, he's very childlike in many ways. And he gets excited about little things, like when he finds definition of a word that he doesn't know. He doesn't have very many books. He has an encyclopedia and like a Bible.

I think that that's really what helped him, was finding God, you know. There's a lot of support in the prison system in that way. And so, I think that that was really, like, what kind of kicked it off was finding God, and that has helped his path a lot. And then learning to forgive himself.

Yeah, so he has, you know, I started off, we started off very slow and just building a lot of trust. And that's really what it was in the beginning was just us building trust together.

And you know, I definitely there's been times where I've like questioned what he's telling me, which I think is natural, you know? Or I'm like, "Is he really sober?" because of little things that he says sometimes, but I realize it's from years of drug abuse. That's really what it is.

[0:37:35]

Mea: And I feel like I think the biggest thing has been, like, her family, Cheree's family, and being afraid to share with them and to tell them because I haven't told anyone so far, besides, you know, my family and my closest friends. And that's been very little. It's kind of been, really, been dedicating this last year to this work with him, and everything else seems so small compared to this work that we're doing together. And so a lot of my time and energy has gone into relationship building with him and trust building.

So I've been really afraid to share with her family. And just recently he asked he wrote her mom a letter and asked that I would give it to her when the time felt right.

So I did reach out to Cheree's mom two weeks ago, and I wrote her, and I shared with her about this last year, and I haven't heard back from her. And I haven't sent a letter to her. I'm keeping it until I hear from her but I think that's just been really sensitive with that part of things understandably, you know.

Her mom is a beautiful woman, and, and I feel she's still very angry, you know, rightfully so. And so I know, I don't know how she will respond to this, but I've found myself over the last year going into... So yeah, I'll just, let me share a little bit more just about our letters together and kind of about him, and where he's at.

[0:39:33]

Mea: Yeah, it's been a slow building process. And he shared with me that he has a son, and he has a daughter and they're teenagers now. And I don't think he has contact with his daughter. He has a little bit of contact with his son.

And so a lot of a lot of the first few months were just sharing about different things, and I opened up and shared with him about Cheree. He didn't know, obviously, anything about her at all. So I think it was really healing for him to hear about her, this person's life that he took, and what she liked and the things that she was into.

And he told me that he took a history of rock and roll class in prison because we used to love classic rock; we listen to a lot of classic rock together. And he has been drawing pictures of butterflies because he knows that Cheree loves butterflies, and that's how she has shown up for me.

And you know, his letters are just, every time he writes to me, he still apologizes. And he's deeply, deeply sorry. And now that he's sober, he is feeling everything. And it's hard for him because he's going through it all, and he's allowing himself to feel the pain that he's caused for Cheree's family,

her mother, her friends, his family, everyone around him. Because for so long, it's something that he's pushed aside.

And I keep reminding him, like, you know, I keep encouraging him, "I keep going, keep going. You're doing amazing. It's natural to have..." you know, I've kind of just become like, I've become a big support system for him. He doesn't have a lot of contact with anyone on the outside at all. He has a brother that he's recently connected with, and his mother and father live up in Northern California. And his Dad, I think his stepdad, is sick and his mom just had a stroke.

[0:42:07]

Mea: So it felt like he was doing really good when we first started talking, for months, and then when COVID hit, he had been trying to get a transfer up to two Corcoran. Is that it? Do you know? Um, yeah, it's Corcoran. It's up, like, in between Bakersfield and San Jose, I believe, out in the desert.

So he was trying to get a transfer there so that he could see his mom because she's getting older. And so he was really working on that. He finally got a transfer, and it happened right before COVID hit. And then as soon as COVID hit everything, you know, in the prison system right now, it's just, it's awful.

And so I had started to get letters from him, like, every week, where it was like once a month, we would write to each other. And then they were coming in every week, and he was super stressed, and a lot of anxiety and fear with what was happening in the prisons. Like he was going from a Level Two, which means that he had like a little bit of freedom to still do things like go outside a certain amount of time per day, take a shower at least once a day, to Level Four, which is like you get one shower a week, and then maybe get to go outside — I think it's different in every prison — but you get to go outside for, you know, just not a lot of privileges. And that was hard because he worked really hard to get to the Level Two.

And, and so he was seeing like the prison, like, the nurse and a psychologist there and going in for support. And, of course, guess what they're trying to offer him there is drugs like, "Take this pill, you know, for this," and he's just like, "I can't take that, like I'm working on my sobriety." And so I had given him some breathing exercises that he had been working on. He said that was really helping him a lot.

[0:44:28]

Mea: But I've found myself advocating for him quite a bit, and it's interesting because in the beginning, I kept having to question like, my feelings because I started to care for him. And I'm like, wait, am I like... but Cheree's gone and just there's just so much deprogramming, you know. Like, how can you care for this person or try to advocate for this person who took your best friend's life?

And all these things coming up, and every time I sat in and tuned in, it was like, this is the right thing to do. He doesn't, yes, he's in prison for the rest of his life, and, you know, it doesn't... I don't forget what has happened, you know. But he's a human being, and he has rights, you know, as a human. And what's happening right now in the prison system is awful, and he's experiencing it. And so I want to do what I can to help him.

And so I've gotten in touch with his parole officer, and that was really interesting as well, because that was the man who defended him in court that day, which I realized later. Yeah, he had asked me to contact him and let him know what was happening inside the prison. And he was doing like, you know, open dorm living to a tiny cell in confinement.

And so I had called and shared with his parole officer what was happening with him, and you know, asked like, "Are you familiar with, you know, his name is Omar?" And he was just like, "Yeah, I know this case very well." And so I've been in touch with him often. And just so that he can have like some sort of rights in there right now.

And I think it's lifted a little bit like he's definitely doing better, but it was really intense for a few months, and I was taking on a lot of it on top of, you know, what we were dealing with here on the outside with it and just our own personal experience with COVID.

But it felt and it feels important to us to help him and to be there and to just use my voice and to do what I can.

So there's little things like, he has like a tablet that he can connect. And suddenly text messages through, or I'm not sure what it is, but it's like \$200 you know, and he bought it, and it was lost and like, it got delivered to the prison, but he never received it. So little things like that, where I'm like, helping him track things and just a lot of things that he can't do from the outside.

Um, but you know, he definitely shares with me how grateful he is for our friendship, and I feel like we're just on a beautiful healing journey together. And and, you know, I feel that Cheree saved his life because he was on the path to overdose, you know, so much. And now he's getting a chance to live again. And it's so beautiful, like I said, just the childlike part of him that comes out when he's talking about feeling again and smelling and, like, all of these things that were taken from him through the drug abuse.

And he just... I actually just received a letter from him yesterday. And yeah, he says, "By the way, I had to look up the word 'extraordinary'." I think maybe I wrote that was one of my letters (*Mea laughs*). And, yeah, just little things like that, you know.

[0:48:51]

Mea: Something else that he did in November:

So yeah, when we had started to build trust together, I had questions about that day that I wanted to ask him. And so I had wrote him a letter that had just had like a bunch of questions, "Did you know that she was in the house when you went in there? Tell me what happened, like from your end."

And so he wrote to me, and he said, "Before I move forward and share any of this, I feel it's important that I ask for your husband's permission to be in connection with you and to be communicating in this way." So he wrote Augustine a separate letter, and then Augustine wrote him back, and Augustine just shared, like, "Of course, yes, I support this relationship between the two of you." And so, you know, I really appreciated that he did that.

So he wrote to me and shared, you know, we've went into that day several times together, and you just shared, like, you're not in your body when you're high. He just doesn't remember even a lot of the last 20 years at all. And his story matched to what I knew.

The only other detail that I learned was just that he had a pipe. And he told me like, "As a homeless person on the streets, this is something that you do, like, you carry a weapon," you know. So that's why he had the shank, and that's why he had this pipe. And he said he thinks it was some sort of kitchen pipe. So that was one thing. And he didn't know that she was in there. I mean, he told me everything up until he said that he remembers drinking a beer, which I already knew that was in the police report.

But to open that up for both of us, and for him to go there and reflect on that day and those moments and like really sit with that is really powerful for him. And he's doing the work, and he's learning to forgive himself, and he's learning to forgive those around him that had caused him pain and abuse that led him down that path.

And so, yeah, it's become a big part of my life, this connection, and I think that when the time is right, I would like to meet with him in person.

And I feel like I've taken on another child in a way (*Mea laughs*) just because he is a part of our life now, he's a part of our family's life and you know, Naia knows who he is. And Naia doesn't know details of the story, but there's a lot that she's learning through this as well. So that's kind of where where we're at right now.

[0:52:23]

Mea: And, you know, also I feel like just even diving into the anti-racism work over the last several years has been such a big part of all of this as well, because this work goes hand in hand with the prison system, you know. So I've learned so much, just about that, and the conditions of the prison, the prison system and just all of it.

So it's... I just feel so divinely guided in so many ways. And yeah, I just I'm grateful for him that he's willing to go there with me. And he's willing to sit with it and really look at everything.

And some days are harder for both of us. You know, like, sometimes I hear from him, and he's just he's struggling and yeah.

Yeah, but we're coming up on the 10 year anniversary. And so, um, and so I felt that I was ready to share, especially because I had communicated with her mom, and I heard that her mom knew what was going on know what was going on, and because I had shared a little bit on your podcast before. So I just, I thought of you because I was saying well... And it's just so interesting how this all came through this man, listening to your podcast that day that led me to find him. And so I have been wanting to share a little bit more about it and where we're at with things now and our journey together. And just thought like, maybe I could do a blog post or writing about it, but there's just so much that it feels really good to just speak to it and and just share Yeah.

Amber: It's, like, I feel healed hearing this story. I feel healed hearing about your healing and his healing together. And while I totally understand that some people cannot do what you've done

here, since you could do it, I'm so glad you did do it. You know, I admire it so much. And it just hits me as the right thing, and it has from the beginning.

And it's almost like you finding the forgiveness in your heart from the very beginning, you know, even though you weren't in touch with him, it opened some door. It opened some door in the universe, and really laid the foundation for what has become now this healing relationship between the two of you.

[0:55:38]

Amber: I think, too, about addiction, you know. Like, it wasn't Omar who killed Cheree. It was meth who killed Cheree.

And like, you know, we've talked about alcoholism in our families before — in that podcast we did, too — but it really shifted things for me with my dad. Just in the last year when I was with him, and I saw, like, he's not even Gary anymore. He's alcohol.

So you being able to see him, see his humanity. When that's just what prison does, right? It strips your humanity from you.

Mea: Yeah, and at first, you know, I was thinking about like, he was born a perfect being into this world, you know, and then learning about ancestral trauma, and that we carry that through when we come in. And so, you know, who knows what's underneath all of that?

But yeah, you know, it's... there'll be times, too, where I'll find myself, like, angry at someone, and then I have to think like, "Wow, if you can forgive this man, then how can you even hold on to this little bit of anger that you're feeling for this person right now?" you know. So it's been such a beautiful teacher in that way. I'm constantly just like, reflect and forgive and move forward.

[0:57:23]

Mea: Yeah, and thinking about, you know, like you and Owen right now, and I know that, you know, your parents both passed through someone else's mistake. You know, and we've talked about that as well, like, having to, even if it's not like a violent crime, really looking at that and facing that.

And forgiveness can be so liberating, and I didn't know it at the time. You know, it was almost just like I have to do this, can't carry any fear or anger or hate or judgment in my body right now when I'm carrying new life. I have to move through this. But I didn't know how powerful and healing it was until I really started doing the work with it.

There's a podcast with his name is Shaka Senghor that Oprah interviewed, and it's so beautiful I recommend it. But it's about a man who committed murder, and he had the victim's family write to him in prison and express that they had forgiven him. And to hear it from his side was so beautiful and Omar's told me, you know, he just said that he's just when he first received my letter that he just cried and cried and cried. And that's powerful, you know. And it's hard to forgive, but it's so easy, too.

Amber: Totally, yeah, with my mom, the woman in her 20s who hit her, it really wasn't her fault. An accident earlier in the day had knocked out the stoplight, and they had not put up proper signage.

So I do have anger towards the government agencies that chose, literally were like, "We don't want to put the signage up." You know, at this point, there's been depositions. And we've, we read exactly what happened that night and who dropped the ball.

But with Owen's dad, who just passed less than a month ago, the day we're talking, it was a drunk driver. It was a 29 year old woman, and when we got her name, we looked her up, no Facebook, nothing. The only thing online about her is a previous alcohol related conviction five years ago when she was 24. So that just immediately told us she has a problem, you know.

And it, literally, that's still that's the only thing we know about her, and that she was Care Flighted that night, and we just we keep meaning to check back in with the detective or the investigating officer, and we keep putting it off, but we'll do that soon.

But seeing that just kind of immediately put forgiveness into my heart. Who knows if you're already an alcoholic by 24 what happened in your life?

Mea: And anyone can become a victim of drug abuse. You know, we, like I said, we all know people who've been through that. And, you know, even Cheree's own brother had had addiction with meth.

Amber: Wow.

Mea: We used to call it speed back in the day. It's probably still called speed, but um yeah, I remember that she hated that. He would... he'd get on like a speed binge, and then she wouldn't see him, and he spent time. He was in and out of jail as well. So, you know, Cheree's mom, like she knows what that's like to care for someone and love for someone and love someone who has addiction problems.

Amber: Right.

Mea: Um, but I am like, I'm really curious about Cheree's mom and how she's gonna respond back. And, of course, it's her own journey, you know, but

Amber: Yeah, I mean, yeah, it's easy for me to forgive these people who killed my mom and my father-in-law, but when I think about my child, that that would be a whole other thing.

Mea: Mm hmm. Yeah.

Amber: Yeah. And you know, when I said earlier that "Omar didn't kill Cheree, meth killed Cheree." I feel like that might trigger some people, and I want to really speak to, like, the people complexity of addiction, and how, of course, there is still agency that people have, but that, really, these hardcore, addictive drugs and alcohol, rewire our neurology so deeply that we just become different people or like ghost-like people; just shells, who are... all our motivations are the drug. And so it's like all of our behavior just is the drug when we're in that state.

Mea: Yeah, and that's what he had shared. It's like all he could think about and all he ever did think about. He'd do whatever he could just to get the next fix.

[1:02:38]

Mea: And also I want to share, like, I'm... I have, you know, started to dive deep into the prison system and reform and all of these things, but I'm also still learning so much about it. And it's... I'm just like, so hungry for any information. So just the tools that I've been using is, you know, listening to podcasts, reading books, I'm following Instagram accounts. And so I do want to put it out there because I want to understand more.

And it's like, it's hard because we write each other letters, and sometimes he doesn't respond to questions that I asked, or he will, like, two letters later. But there's just a lot that I'm still learning. And I want to know more, and I feel like it's a big part of my path now, to help advocate and to just use my voice in whatever way I can to help not only him, but you know, the prison system is so corrupt just like everything else. But we need more people to share about what's happening.

And he, you know, he got life without parole. I need to look into this, but I believe there's three reasons why you can get life without parole, and one of them is, like, murder with the intent to also rob. So because it was burglary and murder, that's why he got life without parole.

But you know, these are just things that I have never looked into, or, you know, as a white woman of privilege, that's not something that I'm paying attention to. But I am now, and it's important, and definitely feels like it's a big part of my path during this time.

And even with Augustine, you know, he's been really supportive, but sometimes, like, I can be maybe a little harder on myself or like, and he'll remind me, and I've had to tell him like, "This is my path right now. And this is, this is where I'm at. And I need you to support this, and even if you don't understand it, or even if, you know you feel a different way. I need your support through this time." And that's all I had to say to him, and he was like, "Got it. I'm here." So he's been really supportive even though a lot of it is he doesn't understand because it's not his experience.

But I'm learning so much and open for anyone has any more resources or even, yeah, just I feel like I'm constantly looking and researching. And like I said, it's still very new. So.

Amber: Yeah, it seems so big, and you know, of course, I'm aware of how fucked up the prison industrial complex is in America, but it seems so big and overwhelming and complex. But yeah, and now I'm curious, and now I want to know what you've read and what your resources are. So maybe we can put a little something together from them.

And I had been hearing, too, that COVID was really hitting some prisons very hard and making things a lot harder for prisoners, but I didn't really know what that looked like, and it's helpful to have an individual story.

Mea: Mm-hmm. Yeah. Yeah, I think there's some really great podcast episodes on what's happening right now in the prison system with COVID. And I can link those.

[1:06:49]

Mea: And something else that I just was reminded of was a couple months back, you know, I had asked him. I'll send him stamps and like things like that, you know, that he needs in there. But you can send money, but he has a fine for the crime for taking Cheree's life that he'll never be able to

repay in there. So if I were to send him any money for anything, for like small things, you know, they take, like, more than 50% of it. It goes to this fine.

So, there's a way that they can do it. Like they can have... you can send money to their friends who don't have I think it's restitution, and then they can give it to him.

But yeah, I had asked him like "Yeah, if you need anything..." Like I would really like to send him books, you know, and things like that. But he asked if I would go in half with his brother on getting him a TV and I was like, "I'm not getting you a TV. I don't even watch TV. Like no way!" (*Mea laughs*) That's what I was thinking in my mind. But I did share with him, I was like, "I'd rather get you books." But then I was like you know what? If he wants a TV, I'll help him get a TV. (*both laugh*)

He did write me recently and shared that, like, he would be happy to receive it some sort of, I don't know what it is, but it's some sort of tablet thing that has like 150 bucks on it already. So I think I'm going to send that to him. Because you know, you love books. And I feel like there's so many good books that I want to send to him that I feel like can help him.

Amber: Yeah, and then you can have them all in one small space.

Mea: Yeah. And also, you know, if anyone out there has friends or relatives, loved ones, that are incarcerated, that have experience, you know, how I can be the support in a better way, please reach out, and let me know because I only have him, you know. And like I said, we're just writing letters to each other. So I just want to understand more.

Amber: Yeah.

[1:09:19]

Mea: We were, Cheree's family, was going to do the 10 year celebration of life this year, but ecause of everything that's happening, they're going to postpone it. But I found a photo of her recently online that I had never seen before, and she looks so beautiful and to, like, find a new photo of your best friend that you haven't seen in 10 years, like a photo that you've never seen before. I've just been looking at a lot, and like, just sitting with her and feeling her, and I know that this is what she would want.

I feel that, personally, you know, especially with the butterflies, like I know, it's so typical, like, you see a butterfly and you think of those who have passed, but like, there's been so many instances where I'm talking about her or I'm calling her in and she shows up. It's so beautiful.

Amber: Yeah, thank you, Mea.

Yeah, just thank you for leading by example. And it's like you create a space in the world for folks when you do this. You create a space to slow down, you know. Even just you saying that this has been a big part of your life and your work for the last year, I can feel that there's a lot of slowness and intention in what you're doing with this, and you're choosing, like, not to tend to the millions of other things that I'm sure are demanding your attention, and instead really work on this deep healing. And that's inspirational and beautiful.

Mea: Thank you. It feels nourishing in so many ways. And also, yeah, just something to give my focus and my attention to that's not like social media, you know. I've just really stepped away from that platform a lot. There's still the Spirit Weaver space that that I'm focused on, and I like to share on. But my personal space right now just feels, I think, it's just a reflection of where I'm at of just being inward and quiet and just taking time out from that world. So good. Hey,

Amber: I bet. (*Amber laughs*) I'm using it much less than I ever have. But not a complete step down.

Okay, anything else? Well, I'm honored that you reached out, and that you shared this story with me and with the Medicine Stories community, and I feel a lot of love for Omar, as well, and a lot of softness around the whole story.

And really honoring Cheree. That's 10 years. 10 years gone. It's a big anniversary, and I said a prayer for her before we started, and I'll certainly be thinking about her on the 24th

Mea: Thank you for listening and just for being here with me, again and again.

[1:12:59]

Mea: I oiled up with your with St. John's wort and immediately felt it. And I think I'm getting that violet leaf castor oil in the mail in the next few days so I'm looking forward to that.

Amber: Oh good. Yeah.

Mea: Nourishing medicine.

Amber: Absolutely, and I really find that doing a castor oil pack because you have to be still, you know, and medicine of castor oil — it is so deeply healing and it is such slowness medicine, too. Really been coming to me. I've been doing it every day for the last week.

Mea: Yeah, I really... so I found out — I'll just share briefly — I have a fibroid. I have two fibroids, one's three inches, one three inches by three inches, one, one inch. And I feel like it has started to grow bigger, and you know, I'm 43. So I think this is a common for them to come during this time, and they say that they shrink after menopause, but I'm just learning about them.

And getting... I am a little bit nervous because I know that they're not harmful, but I'm just I know I can heal this on my own, and I can also have a surgery and have it removed but my mom is just like, "Don't do it. It'll go away." It's not causing me pain, but it's definitely like making my tummy bloated. So I've been doing a lot of herbal teas with nettles, and milky oats, and red raspberry leaf and then the castor oil packs, and yeah, I'm so look forward to it. And I had been doing them and then I saw your video that you had shared. And yeah, I'm really finding that healing right now. Not only just what's happening, but yeah, like you said, just giving ourselves that time and space to rest, and just be. Like, I'll read a book or listen to a podcast and just for like an hour, and just drop out and so that's been really nourishing.

Amber: Yeah, when I've done Instagram posts in the past about the violet leaf castor oil, I've had a lot of comments of people saying that they successfully shrunk their fibroids with castor oil packs.

Mea: That's awesome. I'm so... yeah, I don't know anyone who has them. I know that a lot of women have them, but I haven't come across.

Amber: I have one, actually. I suspected it was there for a long time, and then when I got an ultrasound when I was pregnant with Nixie, about four years ago, they're like, "You have one," and they showed me where it was. And I was like, yep, that's exactly where I feel it.

Mea: Wow. How big was yours? Did they say?

Amber: I don't remember if they said, or I don't think it was very big. Like, when you said three by three inches, I was like, wow, that sounds big.

Mea: Yeah, I can feel it. In the morning time, like when my bladder's full, and I'm laying on my back, like I don't... I try not... I don't feel it until the morning, and then I'm like, there it is. Like pops up and I can feel it. Like I think it's growing! So that's why I really started to focus on drinking the tea and the herbs and doing the castor oil packs.

[1:16:24]

Amber: Yeah, and Alyssa Vitti, *In the Flo*, that's her book, and then she also has a website. She has so much good information. Any sort of like female-bodied issue, she's amazing expert on the whole menstrual cycle and everything that can happen with us, so I recommend that, too.

And then I want to tell you, too, since we're still recording — and by the way, I'm good on time — I am juice fasting right now. We had checked in a few months ago. You were doing an extended juice fast, and I was doing just a shorter water and broth fast but I'm on day four of a juice fast right now. And it was because of Owens dad's death and just the incredible stress of the last three and a half weeks, and traveling, and just eating much more inflammatory foods than usual. I was... My immunity was super low from the exhaustion of early grief. And I was like, I need a reset. Yeah, so I'm on day four, and I feel amazing. It's like the easiest fast I've ever done on my own. I'll eat food soon, but...

Mea: Yeah, I know there's so much you know, I really, I used to do a lot more cleansing. And I haven't done it for a few years, but I think there was so much controversy, too, about the juice cleanse and fasting and all these things. But my body thrives when I cleanse. It does and it, like you said, it's just a reset, and like I find that I can keep going once I get going.

And I love making food when I'm cleansing. So my family's always saying, "You're cleansing. Alright! Awesome!" Because then I'm always in the cookbook, like, what can I make and smelling it. But I have, I feel like now because I just, yeah, I did that one. I think I did a 15 day one back in September when I got back to the islands. I think I'm just gonna keep that ritual going every year, when I get back there.

And also it's so hot and humid there, and like it's a lot easier to cleanse in those situations. So, yeah, I feel like just to get a 10 day. For me the 10 days work really well. but it's like any extra weight or water that I'm carrying, that's — for me, personally — that's how if I want to drop a couple pounds, and it's just because you know, we all know what our body feels like when we're in like... What do I want to say? We all know how we like our body to look and feel. You know, it's different for everyone, but I know when I'm carrying around some extra pounds, and if I do a juice

cleansing, it just melts away. Like, my digestion is back. I'm eating lighter. I can get on the intermittent fasting thing again. So yeah, that's great. Yeah. ANd day four, that's great.

[1:19:37]

Amber: Yeah, totally. Um, yeah, it's like when I am carrying around the extra pounds, I'm like, this is fine. I still love myself. It's okay, and then also though, this, I know this isn't the optimal place for my body to be.

We do all have like an optimal zone of weight and shape, and at some point, it just doesn't feel good anymore. And also when I'm feeling, internally with my immunity especially, because three days of fasting completely resets the immune system. There's a lot of times when I'm like perfect and yeah, exactly. I'm like, I could work out hard for like the next six months, and maybe lose the same amount of weight that I would lose just doing a brief juice fast.

Mea: Yeah, that's what happens with me. I'll work out, and I'll go in, you know, I'll be like six months so strong working out, but I see my body changing. But it's with cleansing, that's really what like, takes it to a place quickly where I want to be. And I and I love working out, too. And I like working out because, you know, this strengthens my body. But just, there's something I just think. Yeah, the cleansing that is. It feels quicker. And it's also, it's just so beneficial in so many ways.

Amber: Yeah, yeah. For anyone listening who's never looked into it at all. Like, you know, what happens when you're fasting is that all that energy that normally goes to digestion, which is a huge percentage of the daily energy your body is building up, or using up, gets diverted into whatever needs to be healed and whatever needs to be addressed in the body. So it's just this amazing form of self-healing where whatever needs the healing is going to get it.

[1:21:22]

Amber: And I remember, too, when we were talking over the wintertime that you said you were getting colonics throughout yours. We're both cleansing at the same time, both fasting, and you encouraged me to do it, and I was kind of like, "Maybe? I don't know." And I ended up not doing it.

But then I was talking to my friend, my best friend, who does colonics, and I had had some pretty bad symptoms the last couple days of fasting, and she was like, you probably just had some poop in there that needed to come out. She's like an expert, of course, on all this because it's her job. And she told me — and this is what really made it click for me — when you're not eating, of course, peristalsis shuts down, so your digestion shuts down. So if you do have poop sitting there in your gut it's not moving out unless you do something like colonic or start eating again after a few days at least, you know.

So yeah, I made my appointment, and I'm getting one tomorrow. Thanks to you. (*Amber laughs*)

Mea: Oh, that's amazing! Oh, that's great. It's so... it's wild to see what comes out of you! And it's cool if you have a good colonic therapist, who can like guide you to what's coming out. They're like, oh this is really old, look at this... (both laugh) Yeah, "Okay, thank god that's leaving."

And they'll kind of, like, when you get towards the end, they'll kind of like coax you, "Do you want to do one more flush?" And you're like, a lot of times I'm like, "No, I'm done." But then I know if I just do that one last one, then I'll get another big release. And then like yes, you just feel so good.

And there's a... my colon, the woman who does my cleanses shared with me that story about this girl who had swallowed a Barbie shoe when she was a child. And like her mom looked through her poop for weeks for it and could never find it and it came out in one of her sessions.

Amber: Oh my gosh.

Mea: Like one of those pink Barbie high heels. Yeah. (*both laugh*). So you don't know what's stored in there.

Amber: Wow, that is so funny. And that's so motherhood, too, like, looking through your kids poops for a few weeks.

Mea: I know.

[1:23:42]

Amber: Well, I remember you told me to when we were texting about that, that you read something that we have, like 13 pounds, was that it? Of poop at a time in our bodies?

Mea: Yeah. It's wild. I mean, yeah. I'm happy that you're getting one. Let me know how it goes. I'm curious.

Amber: I will I did it once last year with her, but it wasn't when I was fasting, but she has been, for like 20 plus years, she's been experimenting with fasting and cleansing and colonics and enemas. And she said — I think you said this, too — that when she's juice fasting, and she gets a colonic, she is like high afterwards, like clear, and just feeling like the best way she can feel.

Mea: Mm hmm. Yeah, I feel like a lot of... Like, if I have, like, things that I've been sitting on or things that I'm wanting to do that time, if I'm cleansing, I'm always like, okay, this is the time where I'm going to drop in and meditate and really like tune in deeply about these things that have been coming up that I haven't taken the time to sit with.

So it's not only just like the cleansing of our bodies, but I feel when like the clarity in your mind as well. And what can come forth when you're, when you're cleansing. And, you know, I love the I-Ching, so that's something else that I love to do when I'm cleansing is just like every day go deep into the I-Ching, and it's just really helpful, a really beautiful guiding tool.

Amber: Yeah. Thanks for reminding me of that. You taught me how to do the I-Ching a few years ago. So... (*Amber laughs*) glad we went there. It's fun to talk about those kinds of things. And thank you for the inspiration also in the just, like, guidance around the fasting.

Okay, I love you. It's amazing to see your face here on the Zoom call, and thank you for everything you've brought into my life over the years that we've been weaving together.

Mea: Yes, thank you, Amber. I love you, too and give Owen a big hug and sending you guys a lot of love during this time, and thinking of you, and holding you close. Be gentle with yourself.

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

[Closing]

[1:26:02]

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.

While you're there, check out my quiz "[Which Healing Herb is your Spirit Medicine?](#)" It's fun and lighthearted, but the results are really in-depth and designed to bring you into closer alignment with both 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. 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!