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TRANSCRIPT

Betzy Bancroft, November 16, 2006

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The following is a written transcript from John Gallagher's interview with Betzy Bancroft on November 16, 2006.

The interview was part of The Herbal Teleconference Series, which was an event celebrating the release of *Wildcraft! An Herbal Adventure Game* by LearningHerbs.com.

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For more information about Betzy Bancroft and United Plant Savers, please visit www.unitedplantsavers.org.

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John Gallagher: I am John Gallagher from LearningHerbs.com and welcome to our Herbal Teleconference series. This week we are with herbalist Betzy Bancroft from United Plant Savers, and we have a great call tonight, just like last week. Hold on until the end of the call, because we have another really cool Herbal Learning gift to raffle off. Also, if any of you get kicked off accidentally, just call back. So you know, you are all muted out, so if you have kids screaming in the background, no worries, we can not hear it. So scream away.

But first, before we get started here, I just wanted to let you know that when I first started learning about plants, it was at Wilderness Awareness School, where I had been working for about 16 years. I naturally had an ethic towards treating plants and wildlife with respect from my work there. Early on in my training, I met a professional wildcrafter named Michael Pilarski out here in the northwest where I live, and what he

told me made sense. He said that, when we are gathering, we have to have respect for the plants and the environment in mind. He told me about a group called United Plant Savers and sold me a book by Gregory Tilford called From Earth to Herbalist. I know many of you on this call actually have that book, because I require it for the Roots and Branches course that comes with the Herbal Medicine Making Kit.

Tonight we are going to get a deeper look into what drives us here at LearningHerbs.com and what our motivation and passion is behind this business. You will also see why we created Wildcraft, our new board game. A portion of the proceeds of our game will be donated to United Plant Savers, on an ongoing basis, to give back to what the incredible work that they are doing.

I would like to introduce you to an amazing herbalist. I knew her remotely from a mutual friend of ours, Mark Tollefson, right?

Betzy: Yeah.

John: He is the Director of the Wilderness Youth Project, and just found out that his wife is going to have a baby in March.

Betzy: Yeah.

John: They taught at Tom Brown's Tracker School together, right?

Betzy: Mark and I did teach a class together, the Wild Edible section of the standard class.

John: He sent me a big bag of organic astragalus root once and said he got it from you.

[Laughter]

John: And then I found out you were working at United Plant Savers. So you worked with Herbals and Alchemists for fifteen years. You have taught classes

in field botany, conservation-minded collection and introductory herbal studies at arboretums, herbal conferences and all kinds of stuff. And you are a professional member of the American Herbalists Guild. That is a lot. I am pleased to welcome Betzy Bancroft. Hi, Betzy.

Betzy: Hi. Thank you so much. I am honored to be here. I really am.

John: Oh cool. That is good.

[Laughter]

Betzy: Sure.

John: I am sure the conversation is going to wind all over the place, but I guess a good place to start is this. What is your story? How did you get started in all of this?

Betzy: I do have a little story about that. I love stories, and when I was a little kid my dad told me a story from when he was a little kid. His parents learned about jewelweed from a farmer, and always took care of my dad and my uncle with some. We grew up in New Jersey, so there was a lot of poison ivy there. This friend of my dad's got a really wicked case of poison ivy and nothing could cure it. I mean, they were bathing him in calamine lotion and nothing would touch it.

My grandmother went out and got what they called water weed, which is jewelweed, impatiens, and doctored this boy and cleared it right up. His father worked in a lab somewhere and immediately though, "Oh, I am going to bottle this and get rich." And so he did, well he tried. He took a bunch of the herb into his lab and tried to extract it, or whatever he did, and he could not make anything useful out of it. So, from that story, I learned that herbs are magic and you cannot necessarily put that magic in a bottle.

I started using that plant when I was a kid, and

eating a lot of wild fruit - cherries, raspberries and grapes from where I grew up. Then I found a mint patch and started making tea. I was just really always was a nature child. I hung out with the plants a lot. Then I met my teacher David Winston and started studying formally about twenty years ago. That's my story.

John: When you are working with herbs and helping people with things, when you are learning about them. And I asked a guest last week. Do you first come from a place where you are learning about the plants and then seeing what the plants have to offer, or a place of, "What is your ailment?" and then trying to figure out a way to cure the ailment?

Betzy: It depends on the situation. I try to get to know the plants in my neighborhood. I look at plants like friends of mine. My friends and neighbors are the green people who live around me. I try to get to know the plants close to me. Lately I have been studying Canada Mayflower, because it is abundant in the forest here and is a new plant for me. I did not see it where I used to live.

I take it from that perspective, but I also from the other. People ask me, "What do I do for this?" If I have an ailment I always treat myself with herbs. Then I come from the other perspective of, "OK, what might be useful for this person in this condition?" I always say, "What is useful for this person?" because I am always treating the person. I am not like, "What is good for acne?" because it may be that a whole bunch of herbs are good for acne. But what is important is, "What is good for this person in this situation? Right now, today?"

Then I look in the books. I might taste some plants. I might know something off of the top of my head. So it is some of each, really.

John: That is often the overwhelming thing when people want to approach learning about herbs. It just seems so huge. There are so many ailments and

things that can happen to us. There are so many plants out there. You look in books and you look in a lot of herbals, and there is a list of ten herbs that you can possibly use.

Betzy: Right, right. How do you narrow that down?

John: Yes, exactly? So what would you recommend to someone who is just starting out?

Betzy: This is a wonderful question. I have taught a lot of introductory classes, and what I say is that you should start with something that you already like, like some herb that you like to cook with. Maybe you like to cook with rosemary. Maybe you really like ginger. Maybe your whole lawn is plantain. You know what I mean? Pick just one plant at a time and get to know it really well in terms of its flavor. Make a cup of tea with just that one herb, and get to know its flavor. Chew on it, as long as it is an edible plant. Chew on it and really get a sense of its flavor, its character. For example, when you chew on a leaf, you can tell if it is astringent. Astringents are drying; they tighten up tissue, kind of makes you pucker. Or it may be a demulcent, which is like if you chewed on a piece of marshmallow root, it would get really slimy. If you made some linden flower tea, you will feel that mucilaginousness. Those two are really important medicinal qualities to understand.

So really check out one plant, really get to know it. Maybe look it up in a couple of books and see what other people say about it. Really trust your own experience of that plant, and just build on that from there. If it is one plant a week, one plant a month or whatever your timeframe is. It does not matter one bit. Just like you get to know a couple of friends really, really well, and you can rely on them in a lot of situations, where if you had 100 acquaintances, they would not be as useful to you as five really good friends.

John: Exactly. It's funny you say that because I worked 11 years as director of the Kamana Naturalist

Training Program at Wilderness Awareness School. I talked to people on the phone every week about this. That's exactly the point I would always make. When people are inspired to learn about something, and something that seems really huge, it seems really huge but you know what? If you look around, there's a lot of people too and you don't know all of them. And you don't feel like you need to know all of them. But you really do feel like you have to have a few close friends or family members that you get to know well. It's no different at all with herbs, is it?

Betzy: No it's the same thing. And you can take that further and say well, in the woods I'm likely to find this person. [laughs] You know? But yeah, it's a useful analogy.

John: Exactly.

Betzy: Yeah.

John: You're there working now with United Plant Savers and you moved to Vermont?

Betzy: I did.

John: Tell me more about the organization. Cause you know I know a bit about it but I'd like to hear from a person who works there.

Betzy: Sure. United Plant Savers was founded by a group of herbalists about 12 years ago. Rosemary Gladstar, who many people have heard of or have taken classes with, is really quite the visionary. She starts things, herbal things. Fortunately, a lot of great people have perpetuated the things that she started, like the California School of Herbal Studies. Things were really heating up at that point. The Dietary Supplement, Health and Education Act was passed in the 90's. The herb industry really started to perk up. She was teaching and a lot of other people had started teaching. They looked around and said hey, you know what? If this keeps building, plants are going to be at risk. Ginseng was already an endangered species because it's been exported for

300 years. There's a lot of people cultivating ginseng but the pressure on the wild stands is still immense. Goldenseal is catching up as far as its endangered-ness and lady slipper and so forth.

This group of herbalists decided to be pro-active and do something about that, so they founded this little organization called United Plant Savers. What we do, let's see, I can read you our official mission, which is "to preserve, conserve and restore native medicinal plants and their habitats in the US and Canada while ensuring their abundant, renewable supply for future generations." So they wanted to make sure that our plants would be here. Not only just for human use but, especially Rosemary, recognizes very strongly that the plants need the plants too. These healing herbs are also medicine for the other beans in the forest and the ecology.

John: This beeping and stuff going on -

Betzy: Excuse me?

John: This is just people, sometimes, I don't know it's a service, sometimes people are dropping or coming on. It didn't happen last week but apparently it's a little bit of a technical glitch we're having so if you can just ignore those things and just listen to us talk then that's the best we can do. I apologize. Sorry, Betzy.

Betzy: What we do is we have a number of different all geared toward raising consciousness about conservation of medicinal plants and especially sustainable use like read the label, make sure it's organic goldenseal instead of Wildcrafted, et cetera. We offer a lot of resources for people who want to teach about native medicinal plant conservation and also who want to grow medicinal plants from just replenishing their own land or growing their own for their own use or going into it as a livelihood.

John: Like say someone who really wanted to use goldenseal could choose to actually grow goldenseal?

Betzy: Sure if they had the right habitat for it.

John: They would use these resources to find out how. Or ginseng, or echinacea. What about echinacea? I bet you have something to say about that.

Betzy: Oh sure. Echinacea, there's a number of different species. Echinacea purpurea is ridiculously easy to grow and just a gorgeous plant. The one that's specifically at risk is the prairie coneflowers, like the echinacea angustifolia. What happened was when the echinacea boom happened and it became a very popular item in healthy food stores and so forth, the bigger companies were hiring people to just go out and dig it up. Acres and acres of prairie areas of echinacea really got decimated. Perennial plants, when it's the root that's the part used, a lot of the perennials are slow growing plants and it takes a long time for them to be reproductively fertile and so forth, they can't take that kind of harvesting pressure. John comes along and digs a few roots here and there it's not a big deal. But when you have harvesting on that kind of a commercial scale it's a different story.

John: Exactly. What would be some herbs that people really should look out for and not pick that might be more at risk?

Betzy: Things like lady's slippers. Especially plants like that have very specific needs in terms of where they'll grow and who they'll grow with and so forth. The more, shall we say choosy or the more factors a plant has for limited habitat or limited reproductive capabilities, those plants are the ones we should be especially capable of. And then plants like dandelion that reseed freely everywhere. There's no chance of over-harvesting dandelions. Then there's also ways around it. For example, you could just take part of a root. You can do this with ginseng even. If you've ever seen a ginseng root they have little branches that's why they call it the man root. You can actually dig up a ginseng plant and cut part of the root off. This is what I would do if I really, really needed some

wild ginseng. It's not a plant I would harvest just to have some on hand. But if I really needed it, for someone especially, I'd get some and I would take part of the root. But if you replant the rhizome, what looks like the little neck where all the scars were and make sure that the bud is there, you replant that and the plant grows back. You get what you need and the plant continues. It's all good.

John: Can you speak then to like something that I tell people, cause it's like if there's a certain plant, what part do I pick or how would I know this? Now I can say well it's really good to get to know the plant first and know it's life cycle and how it reproduces before...

Betzy: Oh sure. It is important. Going back to what we were saying about really getting to know the plant, knowing it's life cycle. Plants - perennials, annual and biennial - have basic life cycles but knowing which of those the plant is, knowing what it's traditional use is in terms of what part of the plant and how either indigenous people or our grandparents used it. A lot of plants, even though the root was the part traditionally used, the leaves are also active. So if you want to get to know a plant that maybe you don't have any information on, check out the leaves first. That's going to be the most sustainable too. But there's a lot to know. Even one plant, there's a lot to know.

John: You can literally spend a lifetime studying one plant and I know that, also you know it depends on ecosystems, lets say St. John's Wort for example. It grows on both sides of the mountain here in the west of the Cascade Mountains. One's the really wet side where I live on the west side of the Cascade Mountains. Then there's the east side of the Cascade Mountains. If you go to the east side of the Cascade Mountains, it's considered a noxious weed and it's everywhere and you can go and harvest tons and tons and tons and bring it home and strip it down and whatever.

But on this side of the mountains where I'm at, it grows pretty much in those dry rocky areas. So where it will be is the highway medians. So you've got to really search hard to find an off the road, off the trail, off the beaten path place where there's a nice patch of St. John's Wort growing. So harvesting it, it's the kind of thing where you want to maintain a patch in that situation, versus just not thinking about all that you're taking. When you're in a huge field and you take a big bundle and you can still see a huge field, you know you're not making a big difference. But if you go in an area that doesn't have much, you've really got to pay attention to your ecosystem and not just the life cycle of the plant.

Betzy: Oh absolutely. How big the population is has a whole lot to do with how much the plants can handle you harvesting. Also think about, I come by today and take a little bit, you come by tomorrow and take a little bit, then our other student comes by and takes a little bit. You know what I mean, how many people are harvesting from that patch too? You do want to think about how much the plants can sustain you taking. It's not so much about how much you need but about how much the plants can handle. That's an important perspective.

John: I never got that perspective, I never thought of that little bit that you just said until I was reading through the first part of *From Earth To Herbalist* by Gregory Tilford because he talks about that and I was just like, "Oh, yeah. You don't think anyone else is out there taking stuff until you realize oh I guess there are other people out there taking stuff.

Betzy: Especially such a choice plant in a choice spot.

John: and the right time of year. There are certain patches of things I tell everyone about and there's certain patches of things I never tell anybody about.

Betzy: Yeah, everybody would like that.

John: Especially when you're teaching a class.

Betzy: Stay off our special patch.

John: You have to be careful not to take your classes by.

So are there some good wildcrafting rules of thumb? Also, why don't you find wildcrafting for us. Because we've got this zine coming out and I get these emails sometimes saying "What's wildcrafting?"

Betzy: I get those emails too. My definition of wildcrafting is harvesting something that's wild. Something that is in nature's garden and not in a human's garden. Yeah, there are some great rules of thumb going back to what part of the plant. You want to think about harvesting the part of the plant where the energy is highest.

John: Oh, yes. Please talk about this because I feel stupid when I was first starting out that I didn't get this.

Betzy: This is important.

John: You know it is! Now I go "Duh!" but in the beginning I was like "Huh?" So please talk about this because I know a lot of people listening are like, "What are they talking about?"

Betzy: Sure. You know that everything is based on energy. Energy in the food chain comes from the sun. All the energy on the earth comes from the sun through the photosynthesis in the leaves. So when plants are really leafy and they're making leaves and they're doing their photosynthesis thing, that's where the energy is, in the leaves. What the plant does is it stores that energy in it's root and it brings that energy back out to flower.

Or maybe if it's an annual plant it just stores up a lot of energy in the leaves and then flowers and goes to seed. So when the leaves are fresh and new and real vital, that's when you want to harvest the leaves because that's when the energy is highest in that part. When the plant is blooming, and it's just going

into bloom and it's just primo, that's when you want to harvest the flowers because that's when the energy is highest in the flowers. Then if you want the seeds, you go for when the seeds are ripe, you know when they are dry, maybe not completely dry, you have to know the plants a little bit. But plants, especially annual plants, put a lot of energy in the seed. That's their next generation. They're depending on those seeds entirely for their next generation.

Then with a bi-annual or perennial plant, the energy descends into the root and is stored in the root for growing the next season. So, springtime is the best time to gather bark, when the sap starts to run and the vitality of the plant is coming back up out of the earth and into the limbs of the shrub or tree. So barks in the spring, then leaves and flowers in the summer. Of course that can be anywhere from spring until later in the summer depending on the bloom time of the plant.

John: Sure because if I'm out for wild edibles in the springtime that's when they're the most tender. If I'm going to make a salad with my favorite edibles want to go in the spring when they're green.

Betzy: Fall, like now, is the best time to gather roots because that's when the vitality is highest in the roots. If you had a bi-annual plant with a two-year cycle, you would harvest the root the autumn of the first year, because if you waited until the autumn of the second year after it's gone to seed you'll find a slimy, stringy mess when you dig up that root. There's nothing left because it spent all its energy to reproduce. That's a good rule of thumb you can keep in mind. Fruits obviously when they're ripe. A lot of fruits are nicer actually after a frost like rose hips.

John: I've got to ask you this since you just said rose hips and this is something that goes through my mind when I'm harvesting. Here's the thing. We go out as a family and we harvest rose petals in June when they are all happening at the park, the wild roses. We love to fill the jar and we love to fill it with honey and

make rose honey. But as I'm picking of course you know there's no way all these wild roses that our family could possibly make a dent. But I wonder as I'm picking the rose petals on the rose plant, no matter what will that still turn into a hip?

Betzy: It depends on if it's been pollinated yet or not. If you pick those petals before the pistils are ripe, being a female part and that flower doesn't get pollinated, then no, it won't make a hip because it needs that pollination to happen. The petals of the flower are like, "Here you go pollinator. Here it is!" You know? They are a little beacon for pollinators. The other thing about how much you take, leave enough for the pollinators and the animals and the birds and everybody too.

John: I always figure that they're these huge hedge roses and there's no way I can reach the whole top area.

Betzy: Sure, sure.

John: So when we're going through, but I'm keeping that in mind when I'm picking. That's the point right, that I'm keeping ethical and sustainable in mind, every time.

I don't know if you've heard of this, you probably have but have you heard of this twenty/twenty rule or rule of twenty?

Betzy: I have. I've heard a number of different percentages and rules of thumb.

John: What do you think about this? What is that?

Betzy: It's useful. A lot of people like numbers. But I think just being sensitive to the neighborhood where you're picking. Like I said the needs not only of the plants but the plants reproductive needs and the plants well being needs but also the needs of the rest of the ecosystem. That's all-important to keep in mind. I'm not much of a numbers person.

John: I found that very useful when I was starting out just to keep in mind. But yes, eventually like you said, what if I pick twenty and the next person picks twenty and the next...

Betzy: Yeah.

John: What that is everybody by the way, one out of every twenty leaves, one in every twenty flowers, one in every twenty fruits or whatever. That's just what you keep in mind.

So you were just talking about seasonal things, times of year. Now someone had emailed into me last week and it couldn't quite fit in with the conversation. What are you, in the wintertime that we're getting in now, what are a couple of things that a person can harvest? Like where you are anyway.

Betzy: Where I live, I harvest things like pine needles and spruce needles.

John: What do you do with them?

Betzy: Evergreen parts for teas in the wintertime. They're great expectorants. Pine and spruce and so forth are wonderful expectorants for colds. That's most of the gathering I do in the winter. I like to curl up by the wood stove and knit in the winter. [laughs]

John: Do you have cottonwood trees?

Betzy: We have a little bit of cottonwood up here, but not a whole lot.

John: We have massive amounts here so making balm of Gilead is an annual thing here.

Betzy: That's a great thing to do. My personal Wildcrafting is mostly really common species. Or the other kind of harvesting I do myself is salvage harvesting. If somebody is going to come along and mow, including me. I don't mow very often. But when I do I pick the plantain leaves out of the lawn before I mow it and it makes it rough.

John: I mow around the plantain leaves. My neighbor commented on it. "What about that spot?"

Betzy: I've been known to do that. I mowed around a St. John's Wort this year. [laughs] I tend to go for the really common stuff. My friends were digging a trench and there was a barberry in the way so I took the roots.

John: Exactly.

Betzy: But different places, you're going to have - I mean we're talking to people all over the country and everybody's got a different winter situation. So someone in Florida is going to have a completely different, they're going to be able to harvest all year round. Other people like in California are mostly going to be harvesting, I would suspect, in the moist seasons of the year.

John: Right. Get in touch with your seasons and what's growing.

Betzy: What's growing and what the botanical neighborhood is doing at your time of the year.

John: Take your time and get to learn things. And in time you'll look around and the whole neighborhood and the whole forest will be in Wilderness Awareness School we call this the wall of green. I can go to different parts of the country or places that I'm not familiar with a lot of the trees and things or plants and see a wall of green and one by one, before you know it, all those plants that are around you are just jump out and they are individuals.

Betzy: They start to differentiate. Sure. They are definitely individuals. Yeah, you just got to get up close and personal with them a little bit and then you get to see. You know, one of the things also that I suggest to people is to learn the basic difference like opposite leaves, alternate leaves, basil leaves, whirled leaves, compound leaves, simple leaves so that you can use a field guide, at least if the plants and flower look something up really simply. But those few

botanical words or terms are very helpful to know to be able to start to look at plants. Being able to tell if it has opposite or alternate leaves for example is really very simple. Sometimes it's not easy to tell if it's a compound or a simple leaf, but the alternate opposite thing is pretty easy to grasp.

John: And if anyone wants a good resource about learning that, there's a field guide called Newcomb's Wildflower, Guide to Wildflowers is it?

Betzy: Yes, Newcomb's Wildflower Guide. That's a great one.

John: And it teaches you to look at patterns and it's amazing. So if you want to learn how to identify plants between that book and Botany in a Day by Tom Elpel.

Betzy: That's the one I was going to suggest. That's another great one for understanding how to look at plants. If you can get a sense of the family, you learn a whole lot about the plant. For example, if you know something is in the Malvaceae family, which is holly hocks and marshmallows and cotton and things like that, there's no toxic plants in that family. And they're pretty much all mucilaginous.

John: Same with mints too, right?

Betzy: Yeah, there's no toxic mints either. So if you can tell it's a mint you know that it's OK. It won't harm you if you nibble on it. Mustard family, too, is another one that they're all edible. They're not all that tasty but all of them are edible. You can find mustards practically anywhere you go.

John: Ah. However, if you know that something looks like it's in the carrot family what would we have to look out for?

Betzy: Carrot family you must be much more careful. Families like the carrot family and the rugelas. I don't know the common name for that family, but those plants have a lot of very, very toxic members and it's

easier to confuse them. If you know they're in one of those types of families, you want to be a lot more careful than if it's a rose or a mint or something like that. That's important.

John: That's very important. So that's where the families can really come in. Just on a side note the Kamana Wilderness Naturalist training program Wilderness Awareness School really kind of takes you through slowly learning about how to look at plants. But it also, of course, it teaches you birds and tracking and trees and lots of other stuff too, but plants are part of it. It does take you through that step-by-step. But if you just want to get a couple of books, the couple name books that come on easy Newcomb's Wildflower Guide and Botany in a Day.

So when you're out there and you're picking something. You're out there and you're harvesting something. What's going through your mind as you're doing that?

Betzy: I'm thinking about kind of the similar mindset as when I'm gardening. I'm thinking about what would make this patch of plants better, or what do these plants need? Are they maybe a little thirsty? Do they need to be thinned out? When I harvest I think a lot about pruning or thinning. It's kind of a horticultural approach, like I said. For example, if I need some bark from a cherry or something like that I'll look for branches that are crossed or crowded just as I would when I was pruning my apple trees. Or if I'm harvesting nettles I cut a little here, cut a little there. I try to cut them so that the plant can grow back. Like if you cut basil in your garden and you cut it just a bit above where the leaf axle, where two shoots will come back out on either side because it's an opposite plant, it's easy on the plant if you snip it just above there. I think about what the plants need, what would benefit them as well as what's benefiting me and try to give back in that way.

John: And also I'd like to see what you thought too. Even when I look in the herbalist book where he's so

thorough in so much about everything you can think of, but something that I'm sure you teach and that I always tell people to always somehow recognize or give thanks to the plants when you're doing that. Different people have different ways of doing that depending on traditions and religions or spiritual beliefs, but there's something about energetically. So what do you think about that energetic exchange?

Betzy: I always try to have happy, good thoughts, caring thoughts in my mind. Absolutely. I think that's really important. The plants respond to it. I've had some interesting experiences with plants who really didn't feel like being picked [laughs] and so I didn't. Then the example particularly as I was teaching a class on herbs, Herbs for Gladness, was the name of the class, so I wanted to make some rose syrup. I went over to the garden at Sage and I picked a couple of roses, and they were like, "Oh, OK, if you must." I knew that particular shrub of roses had been picked a lot, and I went to a couple of more and they were like "OK." Then I came over to my yard, and there was a big patch of roses in the front, and they were absolutely delighted to be picked. I mean, they were "Pick me, pick me!"

John: [laughter]

Betzy: So picking up on the energy of the plant if you can't do that or if you don't connect with plants in that way, it's all right, but you should try to be sensitive to where the plants are at and have a positive, caring mind when you are gathering for sure. You are preparing food and medicine, and that is all about healing and well-being and nourishment and health, and you want to perpetuate that energy and put that energy into what you are doing.

John: Honestly, when I started learning things and people would tell me that, I would be like, "Yeah, right." It sounded kind of weird. But as I was doing it, as I started working with plants more and more, you could really feel something just like - everyone knows

out there when you could feel things off of people without any words being exchanged.

Betzy: Sure.

John: You could be next to somebody, standing next to them on a bus or standing next to them in line, and you just know what they may be feeling. There's not much of a difference there.

Betzy: Oh, yeah. No, the comparing it to humans is a certainly apt comparison. If I wanted your help, would I ask you nicely or would I just grab you and say, "Come help me," you know what I mean? When you are asking these plants for their help, nourishment, and gifts, and you ask them nicely, it's just a good thing all the way around.

John: Yeah, so that's important.

Betzy: I think so.

John: So, let's see here.

Betzy: You were going to ask me about processing.

John: Yeah. What do you have to say about that?

Betzy: One thing we discussed earlier that I think is very important and we wanted to talk about is making sure that when we go harvesting; like me, doing my little salvage harvests, I never know what's coming up. But when you purposefully set out with your basket to harvest plants, make sure that you have enough time to take care of the plants after you have harvested them. Make sure that if you are going for St. John's Wort flowers in the summer that you have enough olive oil and enough time to put those up because you don't want to waste their gift; you don't want to waste that medicine.

We all do a number of different things with the plants we harvest; sometimes they just get dried. The simplest thing that I do is to lay them in baskets in my herb room and let them dry that way. But if you

live in a moist environment, or if the weather is damp, there are a lot of plants like red clover and rosemary that don't dry very well just in the environment, they need a little extra, so you can put them in the dehydrator.

John: That is what we have to have where I live.

Betzy: Yeah, I would imagine so. Or you could just finish them off in a dehydrator to make sure that they are crispy before you put them in jars to make sure that they do not mold on you. Some day I will have a solar dryer, but I don't now. [laughter]

John: Yeah.

Betzy: But yeah, make sure that you plan your medicine making into your harvesting schedule, into your day.

John: Very important. I told Betzy of a time early on when I wanted to make dandelion wine, and I went out and I harvested a big bucket of dandelions, and I came home and left them out and got really busy and didn't think the whole process through. Well, they all molded. I just felt so bad, and that was a good learning experience.

Betzy: Yeah, sure. Plants go moldy quick. I mean, they will go funky on you quick sometimes you know.

John: It's OK to make mistakes you know, you learn from it. In fact, I got real lucky my first couple of years; a lot of successes. I started making a lot of mistakes, and I was thinking what's up. Then I realized I was making all these mistakes so I could teach other people what not to do.

Betzy: Yeah, there you go. You learn a lot about what not to do.

You don't really need a heck of a lot of medicine, unless it is a tonic that you take all the time like hawthorn berries or nettles or something like that that is a daily part of your wellness. For most things,

having a little bit of this or a little bit of that is just fine. Depending on who you are and what level you are using herbs, if you are just taking care of your family, think about taking plants that kind of cover the home remedy basis. Maybe you want to have some things for colds, maybe some things for urinary infections or maybe digestive remedies, certainly. But digestive remedies are mostly in the spice cabinet, which are always there.

John: Yeah, even cold remedies are often in the refrigerator.

Betzy: Yeah, certainly. I use thyme and sage a lot. People use osha and goldenseal for colds and flu [pfft]. Have some garlic and thyme and sage, you know?

John: I rarely even use Echinacea or anything like that anymore. I pretty much stick to garlic, ginger, and, like you said, sage.

Betzy: Sage leaves, hyssop. Hyssop is one of my favorites. I have a nice patch in the garden out front. Hyssop, if you are not familiar with it is in the mint family. It's a little sub-shrub, like a lavender or a sage and has similar requirements to sage, and it's a beautiful little plant, and it's a great anti-viral and respiratory tonic.

John: Wow.

Betzy: Yup. Pine needles that's another thing I put in tea for colds a lot. So having a little bit of these home remedy things if you are taking care of yourself and your family is great. If you have a practice, and you are caring for other people, and you are kind of a community herbalist, then it's another story to want to stock your apothecary, so to speak. But for home remedies, you don't need a heck of a lot.

John: And we talked about pine needles, mentioned it a couple of times. I just want to tell everybody a little trick. Often, what you are getting out of pine needles is vitamin C, and vitamin C is very volatile.

What you have to make sure you do is boil your water first, and when your water is hot already, then put your chopped up vitamin C in it and steep it for 20 minutes. If you boil it with the needles, then you will very well dissipate the vitamin C.

Betzy: Yeah, you'll lose the vitamin C. You'll gain resins, though, that are more medicinal.

John: True, good point.

Betzy: This is a really important thing - different preparations of different plants give you different medicines. With pine needles, as John was saying, vitamin C is a really great thing when you have a cold. It is a wonderful, important thing. Especially when you are treating children, you are going to want to make them a really gentle brew that you are going to be able to get them to drink. [laughter] The recipe that John just gave is wonderful, but if you had an older personal with a stuck congestion, and they needed a little stronger remedy, you can actually simmer the pine for a little while, and you get more of the oils and so forth, and it makes a stronger expectorant. It is also less palatable, but if you are sick enough, you will drink it.

But yeah, those are important things. Personally, I think it is much more useful therapeutically to take big doses of gentle herbs. We were talking about the culinary herbs and pine and hyssop and things like that, mint. You can take big doses more often, and I think that is more useful and certainly safer ecologically and personally than to go to stronger herbs right away.

John: You know, and you can think of those gentler herbs more like food.

Betzy: Exactly.

John: Like the nettles that some of you use in the roots and the branches of course. And this is some of the stuff exactly what I'm going to be talking to Susan Weed about in a couple of weeks.

Betzy: Oh sure.

John: Yeah, she's the world expert on that [laughter].

Betzy: Yes, she's also a big fan of getting to know one herb at a time, really well, just using, the herbalists call that 'simples' just simple herb.

John: That's why I, that's the other book I require in the Roots and Branches course is that. It's because exactly that people often say, "Well I don't know about this book, and she's very strong in some of her language and beliefs, and I don't feel necessarily comfortable, or whatever. And I'm sure you've heard that before, right? And I look at that book as incredible, like...

Betzy: Mm-hmm.

John: ...you can't find another book, healing-wise, that covers the very basic wonderful, weedy, species that are out there.

Betzy: Yep, yep.

John: And goes into such depth, and teaching you to do them one at a time.

Betzy: Yeah, and those are the plants to learn first, the gentle ones, the really common ones.

John: Mm-hmm, dandelion, plantain, chickweed.

Betzy: Burdock, you know violet leaves.

John: You know what, I've got another [laughter], you're going to like this, we have a live wild-crafting update going on in my house. Now my son is seven, and he's OK, that's enough said right? [laughter] OK, so earlier this Sunday, this past Sunday, he was on his way home from the ferry dock, right? And we ended up in the emergency room, he was on his way back from Lopez Island with my wife and with my daughter, and he hurt himself and ended up in the emergency room by splitting his head open a little...

Betzy: Oh.

John: ...It was nothing major, it was OK, everything turned out OK, right? So here we are three days later, and he just got home from wilderness awareness youth school where he was getting knife certified today...

Betzy: Oh boy!

John: ...and he goes there once a week and does wilderness stuff, so he's my little seven year-old getting knife certified, not too many seven year olds in school, that's not in too many of their schooling, right?

Betzy: Yep.

John: So anyway, he manages of course to cut himself [chuckle].

Betzy: Oh dear!

John: I know it's horrible that I'm laughing, but it's just like one of those, "Oh no, not again!" kind of parent things, you know? And so my wife just runs down and asks me if you were here in the call, and then we went out in the back, she ran out in the backyard, and there's a tiny little patch of yarrow growing...

Betzy: There you go.

John: ...she went and took some yarrow, because on those deep cuts, you can look at a yarrow leaf and what do you see? Like a serrated blade, almost...

Betzy: Deep cuts!

John: ...it's the shape of a, and they're great for deep cuts, and she just took that upstairs and chewed it up, and now he's got yarrow on his finger.

Betzy: Right, yep, I was just about to say, bet you went and used some yarrow.

[laughter]

Betzy: I'm not going to tell my emergency yarrow picking story [laughter].

John: Oh no, what's your story? You not going to tell us?

Betzy: Oh no, I have used yarrow for bleeding, definitely [laughter] yep, it's great stuff.

John: Yeah, so anyway, yeah.

Betzy: That's a plant I would not want to be without yarrow in the yard, I really wouldn't want to be without yarrow in the yard, and plantains!

John: Mm-hmm.

Betzy: Those are two that I would miss them if I didn't have them, in fact I did miss them, when I was taking the awareness class in Florida at the tracker school they lead us through some fire ants and I didn't have any. There was no plantain around, I mean I probably could have found something if I'd wandered around enough. I was very uncomfortable without plantain, I wish I had a lot to stick all over my feet, you know? [laughter]

John: Oh no.

Betzy: But yeah, herbs are great, and that's one of the things about knowing the simple remedies that are right around your house, so you can just run out and get something when you need it, you don't have to worry about whether you've harvested it, and dried it, and put it up, and made medicine out of it, you just run out the door, unless, like at my house there's two feet of snow. You run out the door and get it when you need it. Which of course blows our little rule about, 'where's the energy?' You know, but plants are really very accommodating and if it's there and it's in reasonable shape it's still going to work, you know?

John: You know, speaking of that, cause you know we're getting near the end here, I wanted to, speaking of that, if you do have something in your backyard, when you're picking things in your backyard, or even just anywhere in your town, some safety things. A couple of things so far from the road, that kind of thing, what do you tell people?

Betzy: Right, I tell people, not within 75 ft or so of a well-traveled road, if it's a logging road or a farm road that's no big deal. I stay away from well-traveled roads. I stay away from power lines, and rail-road tracks.

John: Mm-hmm.

Betzy: Generally, because those areas had been sprayed, fortunately they don't so much do that anymore. They come in with giant mowers, and so forth, but those areas were sprayed formerly, so I worry about what's still lingering.

I worry about commercial farm fields. I don't harvest near, or on, commercial, in other words pesticide and herbicide and so forth using farms.

John: Mm-hmm.

Betzy: I do all of my wild edible gathering, and now if I was going to look for a good place to harvest around the edges of farm fields are great, edges in general are very biodiverse places.

John: Mm-hmm.

Betzy: I stay away from any place people have sprayed stuff. And that might even be a park too, you know? If they are spraying the dandelions or whatever.

John: Exactly, got to be careful, you know I'm going to give my big secret here, that I tell people in the Roots and Branches course about what I do because we're talking about here, you know we pick most of the species that we're picking a lot of these very, kind

of things that grow out in fields and are more considered weeds by everyone else.

Betzy: Mm-hmm.

John: And who are they considered weeds by more than anyone? Well, well maybe not anyone, but I mean by a lot of the farmers, and we're blessed in our valley with a lot of organic farms, and they're more than happy, I know them all [laughter]. And they're more than happy when John comes by to pick their dandelions, or to pick their birdock, or to pick their red clover, or anything.

Betzy: Sure.

John: I mean everything that I use I get abundance, and it's welcomed and it establishes a relationship with the farmers in the area that get to know me, and just go up and ask them! They'll be like, "Yeah take my weeds!"

Betzy: Well, that's, it's true!

[laughter]

Betzy: That's, its kind of the crux, it's you know, you do it in a good way everybody benefits not just you, but the plants and the ecosystem, and everybody benefits when you do it in a kind and considerate manner.

John: Exactly.

So, I got an email from somebody today and you have mentioned briefly, earlier, just as we're wrapping things up, I just want to get to at least one question.

Betzy: Mm-hmm.

John: You mentioned before about gardening as a great way to grow herbs to keep them near you, especially ones that may not grow, just in the wild around you, like there's certain herbs like

elecampane, comfrey, and yarrow, there's a lot, boneset, let see, marshmallow. These are herbs that I'm not going to have growing, but I've got out growing in the yard, because I can go out, and I can make medicine with them, they're very easy, I got to have it so it's easy to grow, if it's not simple...

[laughter]

John: If I have to water it, forget it.

Betzy: Right, right.

[laughter]

Betzy: Oh there are some wonderful, very accommodating herbs that you can grow. I always have sage, sage is really easy, you know salvia officinales, calendula.

John: Calendula, oh I love calendula.

Betzy: It's really easy, and just gorgeous, so is echinacea, easy, echinacea purpurea, easy, beautiful. Ella campaign is a great one to have ella campaign is a really under-rated plant, it's amazing and it's beautiful!

John: Great for coffee, and I've got a Herbal Branch you can get the back issue for, folks on the website, which will show you how to make honey with it.

Betzy: Oh cool!

John: Yeah.

Betzy: Well, it's a sunflower, so it's a tall leafy sunflower plant.

John: Somebody asked me about blue cohosh, and they have it planted on the north-east side of a building with lots of shade from trees near by, every year it grows from the root until it gets a foot high then nothing else happens and eventually it dies down. It's done this for three years, she wants to

transplant it somewhere else, but he doesn't know where.

Betzy: Mmmm. Blue Cohosh likes remote forested areas. It's relatively common in Vermont, but I haven't seen it in a lot of other places. But it definitely likes the more remote off-the-beaten-trail, foresty wild areas. It's not a super-big plant. It should get closer to two feet, and it makes these beautiful blue little berries that look a lot like a blueberry, except they don't have the little navel the way a blueberry does. But that's how you know it will be happy. They bloom very, very early -- they bloom just as they are emerging from the earth, then they make these berries that are most obvious later in the season when they turn a deep blue-black.

John: Great. So hopefully that will help you, Rita, who asked that question. So as we wrap up here, I want to ask you one final question before we raffle off that cool prize. Tell me how I can join United Plant Savers, and tell me how does my donation help.

Betzy: Great question. Our web site is www.unitedplantsavers.org, and if you log on to the site, there's lots of info. There's a list of buttons on the left hand side, and one of them says "Join Us." You can go in there and print out the form. We're not set up for credit cards because we want to put all our money into saving plants, so you have to print out the form and send it. Or conversely, if you don't have Internet or don't feel like printing out a piece of paper, take a piece of scratch paper -- I don't care if there's something on the other side, as long as I can read it. Put your name, address and contact info (phone and/or email) and send it with a check for \$35, which is the annual membership fee, to United Plant Savers, P. O. Box 400, East Barre, VT 05649.

Currently, we've been doing substantial renovations to the facilities at the sanctuary in Ohio so we can start our internship program back up there. That will be very exciting. We also give out grants. You have to be a member to receive a grant. The grants that we

give out are for projects like community gardens and educational nature trails. They are usually educational in nature. We love projects involving kids. Those kinds of things -- restoration projects that involve education -- are the kinds of things that we fund. So those are some of the things your donation will be used for.

John: Everyone, if you want to get into herbs and working with herbs, and some of you live in remote areas where there are no herbal schools or plant people near you, there is no better way to get involved than getting involved with a group like United Plant Savers! You get to network and connect with other people like you are here on "Learning Herbs." The more you are connected with people, the more you'll really feel supported in your learning, and you won't feel so alone when you're out there and you don't have neighbors who are into this as much as you are, and people don't quite understand why you're not mowing all of your plantain or why you don't spray Round-Up on your dandelions.

Betzy: I'm sure my old neighbor where I used to live wondered why I didn't mow very much.

John: It's a long story, but I once got paid when I was a teenager for spraying dandelions. Boy, have I come around. Now I have a company where it's in my logo.

Betzy: I love dandelions. I just think they're marvelous. I have a page here on the wall that I copied out of the "Bread and Puppet Subversive Vegetable Calendar" for 2006. It's a woodcut of a dandelion, and above it in large type is the word "resist." I copied that off the calendar and put it on the wall.

John: The ultimate survivor, the dandelion. OK. I have a few announcements here before we cut it off and give away the prize. I'm going to let Betzy go here. She can hang out and listen if she wants. I just

wanted to thank you so much for sharing what you shared and helping all the people out there.

Betzy: Thank you so much. This has really been a treat.

John: Just a couple of announcements here. November 27 is our next teleconference. We've got John Young, world-famous tracker and naturalist. He is extremely knowledgeable about plants and nature, natural health. This is a guy who can talk about anything, and he's extremely entertaining to listen to no matter what he's talking about.

Betzy: He sure is.

John: I think he was teaching at the Tracker School for a little while while you were there, probably.

Betzy: I have listened to John teach a couple of times. He is really enjoyable.

John: It's going to be fun. And then we wrap the series on November 30 with Susun Weed, and that'll going to be a full call, probably. You can sign up for either of these two if you haven't signed up for them before.

And now, the final moment, the one you've been waiting for. Tonight I'm raffling off a copy of Shanleya's Quest. Do you know this book, Betzy?

Betzy: No, I don't.

John: Shanleya's Quest is a very under promoted book. Tom Elpel, the man who brought us Botany In A Day, which has been a savior for us who learn and teach about plants, came out with this book. It's a children's book, but it says that it's for "ages nine to 99." Shanleya's Quest is a "botany adventure for kids." You know how Betzy and I were talking about plant families before? It teaches plant families. Shanleya is a character, and in this book she goes from island to island. There's a pea island and a mustard island, and it teaches kids the patterns of the

plants in each family in a beautifully-illustrated children's book.

Betzy: How wonderful!

John: It's so cool. I sell that on LearningHerbs too, but somebody -- I'm going to tell you who. I'm going to do my special high-tech raffle system here. It's very high-tech. (drawing)

Thanks so much for joining us. Thanks again to Betzy, and I hope everyone has a great night and got a lot out of this talk. Say bye, Betzy.

Betzy: Thank you again. Take good care. Happy Thanksgiving, and peaceful winter.

John: Good night.



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