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2006

Herbal Teleconference Series

Susun Weed • Jon Young • Betzy Bancroft • Jessica Moore

TRANSCRIPT

Jon Young, November 27, 2006

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The following is a written transcript from John Gallagher's interview with Jon Young on November 27, 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 Jon Young, please visit www.jonyoung.org.

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John Gallagher: Good evening everyone. We've got a lot of people out there tonight. Once again, this is John Gallagher from learningherbs.com. Welcome to Part Three of the herbal teleconference series. We're doing this in celebration of *Wildcraft*, an Herbal Adventure board game, which will go on sale later this week on Thursday at night. That doesn't mean that you need to line up outside my house Thursday at midnight. You can actually just go online, but you might want to listen to the Susun Weed call, because we might have something going on ahead of time. So, hopefully you'll be there with us on Thursday night for the grand finale, to finish it off.

As always, tonight we're giving away a cool prize at the end of the call, so hang on till the end and I'll announce who won that.

Tonight I have the honor of having with us tracker and naturalist, Jon Young. So why is a tracker and naturalist on an herbal teleconference call? We'll find out.

Just so everyone knows, I'm 36 and Jon entered my life at age 15 when he led a group of high school kids on a religion retreat out into the woods to teach them awareness skills. We actually had to read the book "The Tracker" that year. It was required reading, which was pretty cool. That's by Tom Brown Jr. At about that time, Jon was starting Wilderness Awareness Club, which was run in part of my high school, but was something I wasn't involved in. That's the club that became Wilderness Awareness School. I did my thing from age 15-21 and wasn't really involved with Jon and the club, but at about 21 I met up with him and this time I was here to stay.

Since the early 1980s Jon has been directly and indirectly responsible for re-forging a connection for tens of thousands of people with the natural world. He's done this with no bestseller, but with his passion for tracking, teaching, nature, children, helping people, the earth and he has a knack for showing people how they relate to the natural world and how they can bring their personal gifts out.

He founded Wilderness Awareness School in the early 1980s. He wrote the colossal, and what I feel is incredible, Wilderness Training Program home study course through Wilderness Awareness School and he's recorded audio CDs and inspired dozens of schools around the world to start and work closely with some of the respected native elders and leaders in our country. He's author of a book that will come out in 2007 co-produced with Wilderness Awareness School. It's all about connecting kids to nature, practical activities and games and the philosophy behind all of that.

So, let's give a warm welcome. Even though you can't

hear them clapping, Jon, they're clapping. Hey John, it's Jon Young. How are you doing tonight?

Jon Young: Doing great Jon. I feel like I'm on a radio show.

John Gallagher: I know. Don't you remember I used to be a DJ?

Jon Young: You know, you sound like a DJ. I have to tell you that.

John Gallagher: I know. I worked for WCNJ for a little while and this is kind of reconnecting me with all that and I feel a little like Terry Gross from Fresh Air.

Jon Young: Well, it's a good thing you're doing. I appreciate it and I just heard from Ruby, who works at the Regenerative Design Institute here, she's one of the instructors for the Nature Awareness Regenerative Design programs here in this area. She said, "Oh you're doing that herb conference. I heard about that. I'm really excited. I get their newsletter and it's really neat. I get recipes and everything." So she's very excited about what you're doing and I think I'd better get your newsletter too.

John Gallagher: Good. It all stems from a common cause and it all stems from working with Jon. He started it all for me, really. The foundation and philosophy of where I come from in approaching all this, and how I got interested in it all is so vital when learning about this stuff and learning about anything in the natural world, to have a good, solid foundation and a center that you're coming from. So, that's where all that comes from working with you all these years. Who would have thought this 16 years ago? I don't think either of us would have thought we'd be sitting here on a phone call with all these people.

Jon Young: That's definitely true, but I remember, for everyone's amusement out there, when you were running "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dream Coat," and started your own production company, competing with your own high school's summer theater program. If anyone would do something like

this, it would be you.

It makes me feel a little bit old to hear you talking about it this way, but it's really an honor to be on this and support you and what you're doing and to support the important work that is going on at LearningHerbs. I think it's great.

John Gallagher: I'm excited because I see different people who have been involved in the Wilderness Awareness community going out and following their passions and bringing them into the world. That's the place we've really come from. When we all started out here, in the early days, working with you, you always said, "It's not about me. It's about all of you and everyone and what we bring into this world."

So, there are people who have been touched by your teachings in this Wilderness Awareness and have gone on and started schools, written books and all kinds of things. It's amazing. You've been very focused on saying that you've got to go out and bring your passions into the world. So, I'm just following the formula here.

Jon Young: Yes. Its working and we have to give credit to Ingwe also, who passed on November 13, one year ago, as you know. I think that the stability and the pattern that gives the foundation you referred to earlier; he deserves as much credit in that as anyone. Also, of course, Jake and Judy Swamp and my mentor, who started this whole mess for me, is Tom Brown.

John Gallagher: Tell us a little about your background and training and all of that, because a lot of people here are just signing on and I think this is, for a lot of people, the first time they've ever heard you or heard of you. Let's have a little bit about that background.

Jon Young: The part that might be interesting to people is when I was a young kid. I was born in 1960 at a time when television hadn't really gotten its feet under it, as it has today, so it was much more

something that could be boiled down to a few shows a week that you didn't want to miss. Everything else was so-so. You turned it off.

Nowadays, when a kid turns on the TV, they almost can't escape it, it's so potent. So, I guess for younger people, they might not have remembered a world where the opportunities in media and computers and video games and all that didn't exist, but back in 1960, when I was born, there were still kids running around the neighborhood and being free to pursue their own thing and play outside as kids would like to do. They are given that freedom and don't have anything to distract them. I grew up at that time. For that reason, a lot of people who have gray hair, who are my age or older, remember this time. I always see a lot of full body nods when I talk about the time that parents had to find us and drag us back in, when the sun went down. In neighborhoods the grass around people's houses was worn out from the kids and the way they played outside and there were trails in the woods that kids made. They didn't go out with their loppers and cut trails. The trails formed because kids were always out there playing.

In that sense I'm not different from other kids, but I did have a grandmother who was from Ireland, a couple generations back. Her grandma was from Ireland and they settled in a little Irish community called "Irishtown" and they were close to the land. They were farmers.

My Great Aunt and her sisters came over from Poland. She was born in Poland and my grandma was born in America, but that family was one generation and they all spoke Polish. Both my paternal and maternal families were farmers. They had remembrances of ways to keep kids interested in nature. I call it today cultural mentoring, these techniques. I don't think my grandma ever thought of them as techniques and she certainly didn't look at any books at night on how to cultural mentor. She just went on in the pattern of her grandmother, and my Great Aunt went on the pattern of her mother and they knew how to keep us

kids, all the cousins, busy in nature. We were always going on errands. I think a lot of you can probably remember back to when grandma sent you out to get apples or pick berries or something.

John Gallagher: That's exactly what Wildcraft's about. Grandma sends you out.

Jon Young: Exactly. That's my background, so when I was ten years old, I think I was at that age where nature was becoming less of a draw for us. You still get the odd kid in the neighborhood to go out and do stuff but I think the frog catching was wearing off on the neighborhood kids that were my peers by the time we were ten.

I think I was beginning to move toward baseball. I'd go, "OK, I guess I'm going to do after school stuff. All the other kids are doing baseball. I'm going to do baseball." I remember right at that key moment when my after school time would have become absorbed with after school activities, like all the other kids, it was right then, as a little naturalist, something happened.

I already had lots of fish tanks in my basement with turtles and frogs and fish. I had a wild pet meadow vole, which is kind of like a mouse. I had a bunch of stuff in my basement that was really kind of neat for me, but it was getting boring because I was the only kid down there playing anymore.

Then, right when I was ten, I must have been calling for that next kind of a teacher in my life. I guess it's the classic age right-of-passage wise for a kid to meet that older character that takes you on adventures. It was right then, right before I turned eleven in June of 1971, that I met Tom Brown Jr. on a street corner.

If anyone has read any of Tom Brown's books, like "The Tracker ", "The Search," or any them: he has about 18 books he has out there now. He runs a school called "Tom Browns Tracking and Nature Wilderness Survival School," and changed later to "The Tracker School." He's pretty well known in

nature education circles as somebody who had an upbringing that was highly special in that he met an elder Apache who had never gone into the reservation system but who had come to New Jersey for family reasons. He ended up babysitting Tom Brown and Tom's best friend, which was his own grandson, since Tom was seven years old. The elder would take them in the forest and being that he had such close roots to his own ancestor's ways; he was extremely good at getting those kids completely involved with an intensive nature relationship. It was far beyond environmental education. It was another whole class of education.

So Tom, from about the age of seven to about the age of eighteen, was mentored by this elder who was called Stalking Wolf in the books. The name was changed to protect the privacy and anonymity of the family. When Tom was eighteen, which would have been 1968, he was left alone when his elder left. He had spent eleven years being mentored by this guy in the Pine Barrens in every aspect of nature awareness that you can think about. Herbs and herbal medicine and healing was even part of that because the grandfather was a healer and he spent a lot of time with a healer when they went out in the Pine Barrens in New Jersey and there are some neat stories from that part of my life. I haven't really told those stories much, but I was going to share one or two tonight.

The story was that at the time it was in the 1960s and Tom was born in 1950, so three years, one of the things his elder told him was that he should be looking for his first student, and that he would know the student by the sign that he carried. This is the story that I was told and from 1968 to 1971, Tom was looking at kids and checking them out and trying to figure out "Is this the kid that I'm going to mentor?" Eventually he gave me a little test. He met me on a street corner one day when I had a large snapping turtle that I couldn't move myself, and he saw me with this turtle and he saw the turtle as a sign and began to ask me questions. I apparently passed the first test.

I have to say that, at that time, I didn't know I was being tested because Tom is a classic coyote mentor, meaning that he dwells on the edge of your perception. He doesn't really engage you the way a teacher does in the classroom. He instead asks you questions and gets you to tell him what you know and as you speak about these things he begins to get a sense of how much you know about this: Whether you are using your ears or just your eyes. Are you using your sense of smell? Are you aware of trees and birds or are you just looking at animals? He was able to essentially profile my knowledge base, based on the kinds of stories I told him. He began to show up and pick me up in the morning and bring me to school and then wait for me after school. There his jeep would be in the parking lot of the schoolyard and I would jump in the jeep and he would drive me home and send me on errands in the woods. They were kind of like Grandma's errands, except they were up one notch. He would ask me really intense questions when he called me at dinnertime.

Like, what did I do today?

I was out sitting by the fire in the woods.

OK, what did you burn?

I burned some Ash wood.

Where did you get the Ash wood?

And I'd tell him.

Which tree was it? Which way were you facing when you picked it? These were the kinds of questions. Every day he did this until seven years later, I knew every plant, bird, tree, animal, track and I was able to survive off the land and live by my skills. I could trap. I could hunt, fish, gather herbs, roots, use them for medicine, and use them for food all by the time I was eighteen. He had done all that without me realizing he was leading me. The entire time I never perceived

that he was leading me. I just always thought it was my own interests.

Looking back, especially when I got to college, I could see that I had been raised differently than everybody else because I knew certain things that nobody else seemed to know. One of them being bird language; not even the professors knew that it existed and a lot of them even doubted that tracking was possible, so I suddenly realized that something special had happened in those years. That's when I became aware that I had been, not tricked, because it isn't really tricked, it's more like facilitated into a larger version of myself than I would have chosen for myself. That's the beauty of that cultural mentoring model.

I went on to the university to study cultural mentoring models to figure out how Tom did it, number one, and number two, to find out if any anthropologists had researched and discovered the same pattern. I found very little about it. It didn't seem like it was on anyone's radar at that time, so I vowed to myself in 1979 that when I graduated I would open a school based on the model. I opened "Wilderness Awareness School" in 1983, and in 1994 I was working with Tom Brown when he introduced me to a group of people. He said, which raised my awareness of something, "This is the only person I ever had the luxury to mentor the way that grandfather mentored me." After that he encouraged me to teach that model to people, so since 1995, as you know because that's when you joined me in Washington, that is what I became focused on: how to get this model of mentoring out, not just the skills of tracking and nature awareness, but also what you were calling earlier that foundation and building that strong relationship foundation.

John Gallagher: And you have in your workshops, "The Art of Mentoring", "The Mind of Mentoring," and the book that's coming out at the end of this year in the Kamana program, things that you teach now, in your programs (which people can find out about

later), you have really fine-tuned the way that people can go about replicating this model of mentoring and connecting youth and adults, even, with the natural world. To be really effective about it, you've really perfected that. We could be here for a week on the phone and Jon could go on and on and on about piecing it all together and how to make that work.

In fact, in the Wilderness Awareness School there is a very holistic curriculum that Jon has developed. Different shields, we call them, and different shields, like different seasons, hold different qualities. Those of you in the Kamana program, who have done some of our things, you know what we're talking about. One specifically we call the Southwest Shield or the Msafiri Shield, and it represents the Earth, the plants, health, our bodies. Jon, I was wondering about that and also how it's important to have that foundation in nature when coming about it. Some people get very tunnel-visioned, like, "Oh I want to learn herbalism and cure a cold," or "I want to take care of this flu," or "I want to be able to live better with this disease," or they want to learn about herbs and they get dried herbs and look in the book, but never really get around to the fact that this is all connected and all coming from the earth. That's something I really try to get across in programs and products that we come out with. Anyway, I'd like to hear your rap on all of that.

Jon Young: One of the things that crosses my mind when you bring that up is the elder Gilbert Walking Bull, who is one of the few people left in this country who had a reasonably similar lifestyle to grandfather Stalking Wolf, because he escaped the whole reservation situation and lived with his grandparents who were medicine people. If you listen to what Gilbert says, and I was also cross-referencing that with the anthropologist William Powers in his work with Lakota's too, that the concept of a medicine person (that they might call Pejula Wichasha (sp?), which literally means medicine man, or Pejula Wiyan, a person who works with medicine, and when they say it that way they literally mean the plants); the

medicine is associated with the roots and with the herbs. So, this is the concept of Pejula Wichasha or Wiyan, which means man or woman.

He was saying that, when he was listening to the elders speak to him when he was growing up as a kid, most of the elders in his family remembered that every family, every household had what you would consider a medicine man or a medicine woman and often both. It was considered, more or less, a household skill. You learn to make a home, to heat your home, to gather food, gather roots, get water. There are basic household things that everyone needs to learn how to do and one of those things that every household needed to know was medicine. When I say it that way, I mean it literally in the sense of the way learning herbs is teaching it.

I feel like the gift of the learning herbs concept is that you are empowering people to recover those household skills and that every person has that ability, that need, that gift to be able to work with the plants as both food and medicine. This was definitely something that caught my ear because then as I got to know Gilbert a little bit more, he said that the more advanced skills of healing are what you would consider the powerful versions of the healers. Like, in some sense I would liken this to a Qi Gong healer, that would be the best way to explain it to our listeners now, that learning to work with Chinese herbs in the household would be one level of it, but learning to be a Qi Gong healer or a Five Elements Practitioner would be yet a higher level of the same pathway. But the foundation is that everybody has a deeply connected relationship with all of the plants of their area in season. That was households back in the day.

When I'm over in Germany and communicating over there with people, I've had the opportunity to talk with a lot of different kinds of folks and I've heard a lot of stories about that. The country people have that relationship with the plants. Most households in the country are self-sufficient with respect to

understanding plants though different seasons and they have a basic understanding of herbal medicine, if you will, and definitely herbal nutrition; which herbs are used at what time of year for what ailment.

I've always considered that a foundational goal, but I feel that the herbs themselves would never be looked at as something you pull off a shelf as an isolated item, but that if you look at it as a more organic and holistic approach, an integrated approach into your family life, you already have relationships with these plants. You know them. You understand them. Your grandmother used them. Your grandfather used them. You grew up with them. I hope that through work like you are doing, that we could inspire people to claim that independence again around the basics of herbal medicine without people having to feel like, "Well, if I could just get the basics of herbal medicine as a part of my everyday household experience, the things that grow around me, the things that I live with, I don't have to necessarily think of myself as someone who is aspiring to be a powerful healer within the herbal tradition. I'm just an everyday person, a husband, a wife, a grandmother, grandfather, who understands the basics of my home outside. I know the trees, the plants, the birds, the weather, the seasons, that when the frost comes this plant starts to grow, and when the frost hits this plant dies and this is when to gather these seeds and that kind of thing..."

(a little glitch due to a technical problem)

Jon Young: The first thing that Tom did with me when I was a young man was first of all to make sure I had a basic understanding relationship wise of the things that grew around me. Not just the plants and trees but also the birds and animals and things. He wasn't specifically after one thing or another so everything led to everything else. For instance if I got

interested in a particular bird, eventually that bird would lead to its food source and I'd become interested in what is this bird eating and what is that seed and where is it coming from, what plant is in bloom right now? Through my interests in one keeping a fire burning through all seasons, I had to go out and gather things and move branches and sticks and inadvertently if you keep a fire going year round, a couple times a week in the forest you're always walking to new places because you're always hoping the firewood will be there when you walk to the same place. But it's also gone after you've harvested a few branches, there's nothing left and you have to walk to a new place.

I think that was part of Tom's mentoring of me, encouraging me to manage my fire at my camp. I had to go and see new and different places all the time. And I also noticed in the places where I went to urinate or whatever or gather sticks and bring them out, I was actually changing the way the land grew. I was noticing that certain plants were growing around my campfire but weren't growing anywhere else. Certain herbs for instance were growing up around the rocks around my campsite and around the edge of the place where I sat. Because I was always moving the brush and branches around I created space for other plants to grow that didn't grow there before. He would ask me subtle questions about that and I began to learn about Wildcrafting, not from an intention to go out and replant native species or anything like that. It was more like 'hey, when you disturb things in this manner, this is what grows. Or when you move this stuff like that and you wear the ground to this level then this is the plant that grows back there. And he began to mentor me and get me to see that certain plants love disturbance and some plants love to have no disturbance.

Little by little he encouraged my interest in the plants and I became totally fascinated with them. More in their beauty and in their intricacy in the beginning. Their edibility or the fact that they could cause me to itch and stay up all night like poison ivy. So I had to

get to know certain plants because I had to. Other plants I came interesting in because I just loved them.

I would be encouraged to watch plants through different times of year. For instance, in the winter he would ask me, "Hey, what's this here?" and he would point out a basil rosette and I would look and say, "I don't know." And he would say, "Well, look, it's everywhere." Suddenly I would look around and there would be 20 or 30 basil rosettes in an area where I walked all summer. And he's say, "Gee, what do you think it is?" And I'd say, "I'm not sure." And he'd say, "Well it must be here in the summer. Have you ever been here in the summer?" "Yeah, lots of times." And he'd say, "Well, what grows here in the summer?" He would do that kind of stuff to me and it got to the point where I'd have to notice what basil rosettes produced what herbs in the summertime.

I can't tell you how important that information was for me. I began to develop this intuitive link with the plants. I don't think I got my first field guide to plants until I was probably 14 or 15 and it was at that time that I got Peterson's Guide to Wildflowers and I began to just key out things that grew around me a lot and I started to put names on things I just had relationships with.

But there were already plants we were eating and using. Things like plantains. We were using the leaves from them for things like bee stings which I tried to avoid but occasionally I needed. I couldn't stay out of the poison ivy, like it or not because I was always going new places. The jewelweed was an amazing plant. The seeds of the jewelweed are so good to eat. I loved eating the dandelion greens. There were things we were interacting with regularly and eating. He taught me about some of the plants in the Pine Barrens which were really terrible to eat if you didn't prepare them right. I learned a few things the hard way. But I developed a fundamental, practical relationship with them. They became part of my everyday experience. Picking chickweed and eating it

and noticing things like my energy level when I was eating wild edibles and what it did for me. He brought that to my attention a few times when we really needed energy when we were on these crazy adventures in the Pine Barrens. Certain plants would give us that little boost. We roasted pinecones around the fire, popped them open and got the seeds out of them. We gathered acorns. We were working lot with plants and using the byproducts of the plants for more than just food, a little bit of medicine.

Just before he opened the Tracker School he began to teach me some of the more esoteric teachings around the plants. But I wouldn't call it that because for me it was the next natural step. It was an intuitive communication process with the plants and it had to do with working with a particular kind of a ceremony and working with the plants and seeing what kinds of plants were beginning to grow around that lodge. They were basically healing herbs and were really good for all kinds of ailments and internal conditions. He began to teach to me about how the plants essentially talked to different parts of your body. We had already learned how when tracking a raccoon, if you look at the tracks and if you tracked and imitated a raccoon long enough, your body would actually dance the raccoon. And you know this is interesting because I can point to science now and talk about this really directly. Everyone of you out there, when I say the word "screwdriver," referring to the tool and the action of turning a screw with a screwdriver, all of your body, if you had micro-electric sensors, would register a slight twitch in the muscle which would imitate the turning of a screwdriver. This has been proven by science so now I can speak to this directly.

And when you look at the raccoon tracks and you have enough experience with the raccoon tracks, it's just like the screwdriver phenomenon. Your body will suddenly imitate the trail that you're looking at and your brain will interpret that information. So your body becomes a portal for communication with nature in more ways than just information. Like there is a form of data that is very dynamic that has to do with

body messages. And the whole Learning Herbs Journey, the whole South West Shield, as we call it at Wilderness Werner School is really about that understanding, a body-based relationship, a body-based form of communication with the plants, with the animals, with the trees.

With the plants, your body... I don't know if this will happen the first time you might pick up a piece of a dandelion and try to figure out what part of your body it's talking to. Without much experience, I'm not sure you'd get the kind of response I'm talking about. But because I had so much body-based training I was able to start to accurately guess what plant was good for what medicine and what part of the body it would serve. This was that next level of communication, and at that point his school was really busy, I was really busy at the university. And I just played with it a little bit on the side, I didn't follow up on it much more, but it came in handy a lot of times in my life later on. And when I met Ingwe in 1984 and I brought him to the Prime Barrens for the first time. He had never been to the Prime Barrens before, he was from Kenya, East Africa and South Africa, so he had never even been to Prime Barrens and he said (referring to himself in the third person), "Show Ingwe a plant that you know the medicinal use of and Ingwe will tell you what it's good for." And he was doing exactly that. The Tatanka had taught him the very same skills.

John Gallagher: Wow.

Jon Young: And he was able to identify very accurately which plants were edible, which ones were poisonous, which ones were medicines. He was able to tell me what areas of the body that plant could be used for and that kind of thing. And I know now that Tom Brown has healing classes around herbal medicine where he actually teaches that skill. But I also heard him complain that if people don't have some grounding in basic nature awareness and relationship with nature that it's difficult in the beginning. But that everyone can develop that skill.

It's not esoteric, really, it's only lost on the modern life.

John Gallagher: And that's exactly why we have the Kamana Naturalist Training program going because a lot of people wanted me to teach them how to be expert trackers. And he found out that they didn't even know what a robin sounded like. So he needed to go back a little bit and he needed to come up with a program that taught people the basics of all that was either growing or living around them. And there was someone, a season Kamana student Nick and he emailed here and wanted to know. Because some ideas are moving beyond than just looking at and identifying plants and how to know them on a deeper level. I think you just said it right there, "Do you want to be a tracker? You go out tracking." If you want to learn about plants you have experiences with plants.

There's endless information out there. That's why we focus on the learning, once a month we send a newsletter out and give them the experience and to tell them go ahead and they'll get deeper with the plants.

Jon Young: That's the way to do it. That's definitely the way to do it.

I now call it just building relationships. I think everybody understands the concept of making relationships with people, with our pets. And so, if you just think about the same kind of qualities that emerge from any really solid relationship. If you have that same relationship with a handful of common plants, I think a lot of this will come home to you very quickly.

John Gallagher: Exactly, and that's pretty much what it is with our family. They started out just exploring a lot of different plants and it was growing on me. But it's different for everybody. You come back to a handful that are becoming your friends that you use again and again. And for my family, we probably use metal or dandelion or burdock or plants like that every day in some form or another.

Jon Young: That's the way to do it.

John Gallagher: Exactly.

So Jon, some people were also wondering how this all fits in because we're talking about a holistic view of it all. Keeping it simple and it's also about relationships with the plants, with the environment around you, relationships with each other. And if you're going to talk about natural health, that's really what it's about, having these healthy relationships in a lot of different areas in your life. And I know you've been doing a business studying a bit about permaculture so how does that fit in with that?

Jon Young: Well, the permaculture... when we talked a lot of it, reinventing people's relationship with nature again. Our Western experience accomplished a lot, I guess you could say, through technology and whatever we gained a lot of benefits in our lives today. And we also, during that history lost a lot of things that were treasures really to humanity. And I think when the first people came to America from Europe and perceived what the native people were doing here, I don't think they understood that what they were looking at was a giant eco-forestry project and it was a giant permaculture project.

The Eastern Forest as a region especially as an example, that particular bioregion was so productive, it was supporting so many people and it was so regenerative that really, when scientists started studying how forests were regenerating on their own, they realized that the beach trees came in at a much lower percentage. And of course, the chestnut trees were killed off by a disease. But the oaks didn't come in in the same percentage that they were when the early settlers first proceeded and the first naturalists headed into those forests.

And the same thing happened in California, the coast live oak, for instance. When it grows on its own, it just grows straight and tall. Whereas the trees that are older than a certain period of time grow like spiders, their branches spread out like octopuses on

the landscape. And it became evident to some forest ecologists that there must have been some human intervention in maintaining the forests in both the condition and the composition that they were seen both on the East and the West. And now there are a lot of books on this whole study, but it's clear that if we were going to go back to the roots of indigenous wisdom, living close to the land, which learning herbs comes from, tracking comes from there. Even a lot of pharmaceuticals come from there. A lot of the formulas that are used today and taken for granted as healing drugs are first learned from native people in various parts of the planet, especially in the jungles.

(Another technical glitch)

John Gallagher: OK, Jon. So what's going to happen is we're just recording here, and you might cut off for a second, and I'll just click you off here, so we can just pick it up where we were. Go right ahead.

Jon Young: I was just then explaining that with the ecoforestry skills of the native people of this land, all the skills that we talk about, the tracking, the mentoring, the herbal medicine, even the land care skills, are basically what I'm calling indigenous technologies. They belong to all of our ancestors. They are programmed into our DNA, if you will. In other words, our instincts as human beings cause us to make choices around this that we are naturally drawn to want to understand these things. So, the permaculture movement represents the work of Bill Molleson and a bunch of other brilliant people who have gone out into the world researching these in a systematic way. Essentially taking native tools for caring for the land and regenerating the plants and the animals and the food system and other systems for living, they created a whole science and art out of that.

The permaculture movement is representing that. Bill Molleson got his start around the same time that Tom Brown got his start. I think it's interesting they were both drawing from indigenous technologies. I went and did a lot of research on the mentoring and village

technologies - how to weave the human parts together. How to get people's relationships strong with one another, with nature, with themselves. I saw that as I got to understand the permaculture movement, Wilderness Awareness School was born out of an organic farm - I'm not sure how many people are aware of that. But I was aware of permaculture way back when, and said this is something I want to get back to someday - I just don't know how yet. And then years later I began to work with Penny Livingston and James Stark of the permaculture institute of Northern California. I began to understand that we were working on the exact same vision from two different points of view. And that we had very similar goals, very similar aspirations, but we were covering an entirely different set of skill sets. And it seemed that our skill sets were very much needed one by the other. So the tracking movement really had an understanding of the cultural understanding and how to work with the animals and the bird languages thing...

Jon Young: Yeah, so when I saw that the permaculture movement had a lot of skills that the tracking movement didn't have, and vice versa, I realized what was happening was that these two indigenous rooted pathways were coming together where they had actually belonged with our ancestors since the beginning. It was sort of a homecoming. It was also interesting that the permaculture movement was populated with something around 70% women and 30% men, whereas the tracking movement was populated 70% men and 30% women. So we saw this gender balance thing happen when the two programs merged, which I just greatly appreciated, as did everyone else. In some sense it was a marriage destined to happen - no pun intended. The permaculture community is highly rooted in indigenous arts and skills, as is the awareness and tracking and bird language movement. The herbs movement is much more on the side of what you would consider the permaculture skills. But when you step back and look at all of it, you see that it makes a single picture that we might just call village life.

Remembering that humans emerged out of the natural world millions of years ago as a village species. The human pattern has been the village since the beginning of our experience. As far back as anyone can remember, we had very key relationships that we tended. We were in relationships with our families, we were in relationship with our friends and village members, we were in relationship with the natural world, we were in relationship with ourselves and with our ancestors. That these were the key relationships that were tended. When you look at that, what we are about really, whether you are talking about learning herbs or learning tracks, it is really about tending relationships, and understanding how we relate to everything around us. I just see it as a natural convergence of skill sets, wisdom, lineages, and that sort of thing. It's just been a phenomenally interesting thing. Since I got involved with permaculture, I've been all around the world, and noticed that all the other nature schools are linking up with their local permaculture people. We all had the idea at the same time. I'm not saying people were following my steps, but I was finding spontaneously that it was happening in Germany and Vermont at the same time that it was happening in California and Washington. It just seems like a moment in time when these two movements are finding each other and nurturing each other. It's a really good sign. It's very exciting too. The resources that are being shared right now are phenomenal.

John Gallagher: We saw a lot of permaculture places when we were in New Zealand hiking around. It was amazing.

Jon Young: It's much bigger elsewhere on the planet than in the U.S., but it's a very important movement.

John Gallagher: In all of these different threads we've talked about, permaculture, native wisdom and what you learned from Tom Brown, it keeps coming back to relationships. What goes through many people's heads is "Where can I start?" and "What's the simple lecture size?" I was wondering if you could talk about the sit spot for a minute and how that can

relate to somebody who would want to connect with nature and learn plants.

Jon Young: You bet. The sit spot is one of those little gems that, once it takes root, is one of the most effective learning tools I know of. If anyone is listening to what I just said, I've been teaching mentoring and gathering mentoring tools from around the world and mentoring mentors and coaches now for thirty years.

If I'm saying to you that this may be one of the single most important tools for learning that there is, I would hope that you would remember that. I emphasize it that way because even though people hear me say this all the time, very few people actually have the motivation, for some reason, to actually go out and follow up on this one and it's one of the easiest things to do. I think people just don't know what to do once they start doing it. So, I guess Learning Herbs, you have to provide support and I guess I do too. Through all the schools that are around the world now, this is what is happening. Support people locally to maintain this routine, because I think it's really vital.

The sit spot is nothing more than what you probably did as a kid, if you had any outdoor time as I did as a kid. I found an apple tree in my yard and I went outside climbed this one apple tree and found a comfortable spot to sit. I'd sit in that apple tree a lot by myself. I just did it.

What did I do there? Well, maybe I watched ants walk on the bark for 45 minutes straight, just watching them go back and forth. Or maybe I just kind of daydreamed. Maybe I watched the yellow jackets flying around the apples on the ground below or just played with the apple blossoms on the branches. It didn't seem to matter what I did. It was just about making time and space in my life; forty-five minutes or an hour here and there, ideally everyday but if you can't once a week is better than none.

Just go and find a place and sit. A lot of you probably have mortgages or you have rent payments. A lot of you are probably living on the edge of the country or in the country, so you already are paying for your sit spot. I always tell people, if that's their situation, to just go outside in the back yard. You chose that place for a reason.

When I was a young guy of ten and I met Tom Brown, my sit spot just moved up one level of complexity, in that it went from my back yard to a five minute walk from my house. Then it went up to slightly more complexity when he taught me how to make fire and work with fire, so I had a little fire circle that I sat at and just tended fire for countless, thousands and thousands of hours. In that process of sitting and getting to know one place, building a relationship with one place, I began to know the trees and the plants and the birds and the animals as an extended part of my relationship. It felt like family to me.

I spent seven years in that spot. I'm not going to say I went 365 days a year. I didn't, but there were days when I went twice a day. There were times when I felt called to spend the night there by my fire. There were times that I went in the night just to experience the night. There were times when I went before dawn and watched the darkness turn to day and times when I stayed at sunset and watched it turn to night. There were times in the heat of the day and all seasons, in the rain and the snow.

I got to know that place through all of its ways, its times, its feelings, its weathers, its years, its successions and watch that patch of land give birth to thousands of birds and animals. Every year they were giving birth to their babies or laying eggs and hatching and I watched the earth give off life year after year.

I began to understand things that I cannot put into words to this day. There is no way to describe what you get from that experience. It comes down to that

body-based relationship thing again. The form of communication that the human body is designed for, the sit spot can bring out like nothing else. You can't read about a sit spot and get something from it. You pretty much need to do it.

That's one half of these stories. The other half is that when you come back from your sit spot, it really helps to tell the stories of what you saw while you were at your sit spot. If there are no people to tell your stories to, that's the one challenge. People get bored if they come home and no one is there to catch their stories. It is important to be able to tell your stories about your sit spot, so we teach people to journal. Keep a running journal. Then the question comes up, "Why am I journaling? No one is ever going to read this. No one really cares. It's just for me."

I always say, wait a minute. What if your grandchildren were to find this journal thirty years from now and they gave it to their kids? All of a sudden they could read great-grandma or great-grandpa's nature journal. How inspiring that would be for a kid to feel connected to an elder in their community or their family. To feel that love for the land coming through the family three generations down and striking that child would be immeasurably valuable. It would have such mentoring power for that kid. So, if you think you're not writing it for anyone, write it to the unborn children that you'll never meet. Sincerely write it that way and all of a sudden it take on another whole dimension. You begin to understand this on another whole level.

John Gallagher: In the stories that you come up with as you're working with the herbs and your experiences journaling those experiences, if you learn a plant a week or a plant a month, there are a lot of ways you can go about it. It's about establishing that simple, deep connection as you're going along.

Jon Young: Exactly,

John Gallagher: That is the very first exercise in the "Kamana Naturalist Training Program." We do have a

home study program at Wilderness Awareness School. It's the foundation of all that we do at Wilderness Awareness and all that Jon does with his programs. If I ever get around to doing an advanced or ongoing program, which we may do in a year or two, it will definitely be the foundation of that program too.

I know we went a little over there. That's because I wanted to make up for the five or ten minutes we lost due to a technical problem. I apologize for that. I wanted you all to see the foundation and the philosophy that is at the core of our website. That is why I was so happy to have Jon in tonight to help. He so eloquently speaks and relates to that. That's where "Herbal Medicine Making Kit" and "Wildcraft" came from. You saw "Wildcraft," Jon. What did you think of it?

Jon Young: I loved that. I'm excited. I keep asking you when it's coming out and I heard about your Thursday release.

John Gallagher: We're lame. That boat is getting ever closer to the sea elsewhere.

Jon Young: That's an exciting idea. I hope we don't have any violence like we did when the new Nintendo came out, or whatever that was, when your new herb game comes out. Try and be calm, people. But seriously, I'm really excited to get my hands on that and play it. I'm going to play it as soon as I get it.

...The rest was dated product release announcements and small talk...



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