

WALKING WITH ROOT WOMAN

COW PARSNIP



BY SHARON WAUGH

Study nature, love nature, stay close to nature. It will never fail you. - Frank Lloyd Wright

It's the eve of press deadline and I know I am cutting it close to getting my own article submitted but a wonderful opportunity presented itself late last month to join 'Root Woman' on a local walkabout - educator, eco-herbalist, lovingly referred to by her colleagues as the "silver-

haired plant whisperer" - the delightful conservationist and conversationalist, Kahlee Keane. When the law of attraction is fueled by universal synergy it was no surprise when Kahlee's new book *Wild Medicine of Coastal British Columbia* arrived on my desk and within a few ping-ponged e-mails a walk in the woods at Rosewall Creek was set in play with this protective advocate of indigenous plants.

So, I was ready to head out the door packaged in full rain gear, notepad snugged in a protective ziploc, fresh batteries in the camera

and then I remembered the supplement bottle on the counter - a reminder to knock back the last few herb-filled capsules of my annual spring detox. Hmmmm...how ironic when I think about where I am heading...hadn't really thought about how disconnected I was to the plants that were commercially rendered for the ease of my self-treatment.

Have you been to Rosewall Creek Provincial Park? I'm usually a stickler for logging a minimum number of kilometres when I set out in the woods; a jaunt geared for raising

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Above: Kahlee Keane examining Devil's Club



the heart-rate and creating sweat on the brow, so up to the falls is the usual route. But this sauntering hour and a half with Kahlee on the lower loop was equally as conditioning making the heart-full of appreciation while viewing the plants thru her lens of reciprocal respect. A well-intended compliment and acknowledging gesture from Kahlee would start the flow of introduction of her friends to me, the guest, selectively dispensing the medicinal properties of each plant with the physical ailment it would impact. Listening was easy in this outdoor classroom while instructed how to carefully gather the bark or leaves, the ethical ins and outs of harvesting the roots, choosing processing methods – teas or tinctures, salves or ointments – and always the gracious appreciation for the gift of healing offered by the various plants. In a short woodland stretch we met Pacific Bleeding Heart for ‘calming the cycle of grief and shock following an accident, illness or death’; Western Trillium and its abortive properties; discussed the gentle anesthetic effects of crushed Cow Parsnip seeds to reduce inflammation around teething, and the anti-inflammatory benefits on lymph of the clingy Sweet Scented Bedstraw.

When I mentioned my past bush battles with Devil’s Club (there’s even dislike built into its Latin name *Oplopanz horridus*) Kahlee laughed and verified its west coast First Nations reference as being a warrior plant. In her Wild Medicine book, she discusses the assignment of intellectual property rights of the traditional and local knowledge of First Nations peoples of plants such as Devil’s Club, and the potential for retaining the rights to compensation for future commercial harvest and the retail sale of herbal products. A perfect point to launch into the protection of wild medicinal plant communities and the guidelines of ethical wildcrafting... always asking “what is my intention in harvesting?”

It was a great morning to be reminded of my responsibility to strengthen my connection in nature and at the suggestion of Kahlee, I am going to intentionally choose to change my purchasing behaviour to selecting more native plants over imported cultivars for building my garden. And for subsequent forays into the woods, I will continue to hone-up my plant recognition skills and assimilate more of Kahlee’s awareness and love for her living Earth. Many thanks to you! ~

Wild Medicine of Coastal British Columbia can be purchased at EyesOnBC in Bowser, and thru www.gaian.ca.