

INSPIRATIONS



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Interviews by Bernard@BernardSire.com

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Photo by Gesi Schilling

MURIEL OLIVARES

What influenced you to get involved with plants?

I went to school in Miami, then I went to an art college [in San Francisco]. I wasn't too into school at that point, and during college I started working as a florist. Cut flowers, tying in art, designing floral arrangements. I started getting a lot of experience with plants, botanical names of plants, how they grow, biology in general. Over four or five years, I became really involved with being a florist, and started being curious about organic flower production. At that time, the word organic was pretty new. People didn't eat organic food, and only a few people were starting to talk about it. I was curious if there was such a thing as organic flowers, because flowers are pretty toxic, and the flower industry is not regulated by the FDA like food is. I didn't find anything on organic flower farms, this was around late 2007, but I did find a local farm in Homestead that was organic. Bee Heaven Farm. I visited it and started volunteering. I started committing to going every weekend, and then I started to decide, "maybe I didn't want to have my flower job anymore, and I wanted to go move onto the farm." So I did. I quit my job and moved on to the farm. I did a work trade, where they let me live there for free, and I got to eat for free. I was learning and working at the same time. I remember being just really hungry for information; reading and researching. I self taught myself that way. I spent two years on that farm, and then one summer at Four Winds Farm in upstate New York, where I learned some more advanced sustainability. After those years of work trade, I was really broke, but I felt I learned enough about plants and decided to come back to Miami, and start my own mini farm. Seems crazy now, like, "why would I do that?"

How did you start Little River Coop and your own farm?

A friend of mine had that this little lot in the back of her house, and she just let me use it. Imagine a really large back yard. I started a CSA out of the blue. A CSA is community supported agriculture. People will subscribe ahead of time and pay you for a whole seasons worth of vegetables, and then you grow them for those people. I did that for 12 people. A lot of those people were people I already knew, so that was a little bit of money that came in and fueled the project. I kind of considered it as an experiment at that time. It went really well and got all this kind of attention, because there was no one growing organic vegetables, or even any vegetables in the city [of Miami], like an urban farm. The second year, I decided to do it again and had like 30 members, and then somebody offered me some big land in North Miami. In that farm I was able to grow many more vegetables, and the CSA grew every year to eventually be 150 members. At some point I met Tiffany, my business partner, and we started working together, farming together, and building this brand. Originally I had it called it Little River Market Garden when it was just a little thing, and when we started working together we changed the name to Little River Cooperative. That was probably in 2013 or something. We developed a whole other side to our business which was the nursery where we sold edible plants. Then we also started selling the service of installing gardens for people. That service ended up growing a lot, installing gardens and doing organic garden maintenance. The nursery itself, having plant sales, teaching workshops out of the nursery, having that place as a headquarters.

What are your thoughts on the food production system in the US?

That's a very complicated question. In a nutshell, I sort of lean towards feeling that industrial agriculture isn't quite right. I know that it has a value and a place because it feeds very large quantities of people, and some people would say, "that's the only way to do it." But, I personally think it's super unhealthy the way that we eat these days. A lot of processed foods, everything's wheat, or corn, or soy based. That's what most of what we all sustain on. It might feed a lot of people, so people aren't starving, but I don't think all those people are healthy. I definitely think that many more, but smaller farms are better. I think there's a place for that to work logistically to feed lots of people, and I also think solving that problem is a Catch 22 because it's not just about creating more farms. It's about educating the consumers about how to eat well and enjoy eating well. I know that that's almost impossible, even from my own habits. I get it that stuff is yummy and it's easy, and it's really hard to make meals every single day of your life. I think that's why humans have embraced the easy stuff, because it gives us a break and let's us do other things like being on our phones.

What I do know about the future, that because of the virus, there's this sort of surge in interest in home gardening, growing your own food, organic food. I think just because generally, people are more interested in being healthy because they don't want to get sick. They are freaked out that the stores are a place where their lives are jeopardized. They feel if they can grow some food at home, they have some food security. I hear people telling me, "I've always wanted to have a garden and now I'm finally home all the time, so I could do it." No way is anyone going to make a dent in their food consumption at home. They're still going to buy as much food as they used to, and depend on the store as much as they used to. But, I think there's a lot to be said for just the experience of seeing the process of food growing and having their friends and family come over and see their garden and get inspired by it. It's not like a literal impact on their food consumption, but they're making a psychological difference. They feel good about it, their happier because of it, inspiring someone else to do it too. They're building even if it's a small relationship with plants, and all those processes. That matters. It's like a mini version of a real farm. A homeopathic dose.

Are there any resources you'd recommend for people who want to learn more about growing their own food?

What comes to my mind is our website. Not so that they could come and necessarily buy plants or call us, but over the past couple months because of the virus and surge in interest, we developed a bunch of resources on our website. Little crash courses, and we recorded some youtube videos and those are really informative. I would recommend people start reading up and getting familiar with South Florida because we have a very unique growing climate. You can't just follow what Martha Stewart says down here. She's speaking for the rest of country, we're on a little island in South Florida.



Photo by Daniel Son

COREY CHASE

What is your daily practice ?

I like to meditate first thing I when I wake up, and then in the evening. On days when it allows, I wake up at 4:44, 3:33. That time of the morning is known in many cultures as that special hour, basically the time where the earth is least loaded in the electromagnetic fields, so it's the greatest time to connect. Some cultures call it brahma muhuti or amrit vela. I do breath work every day. I used to do asana every day, sometimes twice a day, less since I've had an injury. Mantra, chanting sacred sound vibrations. In short, I would say I love to connect with the infinite every day and that shows up in different ways. I love to sit and either sing mantra with my guitar or play with a harmonium or I'll engage with chanting and mala beads. I grew up with a Rastafarian dad and a mother who is bon buddhist, the oldest form of Buddhism in the world. Rasta is what really grew me, but Rasta could only take me so far. Then it was having a peak mystical experience and meeting shiva. When I started looking into Shiva and Hinduism, I realized there's no drop of sectarianism anywhere, this isn't only for this or that group of people. The Hindus didn't even have a name before the white man went there. The name Hinduism came in when the Aryans named them after the Indus Valley. It wasn't until I tapped into that, that this whole world opened up for me. Once I started experiencing yoga for what it truly is, it's kind of like the missing users guide book for the vessel that we've been given. I got to this space of an inner yearning of something more than this world that we're experiencing.

What are you working on in yourself?

Something that we all are working on perpetually is surrender. Surrendering to what is, to what you weren't expecting to happen and flowing with it. I had a lot of plans to do a lot of travel this last year. I went out of the country to work with Ptsd vets, and the first person I was serving medicine to, I received an injury. A torn meniscus and ruptured my Mcl and Acl in my right knee. All of it had to get canceled, and all of a sudden I got shoved into this self quarantine. I was really fortunate to have a lot of friends and family around to support me. I've never been really one to ask for help, I've always been sort of the one that helps, the person that holds space for others. Being thrust into that position where I had to be the one receiving help, that was a big teacher for me. It brought up a lot of feelings of being uncomfortable being in that position. Having to need someone to help me cook food, or do anything. That was a big lesson for me, and was something I guess I needed at the time.

Why do you think that is, that you wouldn't ask for help?

I've always seen that in myself, my entire life. You know all the experiences you have as a child shape who you are to become. When you don't release traumas, those actions that happened in that time, they stay with you. Your entire life is essentially unlearning the baggage you've collected over the years. The main reason why it started, I once was in a position where I was forced to figure something out on my own, and I was able to. I realized, sometimes asking for help is just a premature exit from trying to solve the solution. I always felt if I stuck with it long enough, I could work it out on my own. This last coming has definitely softened me a bit, made me more able to ask for help, and to receive help. Particularly from women, the divine feminine, the energy of the divine goddess. This entire situation has been a beautiful learning experience.

Can you speak about how you help others?

I share a technique of meditation that's very potent, yogic philosophy, guidance of asana, in conjunction with breath work, pranayama. I teach mindfulness, basically the philosophical side behind yoga. Yoga means union from the sanskrit word to yug, to join together. So essentially yoga is the coming together of one's individual soul or consciousness with the universal consciousness. Particularly I'm focused on the lineage of ADVAITA VEDANTA, which is the school of non-dualism within Hinduism. I use all of that in order to basically coach people, in and out of a spiritual emergence. I also work with a lot of the plant medicines, only in places they are legal, in order to help people to see the mirror of themselves. It's very hard to see when they're situated in their egoic mind. Some I help with meditation, teach them how to eat properly, teach them how to sit. There are infinite paths to the same place. What has worked for me won't work for everybody. I've been able to delve into these different paths, philosophies and religions. They're all saying the same thing. Each path is basically studying a different aspect of god. Christians study the fear of god, Jews celebrate god, Hindus study all the different aspects of god, Buddhists study becoming god. It's like we're all looking at the same elephant from a different vantage point. Naturally, we're all going to be describing a different part of the elephant, but the elephant is still the whole.

How do you relate to fear?

Well, as I understand it, fear is nothing more than a lack of knowledge. As everything in the universe comes from either one of two places, that being either love or fear, it's a daily practice for me to choose love instead of fear and to be aware of this. I used to be one of those kids that seemed to be afraid of everything; from the dark, to the deep sea if I couldn't see the bottom, and so many other things. Over time, all the things I were afraid of started to sort themselves out, and even the projected fears that I held about potential what ifs, or certain things going wrong, would never happen. Slowly the pathway of fear within my own consciousness began to turn into trust, and eventually positivity. Then after some deep experiences, both with and without the aid of plant medicines, I went through a period of about a couple years where I no longer experienced fear. Then boom, fear returned one day and shook me to my core. But with that came a series of beautiful lessons which engendered more growth and evolution. So essentially, I think fear is a good indicator for when we need to pay attention to what may be hiding behind the corner and it is useful for navigating life, but only when balanced with love and critical thinking. And never allow yourself to be steeped in fear, or reactionary to it.

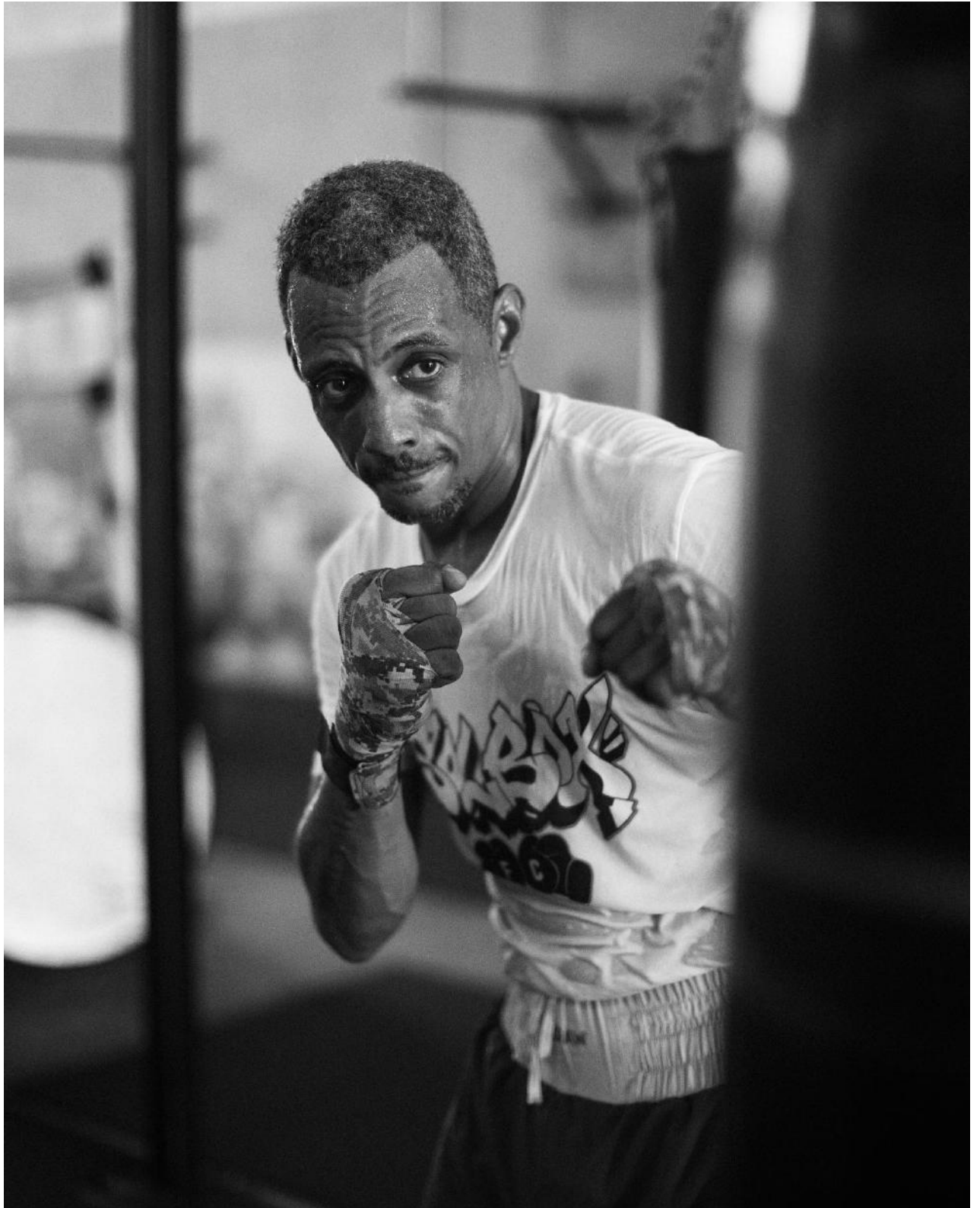


Photo by Karin Mumm

DJINJI BROWN

How have you developed your focus and discipline?

Everything I've done is the reflection of the life I'm living. When I was making music, I was working in recording studios and nightclubs or dj'ing actively. I've never been the kind of dude that could have a day job, and then in the evening go and do my music stuff. I have to be in the lifestyle for me to be focused on whatever it is I'm doing. With the gym it's the same. I stopped smoking weed, drinking liquor, going out till five or six in the morning during the week. My life had to be a reflection of what I wanted Sol Box to be. As much as I miss the music, growing up with a parent, who was a musician that traveled and was always in search of the gig, that particular hunt somewhere deep down didn't really appeal to me. I saw what that did to my dad. I saw how it physically crippled him. Not that his experience would have been mine, but his experience had a big impact on what I wanted to do with the rest of my life. Being on the endless hunt for the gig, you have to be a hunter. I just chose to hunt a little bit differently. The gym experience has helped me, as much as it might be helping other people, for the most part to get my shit together.

I didn't always have discipline, I'm still working on it. I wouldn't tell you I own it, I'm renting it now. I've always had drive and interest. I was talented in certain things and felt I didn't need the discipline to actually learn the things that I was good at, I could just wake up and do it. "I woke up like this." That was another fatal blow to success. The discipline came later in life. The martial arts helped me deal with it. Helping my dad in his later years helped me deal with it. Becoming a father helped me deal with it. Owning Sol Box helped me get it. Stopping the drinking and the smoking for me, helped me become disciplined. My dad told me once, "not everything that's good to you, is good for you." I wasn't always a complete flake, but sometimes I was flaky. Probably one of the most important factors in finding out that my will power was really strong, was when I stopped smoking weed. That means a lot to me. I know that I feel a lot better about not needing it, not wanting it. It doesn't consume the time and energy in my life that it once did. It was so consuming, that my approach to it was that I gotta have it. And if I didn't have it, things didn't feel right, and I never felt good about that feeling. I never felt good knowing, "I don't have no weed, so it's not going to be a good gig." "What am I going to do with this date." That's one of the biggest accomplishments in the last ten years of my life, to be able to put that down and still remain creative. I will admit my production pretty much stopped. But my dj sets went through the roof. I could hear better, program better, mix better. I saw it, I heard it, people told me. I used to be in the dj booth, high, double shots of Hennessy. I had a lot of ideas but I would get sloppy from time to time. Once I cleared that out, I just got even more confident. I heard music so differently and the connection between the music and my spirit was direct.

Can you speak about the difference between talent and work ethic?

I've never had a business before Sol Box. This is the first time I've been able to make some money from my art. All these years, I've been around people who were making a living doing the same thing we were collectively doing. For some reason, making a living out of my art was always slightly outside of my grasp. A number of different reasons I could reflect back on, what it was that I was doing wrong. One of those things, was that I rested my laurels on my talents, rather than my work ethic. Right there, that's the fatal flaw. A lot of talented people out there just say, "I've got this talent and I'm going to do it when I'm in the mood, someone will notice it, and there's this magical reaction that happens off of that." That's really not how it works. Becoming a business owner, taking this gym, this is the first time I really grounded myself into doing something.

How have you been able to improve yourself?

Because I've done a few things in my life, I would be like you're a jack of all trades, master of none. Then I remixed that concept. I'm a jack of all trades, master of one self. When I first started reading Bruce Lee's philosophies about Jeet Kune Do and Gung Fu, a Gung Fu practitioner is someone who sought to be well-rounded at the things he or she did. The fighting aspect was only one part of it. You could be a carpenter, a farmer, a cook, a father. Whatever you chose to do, you were going to seek some level of accomplishment and self-improvement at it. I took that concept years ago, and embraced it and said, "we don't have to be regulated to one form of expression. We have so many feelings as human beings, our lives can go in so many different areas." At this stage I am a musician, a graffiti artist, a boxer. All of it, and none of it. I'm Djinji. Just expressing myself, based on the roads that my life has led me down, and the things that have influenced me. I don't have to be the best at them, all I have to do is practice them and trust the fact that I'll be unique in my expression, and I'm good with that. There are so many people that are better than me in everything I do. I used to be concerned with that, but now I'm not concerned that I'm not as good as them. They're not Djinji and I'm not them, so why compare myself. Self improvement has ceased to be in comparison to other people, and more about the peace that I can find in the things that I do. Knowing that as much as I might think I know, there's always more that I don't know. I like to tell people, "I don't know!" I like not knowing things. It frees you up. I like the space between those notes.

Whatever you're interested in, when you know there's more about it that you don't know, you can continue to improve yourself at any given thing. You want to get better at something, know that you don't know shit. That's how you can learn. The only way you get better at things is by allowing yourself to learn. For me, the way to get better at self improvement, is allowing myself to know that I don't even know everything about myself yet. I'm still alive. I'm still learning. Even when I do die, I probably wouldn't have figured out everything about me, there's too much. It's leaving space for the unknown and trying to piece it together. (It really revolves around trying to be a good person, an effective person at the stuff that I'm doing. I'm not going to be here forever, none of us will be. I'd rather be a good person in pursuit of the things I'm trying to deal with, then be this incredible dude whose a dickhead to everybody.

What's DRUM life?

I wanted to incorporate my graffiti name DRUMS into a jacket, to have me in there, but not about me. I thought about it in response to the social and racial injustices in the world. What have I done in my life to fight that. The arts have always been my battleground. The background of the jacket was red, black and green, the pan-african liberation colors. Drum life not Thug Life. Tupac's Thug life was, The hate you give little infants fucks everyone. I said, Deeper Rhythms Unite Mankind, Love is for Everyone. Then the jacket had meaning, it had social relevance. It was how music historically has been a unifier, especially in America. When rock 'n roll hit, it was at the same time when segregation was being made illegal, because black kids and white kids needed to dance together to Chuck Berry. Over the years, music has brought together more people than it has separated. Politics separates, religion separates, flags separate. The same things people identify with, separate humanity. Folks will identify with their ethnicity, their race, their country, sometimes before they identify with their humanity, their being. What does the flag of human beings look like? Everyone wants love. It's a necessity. You need it to varying degrees, you just have to know the degree to which you need it. You go and you give it, and you'll get it. When people talk to me about the things I've done, I was never a pro boxer, but they know I've been in these gyms, these dojos. I was never a person who painted on the subways, but they know I rode them. They know Djinji has been authentic on his path. They know I was in a hardcore group in the late 80s, talking about the same thing I'm talking about now, like we need unity. I don't know yet what's next to come. Always keep space for the blank canvas. That's where your next piece will come. If you want to, you will.



Photo by Djinji Brown



Photo by Ximena Díaz

How did you find yourself on your path?

What's developed, what I do for work, which is very much connected to my own healing process, is as a visual artist and holistic practitioner. This is what I do, but I've had to learn along the way to not be attached to it, or the outcomes. Letting it flow organically and trusting in the process. Yet, it is deeply connected to who I am. Right now, my main offering is providing the opportunity for people to rest and to connect to the creativity within them. Which, through my personal process, became much more clear when I started giving rest the importance that it needs. It started two decades ago when I was in a very dark place in my life. I was an insomniac, an alcoholic, having bursts of information coming through me that led itself to the unveiling of repressed memories from deep trauma in my childhood. I couldn't sleep and I couldn't get out of bed, or my head. Everything inside of me was in chaos. One night, there was a voice that turned on inside of me, that started guiding me to release tension from parts of my body. At that time, the tension was really intense in my jaw. I was very upper chakra excessive, all my energy was up in my head, trapped in my throat. I was completely ungrounded. I noticed by following that inner guidance and by connecting to my breath, it didn't eliminate the chaos that was happening inside right away, what it started doing was showing me what I had been suppressing inside of myself. It started to give me clarity of what I was working with in my mind, my thought processes. Basically, what I discovered was that I was completely self-critical, mostly every thought in my mind was a negative thought, and I realized I needed to start correcting that. Through that process, I would spend the nights in observation, and it became a practice. I didn't know what was going on at first. I started seeing layers of traumatic information lifting from my system, my mind and my body, and also opening up space in my heart. It was all-consuming and complex. Through the years and endless hours of dedicated inner study, so much has been revealed. This practice of stillness saved my life, and I want to be able to share it with people. There's a difference between activities with a lot going on physically, to just allowing yourself to go directly within. Stopping everything else outside of you, even your own body movements. A lot of people may have difficulty with this idea of seemingly doing nothing. We live in a society that celebrates constant doing. (Energy is in constant flow, so in fact, we're never really not doing anything. Our inner systems are healing, readjusting, reviving while in stillness, in a way that is impossible in movement.)I used to be afraid of my own thoughts. That's why being still seemed difficult. There is power in reclaiming where your thoughts are directed, and I think that's such a meaningful way of approaching life, by taking back our power of choice and connecting to the stillness within us.

Did something happen in your life to inspire you to help others?

Somewhere along the line we forgot that we are self-healing mechanisms. We have the ability to heal ourselves, and our breath is among the most important tools that we have. Beyond that, it is who we are. We are it. It is us. If we can spread that message so that people can stop for a moment to observe their breath, their breathing patterns, and learn to breathe deeply, I think we'd very quickly see inspiring changes in the overall health of humanity. And, it's free.

When it comes to energy; it stagnates, solidifies, rots. So, if that starts happening through delayed attention inside someone's body, then at the point when it becomes physical, there may be a need for certain kinds of care that require a more western medical system approach. Before it gets to that, there's likely been a long road of us not having listened to messages from our inner space. It's important to reconnect through our breath, to our sense of listening to what's happening inside. I was on medication, antidepressants, for two and a half to three years, which helped at first. I was a teenager in college, and I remember it lifting this knot of anxiety from inside my chest and I was all about it. But as the years went on, one experience I had, I had moved to the Czech Republic, and I went on a weekend trip and forgot the medicine. I had an anxiety attack just because I forgot the medicine. I didn't have an anxiety attack because of anything else. I had an anxiety attack, worrying myself that I would have an anxiety attack because I forgot the medicine. In addition, as a visual artist, my intuition was always very clear. That part of myself was very open, and the medicine was closing that down and numbing me. The combination of that, and the freak out I had on the weekend trip, just made me realize my life can not be dependent on a pill. I had to do something else, figure something else out. This is part of why I want to share.

We start medicating children in this society because they are too active, or, not active enough, and we've forgotten to consider the child is probably just expressing something that is not resolved in the family. So let's ask more questions about the family. Let's look more deeply at the psycho-spiritual aspects, the interpersonal aspects, the intergenerational aspects, the medical history, all of it. If we just continue to medicate everyone, we're going to become a world of walking robots. Working with kids, I would always see how the children would be blamed, when the issue would actually be the parents' unresolved emotions in a lot of the cases. What can we do to help the parents, so the kids don't grow up to become an even more intensified version of what their parents haven't yet healed as adults?

[In my personal experience, which was one of life or death, it became this thing where every single breath was a choice for me. Every single breath has the capacity to transform our entire lives. It has to do with how we create the intention inside of us. The breath moves that intention within us. It expands it, it allows that intention to become who we are. Just like anyone who wants to expand their physical capacity will start jogging or lifting weights if they want more muscles. If we want mental and emotional clarity and health, going within and choosing to breathe is a great way to start observing what's going on. To start choosing what it is that we want to keep taking up space in our minds, and what it is that we want to transform. By mind, I mean our heart mind. Our true essence lives within our heart.]

What are some things you think people can work on?

Maybe the most important thing to mention is that people have inside of them what they need. You have inside of you what you need. There is external support and that is highly beneficial, but what is actually healing is going inside and revealing to yourself what it is that is going on, and who it is that you are. Part of the work is to reclaim who you are. To undo everything that you've learned. To undo everything that's been imposed on you in so many ways by the education system, societies, our cultures, our ethnicities, our economic realities, by our religions beliefs. In one way or another, everyone here has been taught to be against someone, or against something. So everyone here, by here I mean on the planet, has been taught division. I personally am mixed, from mixed cultures. And I've experienced judgments from one culture to the other. Often within our own selves we become fragmented. Within our own selves we become judgmental of different cultures or societies, including those from which we come. That's where everyone needs to go in by themselves and figure out where they're in judgment. That's where I think the work is. In addition to that, everything is related to inter-generational trauma, and with what's happened down the family lines. The truth, I don't just mean the stuff families try to cover up. We need to know the truths of our own family's reality. That is what will then start healing the individuals in the family, and then everything sprouts from that. The closer we can get to our own inner space, that's where the healing happens. When we are able to reclaim who we are, not who our families want us to be, or what society expects us to become, that's when we can go out into the world and recognize there is space for everyone to be who they are.

How can one live with a little more lightness?

You can still fall over if you trip on a root. It doesn't matter how enlightened or healed you think you are. Healing is choosing to laugh at yourself. You can still choose to enjoy the process, even when it's not the lightest that you'd want it to be. Finding humor and recognizing how imperfect we are, is such an integral part of the process. Also knowing when it's time to go in, and knowing when you need a break. When it's time to go and shift and be in another activity or connect to a different part of yourself. If we take it on as a lifelong practice, where we are in constant evolution, a constant state of growth, it just becomes about creating the balance of where we want to direct our attention, and when. The deeper that we go into the shadows, the stronger the light is. When the light turns on, it's much brighter than if we're just sitting comfortably in some shady spot. It's about choice. The light and dark energies are always there. We get to choose where we want to direct our attention. To remember, we are a minute part of existence, and at the same time the entire existence lives within us. It's finding the humility in this, and then the laughter just comes. There's no one right way to be playful. Laughter is among the most powerful medicines.



Painting and photo by Dax Hacker

