

## Braiding Sweetgrass Dinner Series

### 1: Skywoman and creation stories

#### Conversation Menu

- What creation stories were you raised with? Are there ways in which these stories shaped your worldview?
- Are there creation stories you have chosen for yourself? How do they show up in your life?

#### Dinner Menu

- "Like any good guest, Skywoman had not come empty-handed... In her grasp were branches - fruits and seeds of all kinds of plants."

### 2: Pecans and mutual flourishing

#### Conversation Menu

- "All flourishing is mutual." What does this statement evoke for you? Do you feel that your world reflects this principle? Do you feel that our world reflects it?
  - "If one tree fruits, they all fruit - there are no soloists. Not one tree in a grove, but the whole grove; not one grove in the forest, but every grove; all across the county and all across the state. The trees act not as individuals, but somehow as a collective. Exactly how they do this, we don't yet know. But what we see is the power of unity. What happens to one happens to us all. We can starve together or feast together. All flourishing is mutual."
- The federal government's Indian Removal policies. How do you understand and relate to our government's historical and present treatment of Native Americans? What responsibility do we, as people living on this land now, have in this history and how do we enact this responsibility?

#### Dinner Menu

- Pecan pie
- Pecan xx salad

### 3: Strawberries and gifts

#### Conversation Menu

- "From the viewpoint of a private property [or commodity] economy, the 'gift' is deemed to be 'free' because we obtain it free of charge, at no cost. But in the gift

economy, *gifts are not free*. The essence of the gift is that it creates a set of relationships. The currency of a gift economy is, at its root, reciprocity.”

- Does this view resonate with your own conceptualization of a gift?
- What gift economies do you partake in?

#### Dinner Menu

- Wild strawberry shortcake

### 4: Coffee and ceremonies

#### Conversation Menu

- “Ceremonies large and small have the power to focus attention to a way of living awake in the world.”
- What ceremonies / rituals did you grow up with? What did they honor?

#### Dinner Menu

- Coffee

### 5: Asters & goldenrods and science & spirit

#### Conversation Menu

- “When I stare too long at the world with science eyes, I see an afterimage of traditional knowledge. Might science and traditional knowledge be purple and yellow to one another, might they be goldenrod and asters? We see the world more full when we use both.”
- Have you experienced tension between multiple ways of knowing? How do you reconcile this tension?
- Have you experienced the invalidation of ways of knowing specific to your culture? Have you invalidated other people’s ways of knowing?

#### Dinner Menu

- Flowers?

### 6: Potawatomi language and animacy

#### Conversation Menu

- “To be native to a place we must learn to speak its language.” What would it look like to be literate in the language of earth? What does it mean for our status here that many of us lack Earth literacy?

- Potawatomi does not distinguish between male and female but rather by animate and inanimate.
  - “Of an inanimate being, like a table, we say ‘What is it?’... But of apple, we must say, ‘Who is that being?’”
  - How do you think having the acknowledgment of shared aliveness built into your language would shape how you engage with the world? Is there room to integrate this animacy in English?

#### Dinner Menu

### 7: Maples and the work of receiving gifts

#### Conversation Menu

- “One half of the truth is that the earth endows us with great gifts, the other half is that the gift is not enough. The responsibility does not lie with the maples alone. The other half belongs to us; we participate in its transformation. It is our work, and our gratitude, that distills the sweetness.”
- What are examples of gifts you must work to receive in your own life?

#### Dinner Menu

- Maple syrup pancakes

### 8: Witch hazel and friend medicine

#### Conversation Menu

- “My mother and Hazel Barnett, unlikely sisters, I suppose, learned well from the plants they both loved - they made a balm for loneliness together, a strengthening tea for the pain of longing... their friendship was medicine for each other.”
- Are there relationships in your life that have been medicine for you?

#### Dinner Menu

- Christmas cookies / November foods?

### 9: The Pond and mothering

#### Conversation Menu

- “The pond has shown me that being a good mother doesn’t end with creating a home where just my children can flourish. A good mother grows into a richly eutrophic old woman, knowing that her work doesn’t end until she creates a home where all of life’s beings can flourish.”

- What does it mean to be a good mother?

#### Dinner Menu

- Golden apples, mint tea, pondside picnic foods

## 10: Water lilies and parenting

#### Conversation Menu

- Is there a salient time where you have had to let go of someone, or where someone has had to let go of you?

#### Dinner Menu

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## 11: Thanksgiving

#### Conversation Menu

- "You can't listen to the Thanksgiving Address without feeling wealthy. And, while expressing gratitude seems innocent enough, it is a revolutionary idea. In a consumer society, contentment is a radical proposition. Recognizing abundance rather than scarcity undermines an economy that thrives by creating unmet desires. Gratitude cultivates an ethic of fullness, but the economy needs emptiness. The Thanksgiving Address reminds you that you already have everything you need."
- "The Thanksgiving Address reminds us that duties and gifts are two sides of the same coin. Eagles were given the gift of far sight, so it is their duty to watch over us. Rain fulfills its duty as it falls, because it was given the gift of sustaining life. What is the duty of humans? If gifts and responsibilities are one, then asking 'What is our responsibility?' is the same as asking 'What is our gift?' It is said that only humans have the capacity for gratitude. This is among our gifts."
- "Let us pledge reciprocity with the living world."
- What might it look like to raise our children with an understanding of their gifts and responsibilities to the living world?

#### Dinner Menu

- Every living thing... but maybe a thanksgiving type meal

## 12: Gardens and the love of the earth

#### Conversation Menu

- "The land loves us back."

- “People often ask me what one thing I would recommend to restore relationship between land and people. My answer is almost always, ‘Plant a garden.’”
- Do you think that the earth loves you back?
  - What would happen if people believed that the earth loved them back?

#### Dinner Menu

- Garden foods - Poll beans, squash, tomatoes, potatoes, berries

### 13: The Three Sisters, unique gifts, and partnership

#### Conversation Menu

- “The way of the Three Sisters reminds me of one of the basic teachings of our people. The most important thing each of us can know is our unique gift and how to use it in the world. Individuality is cherished and nurtured, because, in order for the whole to flourish, each of us has to be strong in who we are and carry our gifts with conviction, so they can be shared with others. Being among the sisters provides a visible manifestation of what a community can become when its members understand and share their gifts. In reciprocity, we fill our spirits as well as our bellies.”
- What is your unique gift (in the way of the Three Sisters)?

#### Dinner Menu

- Three Sisters potluck - Corn, beans, squash
  - Bouquets of wildflowers in canning jars
  - Cornbread
  - Three bean salad
  - Bean cakes
  - Black bean chili
  - Summer squash casserole
  - Pumpkins stuffed with cheesy polenta
  - Three Sisters soup
  - Fried squash blossoms (stuffed with cheese and cornmeal)
  - Dessert: Indian pudding and maple corncakes

### 14: Black Ash Baskets and mindful consumption

#### Conversation Menu

- What would it be like to live with heightened sensitivity to the lives given for ours?

- "Being mindful in the vast network of hyperindustrialized goods really gives me a headache."

#### Dinner Menu

- Plates whose origins can be traced

## 15: Sweetgrass and reciprocity and indigenous knowledge

#### Conversation Menu

- Were the findings about sweetgrass a surprise to you?
- "If we use a plant respectfully it will stay with us and flourish. If we ignore it, it will go away."
- Humans and sweetgrass have a symbiotic relationship - "sweetgrass thrives where it is used and disappears elsewhere"
- "Getting scientists to consider the validity of indigenous knowledge is like swimming upstream in cold, cold water. They've been so conditioned to be skeptical of even the hardest of hard data that bending their minds toward theories that are verified without the expected graphs or equations is tough. Couple that with the unblinking assumption that science has cornered the market on truth and there's not much room for discussion."

#### Dinner Menu

- Plants that humans have a symbiotic relationship with

## 16: Maple Nation and citizenship in the natural world

#### Conversation Menu

- What does it mean to be a good citizen of Maple Nation?
  - Robin's (partial) answer to the question: "'Show up at the damn meeting.' Political action, civic engagement - these are powerful acts of reciprocity with the land."
- The ecosystems services of maple trees - air and water purification, civic beautification, songbird habitats, and on
- Maples will become climate refugees

#### Dinner Menu

- Maple cake, candy maples, maple over vanilla ice cream, shots of maple syrup

## 17: The Honorable Harvest

### Conversation Menu

- How do we, in this day and time, approach the tension between honoring life around us and taking it in order to live?
- Robin's summary of the honorable harvest guidelines
  - Know the ways of the ones who take care of you, so that you may take care of them
  - Introduce yourself. Be accountable as the one who comes asking for life. Ask permission before taking. Abide by the answer
  - Never take the first. Never take the last. Take only what you need
  - Never take more than half. Leave some for others. Harvest in a way that minimizes harm
  - Take only that which is given
  - Use it respectfully. Never waste what you have taken. Share
  - Give thanks for what you have been given
  - Give a gift, in reciprocity for what you have taken
  - Sustain the ones who sustain you and the earth will last forever
- "The taking of another life to support your own is far more significant when you recognize the beings who are harvested as persons, nonhuman persons vested with awareness, intelligence, spirit - and who have families waiting for them at home."

### Dinner Menu

- Leeks
- Wild rice

## 18: Nanabozho and becoming indigenous

### Conversation Menu

- (from Emergence book club) Have you experienced a sense of "species loneliness?" If so, how? What are some of the acts of care or reciprocity that have brought you into a deeper relationship with the rest of creation?
- The "Original Instructions" that the Creator gave nanabozho: Walk in such a way that each step is a greeting to Mother Earth
- "Some people say that time is a river into which we can step but once, as it flows in a straight path to the sea. But Nanabozho's people know time as a circle. Time is not a river running inexorably to the sea, but the sea itself, its tides that appear

and disappear, the fog that rises to become rain in a different river. All things that were will come again.”

- “After all these generations since Columbus, some of the wisest of Native elders still puzzle over the people who came to our shores. They look at the toll on the land and say, ‘The problem with these new people is that they don’t have both feet on the shore. One is still on the boat. **They don’t seem to know whether they’re staying or not.**’ This same observation is heard from some contemporary scholars who in the social pathologies and relentlessly materialist culture the fruit of homelessness, a rootless past.”
- “Maybe the task assigned to Second Man is to unlearn the model of kudzu and follow the teachings of White Man’s Footstep, to strive to become naturalized to place, to throw off the mind-set of the immigrant. Being naturalized to place means to live as if this is the land that feeds you, as if these are the streams from which you drink, that build your body and fill your spirit. To become naturalized is to know that your ancestors lie in this ground. Here you will give your gifts and meet your responsibilities. To become naturalized is to live as if your children’s future matters, to take care of the land as if our lives and the lives of all our relatives depended on it. Because they do.”

#### Dinner Menu

- Something made from a crop that has been well “naturalized” into the US

## 19: Silverbells and teaching

#### Conversation Menu

- “As an enthusiastic young PhD, colonized by the arrogance of science, I had been fooling myself that I was the only teacher. The land is the real teacher. All we need as students is mindfulness. Paying attention is a form of reciprocity with the living world, receiving the gifts with open eyes and an open heart. My job was just to lead them into the presence and ready them to hear.”
- How might we ready ourselves to learn the teachings that Earth has to offer us?

#### Dinner Menu



## 20: Wilderness field station, cattails, spruce roots, and plants as gifts and teachers

### Conversation Menu

- When receiving the gifts of the land, Is gratitude enough, or is reciprocity the standard? How do we practice reciprocity to the land?
- “This is our work, to discover what we can give. Isn’t this the purpose of education, to learn the nature of your own gifts and how to use them for good in the world?”

### Dinner Menu

- Cattail kebabs, roasted rhizomes, pollen pancakes

## 21: Salmon and ceremony

### Conversation Menu

- Robin notes that modern ceremonies focus mostly on ourselves. She encourages regenerating ceremonies for the land and other species, but cautions against replicating aka appropriating ceremonies from Native peoples. Let us imagine what a ceremony for the world beyond us, in this day and age, might look like.
- At Cascade Head, “the ritual burning of the headland cemented the people’s connection to salmon, to each other, and to the spirit world, but it also created biodiversity.”
- “Ceremony focuses attention so that attention becomes intention.”
- **“I want to stand by the river in my finest dress.** I want to sting, strong and hard, and stomp my feet with a hundred others so that the waters hum with our happiness. I want to dance for the renewal of the world.”

### Dinner Menu

- Salmon

## 22: The Subjugation of Native Americans by the US State and Reconciliation

### Conversation Menu

- What would reconciliation for the violence the US State committed upon Native communities look like? What is our responsibility as descendants and immigrants in this reconciliation?

- “When a language dies, so much more than words are lost. Language is the dwelling place of ideas that do not exist anywhere else. It is a prism through which to see the world”

#### Dinner Menu

### 23: Lichens and mutualistic symbiosis

#### Conversation Menu

- The pattern of mutualism amidst scarcity and individualism amidst plenty is one we see in lichens and in our own society. What would a world where there is mutualism amidst plenty look like?
- “When times are easy and there’s plenty to go around, individual species can go it alone. But when conditions are harsh and life is tenuous, it takes a team sworn to reciprocity to keep life going forward. **In a world of scarcity, interconnection and mutual aid become critical for survival.** So say the lichens.”
- “The lichen, in a single body, unites the two great pathways of life: the so-called grazing food chain based on the building up of beings, and the detrital food chain based on taking them apart. Producers and decomposers, the light and the darkness, the givers and receivers wrapped in each other’s arms, the warm and the weft of the same blanket so closely woven that it’s impossible to discern the giving from the taking. Some of earth’s oldest beings, lichens are born from reciprocity.”

#### Dinner Menu

- Rock tripe noodle soup??

### 24: Cedars and old-growth cultures

#### Conversation Menu

- What are examples of old-growth cultures that you have encountered? What might old growth cultures of the future look like?
- “Wealth meant having enough to give away”
- “When resources begin to run short, as they always will, cooperation and strategies that promote stability...will be favored by evolution.”
- “Pioneer human communities...have an important role in regeneration, but they are not sustainable in the long run. When they reach the edge of easy energy, balance and renewal are the only way forward, wherein there is a reciprocal cycle

between early and late successional systems, each opening the door for the other.”

#### Dinner Menu

### 25: Rain and time

#### Conversation Menu

- “Maybe there is no such thing as rain; there are only raindrops, each with its own story... Maybe there is no such thing as time; there are only moments, each with its own story.”

#### Dinner Menu

### 26: Windigo and a culture of greed

#### Conversation Menu

- “As Johnston suggests, multinational corporations have spawned a new breed of Windigo that insatiably devours the earth’s resources ‘not for need but for greed.’ The footprints are all around us, once you know what to look for.” Where in our world do you see the footprints of the Windigo?
- “Born of our fears and failings, Windigo is the name for that within us which cares more for its own survival than for anything else.”
- “We are all complicit. We’ve allowed the ‘market’ to define what we value so that the redefined common good seems to depend on profligate lifestyles that enrich the sellers while impoverishing the soul and the earth.”
- “It is the Windigo way that tricks us into believing that belongings will fill our hunger, when it is belonging that we crave.”
- “Indulgent self-interest that our people once held to be monstrous is now celebrated as success.”
- “We continue to embrace economic systems that prescribe infinite growth on a finite planet.”

#### Dinner Menu

## 27: Onondaga Lake and restoration

### Conversation Menu

- Are you aware of wounds to the earth on the land that you call home? What can be done to heal these wounds?
- "Chief among [the people's] duties was to give thanks for the gifts of the earth and to care for them."
- "The participatory role of people in the well-being of the land has been lost, our reciprocal relations reduced to a Keep Out sign."
- "Restoration is a powerful antidote to despair. Restoration offers concrete means by which humans can once again enter into positive, creative relationship with the more-than-human world, meeting responsibilities that are simultaneously material and spiritual. It's not enough to grieve. It's not enough to just stop doing bad things."
- Biocultural / reciprocal restoration
- "Restoring land without restoring relationship is an empty exercise. It is relationship that will endure and relationship that will sustain the restored land. Therefore, reconnecting people and the landscape is as essential as reestablishing proper hydrology or cleaning up contaminants. It is medicine for the earth."

### Dinner Menu

## 28: People of Corn and a new ilbal

### Conversation Menu

- What is our gift? And how shall we use it?
- How can we develop a new ilbal, new stories of relationship to place?

### Dinner Menu

- Corn

## 29: Salamanders and endangered species

### Conversation Menu

- How to think about the extinction of other species we humans incidentally and callously create?

### Dinner Menu

### 30: Seventh Fire

#### Conversation Menu

- What does Robin mean, when she says that we can be the *shkitagen* to carry the fire?
- What would it mean to choose the grassy path at the crossroads? What would it take to make that choice?
- "Our elders say that we live in the time of the seventh fire. We are the ones the ancestors spoke of, the ones who will bend to the task of putting things back together to rekindle the flames of the sacred fire, to being the rebirth of a nation."
- "We have a choice ahead, a crossroads...I worry who will get to the crossroads first, who will make the choices for us all."

#### Dinner Menu

### 31: Defeating Windigo

#### Conversation Menu

- What is the alternative? And how do we get there? Robin suggests an economy of the commons and a culture of gratitude and reciprocity
- "Anthropologist Marshall Sahlins reminds us that, 'modern capitalist societies, however richly endowed, dedicate themselves to the proposition of scarcity. Inadequacy of economic means is the first principle of the world's wealthiest peoples.' The shortage is not due to how much material wealth there actually is, but to the way in which it is exchanged or circulated. The market system artificially creates scarcity by blocking the flow between the source and the consumer. Grain may rot in the warehouse while hungry people starve because they cannot pay for it. The result is famine for some and diseases of excess for others. The very earth that sustains us is being destroyed to fuel injustice. An economy that grants personhood to corporations but denies it to the more-than-human beings: this is a Windigo economy."

#### Dinner Menu