

## **Podcast Series, Holistic Nature of Us**

### **Episode # 24: Meet Janet Verney**

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Hi I'm Judith Dreyer,

Thank you for joining me for this pod cast series "The Holistic Nature of Us".

My intent is to take us, you and I, into a better understanding of the concepts behind our holistic nature and how that ties directly to the holistic nature of the world around us. How can we connect the dots in practical ways that we are nature and nature is in us?

I will be featuring authors and educators, practitioners and others whose passion for this earth helps us create bridges. We'll see what's trending, what's relevant to our world today, not just for land use, but to connect the dots between ourselves and nature. It's time for practical action and profound inner change so our natural world is valued once again.

Today I'm excited to introduce you to Janet Verney. She is a certified integrative health specialist and she specializes in women's wellness. As the *Wellness Designer* she creates fun and educational programs for women around the world. Janet is passionate about living a rich and full life through delicious food and an abundant lifestyle. She and I recently partnered in a book sharing event at the Story Tellers Cottage here in Connecticut. She talked about her holistic journey and her health journey from a place of using a garden as a metaphor. And in particular, talked about how important our gut health is and how it plays a role in maintaining optimum healthy levels. In my world, maintaining soil health and soil integrity helps support growing healthy vibrant food, which in turn contributes to overall health. So today we're going to have an interesting discussion about Janet's journey and tying in all of these threads about how she used a holistic path to create health for herself.

Welcome Janet. It's a pleasure!

JANET: Thank you Judith. It's so fun to be here.

JUDITH: Let's start off by telling our listeners about your own journey.

JANET: Okay. Well it's a long one. 'm going to try and make it as quick as possible. Basically, I've suffered from a chronic lung disorder that also turned into some gut issues. Clinically the doctors were treating me as though I had cystic fibrosis. But after a long journey at the National Institutes of Health undiagnosed disease program in which they only accept 100 patients in the country every year. I spent a week there being analyzed by a team of 50 doctors and unfortunately at the end of the week I did not get a diagnosis. What I did get is "we ruled out a lot" but I realized on my train ride home that rather than chasing a diagnosis over 30 some years that it was time for me to stop chasing it and really focus on what I could do to improve my health. So, I set out on a journey to do just that. I went back to school, became certified in integrative health. I explored many, many, many different types of both conventional as well as alternative and complimentary medicine. I went to the Hypocrites Health Institute in West Palm Beach Florida and did their Life Transformation program. And as a result of all of these different things, and some of them were not so easy, I was able to get rid of a \$16,000 respiratory vest, \$7,000 nebulized medication and essentially, I am medication free. I do support myself with various supplements but really between lifestyle and diet I was able to improve my health ten-fold. It's made an amazing difference.

JUDITH: That's an amazing story for several factors. First of all, I have a nursing background. I know how serious cystic fibrosis is. And I know how serious the medications are, nebulizers are and how draining that can be. Forget about our health and how we feel physically, but just from an emotional point of view how draining a chronic illness can be for us in many ways.

Tell us a little bit about your holistic path. You looked at nutrition. You looked at different models. How did you start to integrate that for yourself?

JANET: Yes, absolutely. And one thing I wanted to mention about what you said is, the whole emotional aspect of when you are dealing with a chronic illness is a lot of people end up living in a state of fear. And that's something I lived with every day; will I go to bed and not wake up the next

day? And that fear alone began to really erode my health further. I just wanted to bring that up because that was such a big factor for me that releasing that fear and replacing it with what I call love was huge as a part of my holistic journey. So, when I think holistic I think mind, body, spirit. I think all of those factors need to play a key role in your healing journey as well as what I call collective medicine which is; Western medicine, alternative medicine, complimentary medicine. I've used Ayurvedic energy healing. I've used acupuncture, an assortment of different things. And you know some helped more than others. But I think collectively, and that's why I call it collective medicine, (it's my own term), because I feel like I took the best of everything, what worked well for me because we're all so bio-individual. What might work for me may not work for another person. You really have to listen to your body. So that's my approach with Holism.

JUDITH: That's interesting. Fear, the emotion, is part of our make-up. And we can't separate it out and say, okay I feel fear, but I still have to deal with my body and I'm only going to deal with my body. We have to incorporate our emotional nature, our mental nature, our spiritual nature when we go on this path. And I love your term of collective medicine because we are, as you said, bio-individual. What does that mean? You may have had great results with acupuncture. But just because it doesn't work for the next person doesn't mean there isn't something in Chinese Medicine, for example, that could help.

JANET: Exactly, absolutely.

JUDITH: Alright, so sustainability.

JANET: Okay well when I think of sustainability for myself, the most important thing for me and the only way to sustain taking care of your temple, your shrine, your body, your mind, all of that, is basically loving yourself enough. And what I mean by that, and people can finish that sentence, I love myself enough to \_\_\_\_; get on the treadmill, go for a walk in nature, eat more whole foods, ditch the alcohol, get out of a relationship. I love myself enough to \_\_\_\_\_. And that is my way of sustaining my health. Every time I start feeling a little bit under the weather or my stress levels are up I have to take a step back and say I love myself enough to slow down, take a hot bath. Do whatever it is you need to do. Because too often, especially as women, we tend to always put ourselves on the back burner

and take care of everybody else in our lives. And unfortunately, that puts us in a bad place health wise.

JUDITH: It does. That's a great point. I love that as a sustainability factor. We use the term sustainability a lot with our land use, but I love it for our personal use because that's our land. Our body is our real estate and if we look at our body as real estate I think people would change how they approach their body. You know we certainly don't trash our car, why would we trash our body?

JANET: Exactly, yep.

JUDITH: Alright, well I love traveling around the wheel, so in the Holistic Nature of Us we have another concept called reverence.

JANET: Yes. Well in that, again like you said, real estate, I look at my body as a temple or a shrine, so revering it and loving it, every aspect of it. There are times when if I am feeling like I get a slight flare-up with whatever it is that I have, and I usually have triggers for that which is usually stress, I have to stop and say "What is it that I need to do for myself?" so again, looking at my body as that temple and making sure that I'm caring for it.

JUDITH: Yes, and again we forget what reverence means. It means to be in awe of something. How come we've lost the awe for our physical body? It's almost like we just take it for granted and it just better do what we want it to do and we go about our merry way. But we actually have a better response to going about our merry way when we take care of this physical body with more respect.

JANET: Exactly. I mean when we are constantly dising ourselves like, oh my hips are too big, or my hair is too stringy, or my nose is too long, whatever it might be. Those messages are ones that will erode. They are not in reverence to you. I always say to people, send love to those areas that are either hurting. You know in my particular case I love my lungs, I had to keep telling myself, because in the beginning it was "why aren't my lungs doing what they should be doing?" You know you tend to get angry or upset with parts of your body or why can't I be thinner? Why can't I be this or that? I think we have to have that reverence for ourselves and keep sending positive messages to those particular places that annoy us the most.

JUDITH: And women are just the culprits at this level, you know? We want some kind of idealized image that we get brainwashed with from the media, when in fact we're supposed to be curvy and we're supposed to be different and we're supposed to put our own beauty out in the world so to speak.

JANET: Yes, my favorite thing to say to folks is, there is only one you and the world needs what only you can give it.

JUDITH: Exactly, exactly. Let's travel around the wheel again to intelligence.

JANET: Okay, well intelligence to me is all about growing and learning and challenging myself. And even in those situations that are more challenging I look at those as opportunities to grow and learn. And sometimes I need to sit with it for a bit. But those are, in my opinion, that's my intelligence. My intelligence is being mentored by other people. It's taking a new situation and figuring out how I can grow and learn from it. So that would be my take on that one important part of the wheel.

JUDITH: From Chinese Medicine and particular Mantak Chia, he talks about our organ systems as being a community and suggests that we meditate gratitude or send gratitude to that community. For example, for you, lung tissue is very complex. There are many different structures there and it's a community of cells that knows how to be lungs. They are not your eyes. They are not my eyes. So how can we in our meditative, contemplative prayer work send our thoughts to our biological communities in gratitude for their intelligence?

JANET: Yes, yes, absolutely! I mean every breath, every morning that I wake up that there's breath in me is an opportunity for gratitude that my lungs know what they need to do to work. And I feel like every day they're healing. Even as I progress through the journey, every day there is healing that's occurring.

JUDITH: Wonderful! And last but not least we have intuition on the wheel.

JANET: Well this is where I like to say listen to your gut. Gut instincts, it's amazing how people will say listen to your gut and in truth your gut, literally your digestive system, is talking to you all the time. And in our program, which I'll talk about a little bit later, called Foodgevity we talk about body talk. And so often people will take a pill to suppress a body talk symptom

whether it's high blood pressure, whether it's cholesterol, whether it's heart burn. They will pop a pill to suppress the symptoms but what's happening is you're not truly listening to your body and down the line you create almost more of a problem or you get a bigger diagnosis. So, it's really important to listen to that gut instinct and know that your body is telling you something for a reason.

JUDITH: Well tell us more about our gut health. I know you have quite a bit of expertise on that level.

JANET: Yes, well I mean it's basically, if you look at the gut microbiome which a lot of research is revolving around right now, they are finding that, right now the quote is 90% of illness is coming from gut issues. So, you may not necessarily have any severe gut ailments that are troubling you but a gut that is out of balance. If you start getting more bad bacteria or more candida in the gut than good bacteria, or even if bacteria begin to creep into places that it's not supposed to be in which they call leaky gut, it gets into the blood stream. Those things are creating inflammation throughout the body. It can raise high blood pressure. It can create autoimmune disorders. They are even finding children on the autistic spectrum with ADHD a lot of it has to do with the gut. One of the biggest culprits that affects the gut is ultra-processed foods. We have whole foods. We have processed foods. And we have ultra-processed foods. My example of a processed food, because it's right in the middle there, would be an organic creamy peanut butter with a pinch of sea salt. That's a processed food. A whole food would be a peanut. And an ultra processed food would be something like one of those commercial peanut butters that has partially hydrogenated oils, sugars, all of the additives and chemicals that are in there. Those ultra-processed foods, if people simply eliminated those that is a huge step, huge, to getting the gut in alignment. And then of course there are other things. As we get older our digestive enzymes begin to deplete a little bit. The acidity that we need to digest our foods might deplete. There are lots of things we can do to help improve the good bacteria in the gut. But I tell people, smaller than small steps. (For Example) some people who want to eat fermented vegetables which is a wonderful asset to our diet, but if you start eating a fermented vegetable and you eat a half a cup of it, you're going to create World War III in your gut because the bad bacteria are going to start stomping all over you, and it's not going to feel good. I tell people half a teaspoon of the liquid from a fermented vegetable for a week, then add a teaspoon, then work up to a tablespoon a day. So slower than slow because

that little gut microbiome it's almost like it has a mind of its own and it takes charge very quickly. They also, one other quick thing, there's a lot of books and a lot of research going on about the gut brain connection. There's a lot of people facing dementia and Alzheimer's and what I want to say to people is that 90% of the cases, they're preventable. And a lot of this has to do with getting your gut in balance.

JUDITH: I agree with you. I've studied Ayurvedic medicine and Traditional Chinese Medicine and I think their underlying principles, their core principles for health and wellness have to do with getting the gut, keeping the gut in balance is number one. They do believe that most of our illnesses begin in the gut. We have to remember that our digestive track, starting with our nose and our mouth, all the way to the other end is our way of interfacing with the outside world. It has an incredibly important role of staying strong from an immune point of view just to handle the toxins we take in without any conscious awareness, that we ingest every minute of every day. And so, it has this very big role in sorting through the toxins and allowing the good stuff to go through so that we can be nourished and safe, as well as eliminating what doesn't work for us, and what's toxic or wasteful, which is why we have waste.

You also said something to me awhile ago and I wanted you to bring it out today about the nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs. Those are huge in our culture today.

JANET: They are. They are, and they are huge gut disrupters. You know emulsifiers in foods, the NSAIDS (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs) like Aleve or Naproxen, all of those are huge gut disrupters. All have been linked to leaky gut syndrome, or small intestinal bacteria overgrowth issues. All of those things and that can lead to like brain fogs and all of that. So yeah, when people are going in and taking an anti-inflammatory you're basically suppressing something that's going on in your system. We need to get to what the root of the inflammation is and decrease inflammation in the body which has a lot to do with lifestyle and diet. And I say lifestyle first because you can eat all of the broccoli in the world or all the whole foods in the world but if your stress levels are through the roof and you're not addressing them, chronic stress leads to high levels of cortisol. Cortisol turns to sugars in the body, high glucose, and that leads to gut issues as well. So, it's so important that we adjust both lifestyle and nutrition.

JUDITH: Right and it's complex and it takes diligence and patience. When I hear a story like yours, I'm reminded of your activism on behalf of yourself and that takes diligence, it takes patience and it takes practice and not everything works overnight. Holistic journeys take time, it doesn't happen instantly. I worked in the health food industry for many years and I literally had people come in and say, "I don't want the pharmacy stuff so give me something here that works fast." I would just say, I'd point them in a direction and we'd have a conversation but again it's that same mindset. We want everything to be done with today or tomorrow at the latest. When we work on a holistic path, we have to have patience. And again, as you mentioned, our body has to make those adjustments. It doesn't just happen overnight.

JANET: So true. Yes. And sometimes it gets worse before it gets better because when you start making changes, as I said to the gut, there's a disruption going on. You're creating a disruption. It doesn't mean that it's a bad thing, especially when you're going to begin to increase your good bacteria there and eliminate. You know we're always going to have bad bacteria. We're always going to have some yeast and Candida, but you don't want the overgrowth of it. You don't want the extreme end of it that make you sick. So, when we begin this regime of introducing some good things and crowding out the bad things, I always like to say, go for the good, crowd out the bad. Don't just focus on crowding out because you'll feel defeated quickly. But you sometimes experience things like a little bit of brain fog or a little bit of lethargy and just feeling tired and fatigued. Sometimes you'll see acne breakout as you're going through a little bit of detox. All of your organs are so involved in this; it's amazing. From when you were talking about it begins in the nose and the mouth, people are doing a lot of smoothies these days and I heard from one person who said, you know I don't know what it is about smoothies. I love them, and I know they're good for me but, I feel really bloated and uncomfortable after I drink a smoothie. And I said are you **chewing your smoothie**? And she was like, no. And I said well you've got to get the enzymes cooking in your mouth and if you're just drinking and gulping it down, you're not stimulating those enzymes to digest the food of the smoothie. She made that one change. She chewed it and she said, it's amazing the difference. So I tell people when you're going to have food and eat a meal, slow down, create if you can, I know a lot of us are busy and on the go, but create the best circumstances that you can for enjoying the meal whether it's nice place setting or eating in

nature or setting the table, whatever it is, and then slow down and chew your food to the point of liquid.

1. In fact, that's one of my tips; **create a space where you can chew your food to the point of liquid** because it will make all the difference in the world to your digestive tract.

JUDITH: Well that's true and many of us rush through a meal, I'm guilty of it, and then wonder why I don't feel like I've digested everything properly and I know better. You know? That's a very good tip, a good reminder because in our culture we don't stop and think about that. We think about the gratification of the food rather than the implication of the food. I can maybe put it that way.

Well I always like to have three tips. You gave us tip number one. How about tip number two?

JANET: Okay. Well actually my tip number one and I think most important is

2. **loving yourself enough.** Really focusing on yourself care, loving yourself enough to do the right things for you. And I believe that the more that you do that, it creates that intuitive, that gut instinct to begin to listen to your body and what it needs most. So that's my first tip.

JUDITH: Well, I can't say enough about intuition with that first tip because I think once we start focusing on the body, we get a reward. We'll get some kind of insight that says, maybe I should try this? And so why not try that? Follow it, follow that intuitive gut feeling and see where it leads you on your own journey to health.

JANET: Yes. And when you do this I'm telling you the magic begins to happen. And in fact, you begin this ripple effect with other people, so you will practice acts of kindness that you probably weren't cognizant of before but it's amazing how this little ripple effect will occur, and you'll begin to show your journey, your love to other people.

JUDITH: Great, okay. Another tip?

JANET: Okay, my next one, and this is a biggie, it's actually part of my on-line program.

3. I dedicated an entire module to **the power of positivity**.

Replacing negative thoughts with positive. There is, I believe, 80% of the chatter that goes on in our head is made up of negative thoughts or worry. And it's when you look in the mirror in the morning and agh, I wish my hair were longer, or curlier or you know less gray, whatever it is. All of these little negative messages. Or it could be something about work. Or this person is going to get the promotion over me. There is so much negative chatter that goes on in our head and that again can erode health. I encourage people to, I actually wrote (a letter) to myself and it's in my book called "Roots2Wellness", I wrote a love letter to myself. In my love letter I stated it as if I was living it and it was in the present. And it was everything from my health, my career, my friends, everything that I wanted to bring into my life I wrote in that love letter. I'd read it to myself before bed every night. I did this for almost a year and now when I look back at it all of those things have come to be. And it's an amazing thing to read it now and know that wow, I manifested this, and not that I didn't work hard because I took steps every day towards it, but it's so important that we change those negative thought patterns to positive ones. It makes all the difference.

JUDITH: It does. And I think when we're talking about an illness, if we can change our mind thought just from the get go, that I am healthy and well because most of our body actually is. It's just some area that has a weakness in it and how can we address that weakness? If we can start thinking and feeling "I am well and healthy". I agree with you. I think we can manifest all kinds of things. It leads us on a journey. I think that's the best way to put it. And that journey will support our deepest desires. That's what we have to remind ourselves. By listening and following our gut intuition it leads us to manifesting our deepest desires.

JANET: Absolutely, yes.

JUDITH: Before we go, how about telling the listeners about your book "Roots2Wellness"?

JANET: Okay. Well in that book what I talk about in the first chapter is basically, I call it my gift. My illness is my gift and it brought so many wonderful people into my life, like you and our listeners. And without this illness I wouldn't have had all that I have going on for me now. I do call it

my gift. And I go into the next chapter, Unearth. I have a lot of nature and gardening terms in here because I truly believe our body is like a landscape, a garden that we want to unearth what is at the root of the problem. We want to weed out obstacles that are in our way. And when I say weed out obstacles it might be an addiction or a relationship or old habits or patterns that stand in our way. And then we want to nourish. We want to nourish ourselves fully. I broke that into different sections, both spirituality and the power of positivity and of course nutrition is a big thing in there. And under nutrition I actually have like a chart that lists seeds and weeds. Seeds are things you want to introduce into your body and weeds are the things that you want to eliminate from your body, from your diet. I have a whole section about nourishing yourself to health. And then the last section is bloom. And I believe that when we have unearthed what's at the root, when we've weeded out obstacles and we've fully nourished ourselves then we can have this beautiful bloom of longevity, of feeling joy, of feeling well, of feeling happy.

JUDITH: Oh, I love the metaphors. And you know I think we have forgotten that good health is our birthright.

JANET: Yes.

JUDITH: I think we're meant to be healthy for the most part. I'm not saying that we don't have certain issues to discover because your issue has strengthened your wisdom, your journey and what you can share with others and I have a similar path. I had a chronic disease in my 20s, did not realize I was taking a holistic path at the time because there was no language or even support for it, but one thing led to another. And, at the end of three years, I was healed. I wasn't just cured but I was healed, and my doctor was very proud of me. I had a very positive supportive physician at that time. And years later when I stopped to think about all of the things that I did, it was a holistic journey just like you've said. You know we have to weed out what we're doing emotionally that's turning us down or mentally what's taking us down and what kind of good foods can we include, change, to nourish us in that process as well as look at our spirituality so that it becomes a comprehensive program. But back then there wasn't that much language for it or support for us. I was really and truly on my own in discovering this. So, I highly recommend Janet's book, "Roots2Wellness". It's available on Amazon.

Janet before we leave, could you please give everyone your contact information?

JANET: Absolutely. I have two e-mail addresses. One is [connect@roots2wellness.com](mailto:connect@roots2wellness.com) and the other one is [thrive@foodgevity.com](mailto:thrive@foodgevity.com) so foodgevity I had mentioned earlier is an online program. It's essentially 20 modules that women can do online from the comfort of their home that takes them on a journey through both lifestyle and nutrition to help them sort out and unearth and weed out and nourish themselves. This was a program that resulted from my book and a collaboration that I did with my partner Kathleen, my business partner Kathleen who studied functional medicine and is also a certified integrative health coach. Together we built this program because we truly believe that healing is a journey and if you're ready to do the work, this is the right program for you. And the reason why I say that is that too often, especially with weight loss, this is one I'd like to bring up, is so many people focus on weight loss and they go on a particular diet. Well I have to say that no one diet fits every person because we're so bio-individual. You really need to be listening to your gut. What does your body need? You know one man's food might be another man's poison, so we really have to sort out what's going to work for us. The Foodgevity program is educational that shows them what to look for in good food and good lifestyle and to do the work. So that's what that program is all about.

JUDITH: Thank you, and that's all available on your website, correct?

JANET: Yes, it is.

JUDITH: Well we had an interesting discussion today and I hope everyone feels as inspired as I do by Janet's practical talk, her practical advice and the fact that she found a way to turn around a health issue into a healing issue. I feel very inspired by that because that's what the holistic path is all about. It's about uniting all the aspects of ourselves as a human being into a place of integrity that works as smoothly as possible.

I want to thank you Janet for joining us today.

This is Judith Dreyer. I'm the author of "At The Garden's Gate", book and blog. For more information go to my website [www.judithdreyer.com](http://www.judithdreyer.com) and you will find information about this pod cast. The transcript will also be available, as well as my book and class schedule. Please share and get the word out.

I'd like to end with a quote from Paul Hawkin. He's an environmentalist and author who reminds us,

*“sustainability, ensuring the future life on earth is an infinite game the endless expression on behalf of all.*

Thank you everyone and enjoy your day.