

Podcast Series: Holistic Nature of Us

Episode # 59 : Meet: Grandmother Nancy Andry

<https://www.judithdreyer.com>

Hi I'm Judith Dreyer,

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

I invite you to a journey with me into a better understanding of the concepts behind our holistic and how that ties us directly to the natural world around us. My intention is to be your guide for this half hour as we begin seeing our world with fresh eyes, gaining more understanding and learning how can connect the dots in practical ways that we are nature and nature is in us.

I feature a broad range of guests deeply concerned about the environmental issues of our time, and that includes us, authors and educators, practitioners and others whose passion for this earth and for all species help us create sustainable bridges of understanding. These folks are innovators, action oriented, creating solutions in a variety of ways that honors us and the planet's holistic nature. I am honored to share their stories, their projects, and their passion with all of you.

And today I'm delighted to introduce you to Grandmother Nancy Andres. Grandmother Nancy is of Ogunquit and French heritage and has followed the red road since childhood. She is a well known storyteller sharing legends from many different nations and school, health facilities and the pow-wow circuit. She was a staff member of the Joined Nations of Connecticut, a youth organization for those of native heritage. She has been in talks in Calgary Canada, St. Croix Virgin Islands and at various centers in New York, Massachusetts and Connecticut. She has also owned and operated an equestrian business until retirement and now incorporates horse medicine in some of her lectures about native culture.

Good morning grandmother, it's a pleasure to have you here today.

GRANDMOTHER NANCY: Good morning, it's a pleasure to be here.

JUDITH: Well the reason I invited Grandmother Nancy here is that I had the wonderful synchronistic opportunity to find and to hear the Algonquin Water Song. The Water Song expresses gratitude for the water, and it embraces our consciousness and connection, for women in particular, with mother nature's greatest gift.

Grandmother, could you tell us more about your journey and about how important water is and especially for women today.

GRANDMOTHER NANCY: Well traditionally in the Algonquin culture men are the keepers of fire and women are the keepers of water. And you know we are all dependent on water. Our own bodies are mostly water. When we're coming into this world our mother breaks her water. Without water there is no life and so the Algonquin women, the native women in general, all indigenous women all over the world, have usually been the ones who were the caretakers of the water. And in these indigenous traditions prayer is simply a part of daily life.

And so, this water song was sung to the waters by the Algonquin Nation by women. And in 2004, at a gathering at Kitigan Zibi Reserve near Maniwaki Canada, the reserve of Grandfather William Commanda who was keeper of the Seven Fire Prophecies belt, the Jade Treaty Belt and the Friendship Belt of the Algonquin Nation's people, the grandmothers decided to release this song to women who had come from literally all over the world. I know personally I was one of the grandmothers on the beach when the song was taught. Seventeen different countries were represented. And our instructions were to take that song out because we knew that the waters were in horrendous troubles. The gathering that year, the emphasis was on water, and Dr. Emoto had come from Japan. And so, for sixteen or more years I've been doing that everywhere I traveled; St. Croix, Albuquerque New Mexico we gathered groups of women to teach and sing the water song because prayer is powerful. People seem to forget especially when prayers come in numbers and this is a prayer to the water taught to me by one of my most wonderful mentors Louise Wawatie. Wawatie in Algonquin means Northern Lights and I started going to Canada to learn from her in 1999 and to the gatherings at Grandfather Commanda's until his death. But with the urgency of what is happening with the fracking, with the oil and gas industry, we are just seeing more and more destruction of our waters. And once it's gone, you can't restore an aquifer, you simply can't. We're seeing water being sold and privatized. The Creator gave everyone that water free

for nothing and so my prayer was how do I reach more women? Please Creator let me reach more women.

We have some women circles, one here in Connecticut and one down in New York City. And we have had a gathering where the two circles were joined together, and we actually ran over to Wolf Lake in February in the snow to pray for the water. And when we came back to have a feast everyone was saying, "How can we get this song to more people?" and unbeknownst to me, because we never discussed it a whole lot, I knew I had a friend who was a well known producer, filmmaker a way back. She worked with Mike Nichols and she said, somebody said, we need to make a video. And I'm like don't know how the elders would feel about that and I think at some degree there may be people that the urgency nobody is making a profit. It actually cost us an inordinate amount of money to rent the sophisticated equipment and sound stuff that we needed and the women in Summit N.Y, some of their best people aligned themselves with us or other director Nicole Bellingcourt did an amazing job. And we prayed together, women, from the four directions. It was like miraculous. I mean I was praying, putting tobacco down every day. Women come from all four continents and miraculously that happened.

When you watch the video, you'll see June Sun whose done all the walks across America, whose done all the Fukushima walk. She's a Buddhist nun who came here from Japan and was instructed to work with Native American people. She is a very shy person. She really doesn't like being in the limelight. We had this absolutely beautiful woman show up from Nigeria at the last minute. We had all ages from my beautiful Lenni Lenape little girls who are only ten years old, up to myself who is, I'll be 82 this month. So, we had women from all four directions. We had every age group possible and made the film and prayed that the women of the world would be able to view this little short film, which is not the ceremony, it's to teach the words of the song. I wouldn't take that step to actually record the ceremonies. Although, there have been many water ceremonies recorded. And last year when I was at the Center for Earth Ethics, which is Karena Gore's organization, we decided to preview the video there. And Grandmother Josephine Mandamin was there for four days. I had the honor to have a daily interaction with her and I was looking to see this venerable, venerable elders reaction to the video, which is short. It's not a long video. And I was so happy to see a beaming face and receive a big hug. So, our only intent with this video is to get that song out for the women to pray

every day for the water and to see that when this happens there are actually healings. Not only for the water, but for the women themselves who sing this song every day it's, you know it's magical and it's almost hard to explain it because we are living in an era where we no longer believe in magical powers and they're out there. They've always been out there. Our ancestors have always been out there watching and helping us. And you know, when you consider that everyone from everywhere has at one point in their life's history been part of a tribe. You know, unfortunately in Europe those indigenous tribal ways were smashed out by conquerors and by the church and so it's been hard to keep, like the Celtic traditions, the Nordic traditions, although some of them were under the ground and some of them are coming back.

JUDITH: Yeah that's true. That is such a beautiful story that you shared. I know when I saw the film for the first time, *The Algonquin Water Song*, I was moved to tears. As a woman, you know, walking this earth and doing my part in whatever way I can, one of my elders years ago reminded us every time we met with her, to pray for the water, for the women to pray for the water. And we know that we have not taken good care of the water. We actually steal the water from communities, and you said privatize it. And there's a feeling amongst us that we need to take action today. Today's the only time that we have. So, what can we do today? So, I like your suggestions and your call to us women to say and sing this song every day for the water. So that is something I feel an urgency about, so that we help this planet in some way. And you're right. It's a beautiful mystical magical place that we live in and we've become anesthetized in some ways to that beauty. And songs like this challenge and open our hearts a little differently and I'm so happy for your story because I think when we're doing something that has that higher intent, the Universe supports us, and what I would have to do.

GRANDMOTHER NANCY: Absolutely. You know the words to the song literally mean, water is the life's blood of Mother Earth, water is the life's blood of our own body. And what this song and what so many activists, I mean environmental activists, it's a call to sacred activism really. And you know people say, oh I'm just one person I can't do anything. That's not true because if every one person did something, it would be so amazing. We're seeing that particularly with the youth's march, with this young girl from Sweden who is up for a Nobel Peace Prize. And you know what we need to fight is the privatization of water. I refuse to buy water in a bottle. I'm very

fortunate that I have good drinking water here in my house and I understand that some people don't and have no choice but to buy bottled water. But can you imagine, I think a bottle of water probably costs \$1.25, \$1.50 – I don't know because I don't buy it. Imagine if that bottle of water was \$20 or \$30 because if the supply is dwindling and it won't be accessible can you imagine the loss of human life? We've already seen it with animal species when dolphins are washing up on the shores of France and what have you. So how can we do this? Well first of **all ladies out there please sing the water song**. Teach it to your daughters, to your daughter's friends because we're stealing from our children. Every time we destroy another piece of Mother Earth we're stealing from our children. There are species of animals, birds, plants that our grandchildren will never see because they've gone. They're simply gone. It has to stop – the madness has to stop. And we do have to turn to different alternative, get away from fossil fuels. Wind power, solar power, there are so many options out there, but you see the 1% money making greedy people, they are so shortsighted. Don't they understand that when the water is gone, their money won't buy them the water either. I mean you wonder where their heads are sometimes and they're stealing from their grandchildren.

JUDITH: Right, and grandmother, that's a teaching that we don't give our children. Everything we do affects the next seven generations. My elders told me this all the time. And if we could put that principle into product development, into business design, we'd have a different world.

GRANDMOTHER NANCY: We would absolutely have a different world. It would be a more wonderful world. One of my pet peeves is that we don't put our children out in the grass. Everybody's afraid of ticks and oh my God you know the raccoons might have rabies, which my vet tells me is highly, you know, over said. I mean yes, we should have a rabies vaccine for our pets and so forth but it's highly exaggerated and you know I really think, I remember growing up and I was outside all the time. There was no such thing as sitting in the house. And of course, we didn't have the electronics then. But my cousins and I we were out in the snow, in the rain and we were quite healthy actually. We need to get our children's feet back on the Mother Earth. That's why they're becoming more and more detached. That's why we're seeing so much difficulties with a portion of the young people. I mean I live right next door to Sandy Hook, so need I say more? The thing is that it's too easy to say, Oh, here's 20\$ go the mall rather than let's pick-up, pack-up the car and have a picnic. You know maybe this is

my only day off but let's end it having a family picnic or going to a nature preserve or going somewhere where we can learn about the animals and the plants and the birds. We're in a rush, rush society and we need to back it down. And yes, it's difficult for families to live now without two incomes but are we locked into too many possessions and things that we really could live without if we needed to? I mean we all like our comforts. You know I travel to reserves, what I call my home community, even though I wasn't raised in them, where they're still in places no plumbing, no electric and you know what? My relatives are always laughing. Their children are always laughing despite the poverty that the dominant world feels they have, and they do. I mean they struggle and when deforesting and fracking and what have you have destroyed the habitats; we're destroying their food chain. Their way to exist. I mean it's hallucious. I saw a video the other day of young man from Grassy Narrows, which is a far northern community in Canada and because they eat the fish, the fish are full of mercury, the young people are developing learning disabilities and so forth because of what they have to eat. That's their source of food. So, this is how drastic it is, and I think here in CT where we live so nicely, most of us are you know, we don't really think about these things. We go to the grocery store and you know if we can afford it, we buy organic food. No everybody can afford to buy organic food and we're seeing more and more collapse. I'd like to see more and more gardens. I remember growing up that my grandmother always had a garden and she didn't have a huge piece of land. We've got to turn back to respecting the land and this is really, you know I blame the infected ticks on all the pesticides that have been put into the ground that have now leached into the ground water. This is a serious situation and you know people are climate change deniers and what have you. How can you look at the weather patterns and do that any more? It's absurd.

JUDITH: It is, and you know what I've learned by doing this podcast series is that there's tremendous innovation happening out there but it's happening one garden at a time, one farm at a time, one idea at a time. So, I feel hopeful for that, but I also feel the urgency from what you're saying. We've screwed up and we need to buckle up and admit our mistakes and get on with creating the solutions. And nature has the solutions and that's the amazing part to me. If we just take a portion of our lawn and turn it into some kind of wildflower natural landscape, they will come. The critters will come. They will be supported. We'll increase diversity. That's something we can do this spring. Everybody.

GRANDMOTHER NANCY: Everybody, even you just do you know flower pots, large receptacles and plant bee friendly plants in them. I told my friend the other day when it's planting season, I believe our local feed and grain store has a whole section that they've actually labeled "bee friendly" flowers and plants. Everyone could do that because our bees are so endangered, and people don't really realize how detrimental that is. So, you know I'm not much of a gardener, I'm sorry to say. I'm really good with animals. I don't have my grandmother's wonderful ability to take something half dead and make it come back to life, but I certainly can make a little bit of an effort. And I can go in the back of my house where there's some sun all day, the sun's kind of shady, and plant bee friendly things. And I have every intention of doing that. You know I meet with a lot of women who live in city environments and I go try and put out a flower box or if you're living in an apartment try and grow something that helps the air. I don't want any excuses. It's just like the water song. I've had women say, "oh we don't have time", and I go "excuse me, do you take a shower in the morning?" There's no law that says you can't. Is it more beautiful when there's a group of women gathered at a stream or a lake or a river? But if the only way you can do it is to turn around in the shower and sing the water song as you turn around to the four directions in the shower, or while you're doing your dishes, or bathing your baby in the sink. Do it. Just do it. I don't want to hear it. There's no excuses for not doing it as far as I'm concerned. My elders would like just frown and be very, very aggravated. They wouldn't say anything. They'd put their shawl up around their shoulders and turn their backs which was like, oh you're in trouble now! But every single person can have an affect. And when that happens, we can change the world. See it happening in front of our eyes but more importantly we can change it for our children and our grandchildren and their grandchildren. As you say we always think seven generations ahead. That's the indigenous perspective, especially here on North America which we of course call the turtle island and if anybody wants to know about that watch on You Tube Jacob Wawatie's Turtle Island teachings which are in two parts. I highly recommend it. He explains a lot and you know I get very aggravated with the stereotyping and what have you that Native people have had. I did not grow up on a reservation. I grew up outside a major city and I had to seek very hard, very diligently to learn from the elders and to honor my small amount of heritage which if you look at me, I'm Albino as they say. What's she going to try and tell us? This is the whitest white woman we've ever seen in our lives. But in my community at home in Canada you know you don't make yourself an elder. That's a decision made by the elder elders.

And there's a huge difference in elders and olders. Because we're all going to get older, that's just a fact of life. Elder implies that you have some knowledge of the ceremonies, the songs, the legends, and the teachings. I had the great honor; my first two teachers were Lakota and I have a pretty nice base there. Do I know everything? Oh, my goodness I don't know everything about anything. And then of course for the last seven years I've been going into Canada and attending the traditional Midewigaaan lodges, the teaching lodges of the Algonquin Nation, which you know actually existed down here in CT before the colonizers came.

JUDITH: So, there was actually a center here in CT?

GRANDMOTHER NANCY: Well I don't know that because so much has been lost because of the residential schools and the broken treaties but certainly there were Algonquin people here and they're Algonquin or Abanakie and Wabanaki elders, you know, that's all part of an Algonquin chain. Then further south you had the Lenni Lenape people you know. And sadly, most people don't look up the history of the natives who were in their area and it's quite interesting. I encourage people to do that. You know really learn something about what existed here prior to the great sailing ships coming and you know have a foot in both worlds because some of my ancestors came on those big sailing ships and some were here. The French particularly married into indigenous culture as did many African freed people, especially along the shoreline here where many of the native men were taken to be slaves in the West Indies and that's not a widely known fact. So, you know our history books do not tell the truth.

JUDITH: I hear you.

GRANDMOTHER NANCY: You know think about this: Native people couldn't practice their spiritual things until the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978. If you don't believe me folks Google it.

JUDITH: Yeah, yeah. Well I love some of the points that you made here in terms of what an elder or an older is. I did some geriatric nursing, so I really get that part, and as part of the teaching of the wheel too is what does it mean to be an elder. And you give us great examples and you embody that. You know you share the teachings; you've walked farther down the road than some of us have and you share that and I'm grateful to you for doing that too.

GRANDMOTHER NANCY: Well you know Frank Fool's Crow, one of the people of our era and this is a direct quote from Frank Fools Crow, and he said this is for everyone who will respect it but please you know that word respect is multi-faceted, you know. A lot of people are what my Native brothers and sisters call wannabes. You know they'll dress and what have you and disrespect people's regalia, but these principles are for everyone. And do any of us ever say oh you have to do it our way, it's the only way. We never say that. What we say is, come learn our ways, respect our ways and if you're living from your heart, we'll respect your ways as well. You know the most difficult journey that any of us humans make is from our head, because our society is so in the head, it's from the head to the heart. That's the longest journey we human beings are going to make in our lifetime and this life that we're living is, my people's view of it is this is just a classroom because we still believe that when our ancestors leave here, they're still working. They still hear those prayers that we put down every day. And that's what you were talking about the Universe will assist us. And you know people don't look at everything as a living thing. Our perspective is everything has a spirit. The water has a spirit, it has memory, we know that. I mean there are scientific studies that have been able to show that. Plants hear us. You know people say oh look at that crazy person she's talking to the plants. Well they're living things. Oh, my goodness, you know. The animals certainly. I know that was my many years of experience with horses and handicapped children. The difference that it makes, that horses can help cure post traumatic stress disorder and there are many programs out there that are helping to do that. So, we have all the tools here. We're just not using the tools as well as we should be.

JUDITH: Well again, if we go back to nature, nature has been here a lot longer than we have. Janine Benyus says you know nature has been doing a research and development for like almost three to four billion years and we're a very small species in that whole system. And we need to step up to the plate and be humbler about working with nature and the answers are there if we take the time to look for them. And I think that's the beauty of the Water Song. The Water Song has us say a prayer in honor of the water and let's see what happens to us individually as we do that practice. You know?

GRANDMOTHER NANCY: I think there will be a change. We've had so many communiqués from women all over my wonderful sister friend person who made this video happen, Victoria Cummings. You know she gets

communiqués and I just have to say to all you ladies out there, please do it. You won't find out until you do it.

JUDITH: That's true. That's true. And it's the experience of it that grounds it within our being, that makes it come alive within us. It's one thing to hear about things and we know that from going to workshops, whatever. But you have to take the teachings in, and you have to live them and so your words are wise to the women today for the Water Song.

GRANDMOTHER NANCY: You know and that's where we become sacred activists really and you know yes it involves...I'm not a political person, except now we don't have a choice. We really truly choice but you know that's it. Don't sit at home on voting day because if you don't vote and you complain about everything you have no right to. If you vote and it's not going, you know, the way you'd like to see it go, take 10 minutes a day to find out what's going on in the world around you and you'll get frustrated. I get frustrated but I don't think I've ever, yeah, I may have missed one vote when I was really sick, but I get myself even when I'm not sometimes thrilled with the choices but making a choice is better than making no choice. And there again that's part of sacred activism is using the right you have to go and have a voice in what our government is doing. It's your government. It's not you know...it should not be run by the 1%.

JUDITH: Right, right. Well grandmother this has been a beautiful discussion. You've given us some great things to do. Is there anything else you'd like to add before we end?

GRANDMOTHER NANCY: No. I just want to thank the women who do **take this song to heart and sing it**. You know of course I want to thank you for giving me a voice. I'm just a little ant of a grandmother. I'm crawling along but if you watch an ant carrying a leaf 3x it's size back to its community, and community building is really what's important here, especially the women gathering together. You know our grandmothers had quilting bees and what have you. We native people we love our talking circles because when you feel secure enough, you know things that bother you will come out. I just want to say to you beautiful men out there, don't...I'm not putting the men down. We have amazing wonderful men doing good work for the environment. Al Gore, one of my favorite people, who are out there on a daily basis who are trying to change things, trying to bring alternative things like solar power and wind power to the surface,

planting gardens. I mean let's not dishonor our wonderful men as well because you know that's what gives balance. And so, I think if I left a thought for everyone today it's **walk in balance and beauty, appreciating everything that's around you because even on our worst day the sun will rise tomorrow, and you have hopes and dreams for a better day.** So, I think you very much for listening to this old grandma share these things. My instructions from my peers are to take it out and share it. People who don't want to do that are very small minded and they're not thinking of the good of Mother Earth. So I think what you do raising these issues with your podcast is wonderful. And thank you for giving me the opportunity to do that.

JUDITH: You're more than welcome! All I can say is to my listeners I am truly honored, more than delighted to have Grandmother with us today. I hope you are also inspired by her message.

This is Judith Dreyer. I'm the author of "At The Garden's Gate", book and blog. My book is available through my website www.judithdreyer.com as well as several distribution arms such as Amazon, Nook, Goodreads and more. I'd like to remind all of you that a transcript is available for each podcast. And please like and share these podcasts. Let's get the word out and support each other.

And remember, **now** is the time for practical action and profound inner change so our world can be valued once again.

Enjoy your day.