

Podcast Series, Holistic Nature of Us

Episode # 7: Meet Linda Wigger Kraft

judithdreyer.com

Hi I'm Judith Dreyer,

Thank you for joining me for this pod cast series: At the Garden's Gate presents:

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 also 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 am delighted to introduce you to Linda Wigger Kraft. Linda is a garden designer, garden writer, an artist, a creativity teacher and meditation teacher. Her work centers around enhancing body, mind, heart and soul through art and gardens. She is based in St. Louis Missouri. Her writing and gardens have been featured locally and nationally. She teaches workshops around the country.

Hi Linda. Welcome to The Holistic Nature of Use pod cast series. How are you today?

Linda: I'm fine. Thank you so much for asking me to be part of this. It sounds like a wonderful thing you're doing to share this knowledge with so many.

Judith: Well I hope so. That's my intent. Linda, we have so much to talk about. You have such a beautiful background. For the folks who are listening she has a beautiful website, too. Her Mandela flower art is just gorgeous, not to mention what she does with gardens. Which is one of the reasons we're talking today. She has an interest in feng shui but it's more than that. I'd like Linda to tell us about her interest in gardening and the use of feng shui and other methods to create garden spaces.

Linda: Well, I think I was fortunate, unlike many children today, in that I grew up in a time when children could spend time outside. I spent many summers in the woods in various outdoor places at my grandparent's dairy farm in Southern Wisconsin. I think that's where my initial love of nature began. My mother also was an avid gardener at a time before it was that popular and I think I learned from her and many of my relatives. It's interesting, I often use the quote, "If you want to make God laugh tell him or her your plans." because I had no plans to be working with the land. My professional experience is a Bachelor in Fine Arts degree and an MBA. My family moved in 1991 to St. Louis Missouri from Minneapolis and I thought I'd died and gone to heaven because of the climate. In fact, it may not be ideal but from Minneapolis where you have about 3 months of non-freezing it did seem like heaven. I had been a meditator for very long and I have taught meditation and I started designing gardens with a neighbor. This is over 25 years ago or about 25 years ago, and what happened was I started to notice with my clients, my neighbor didn't stay with the business – only for a few years, that there was there was this really profound shift in people's lives when they were able to know their garden, love their garden, be in their garden. I think because of my background in meditation, interest in things that were moralistic or spiritual I started to really realize that there was something so profound for people being outside in their own gardens that I started to write about it. I've been a writer, a garden writer, since about the time I started. And I really bring a holistic perspective to my writing and my work.

I tell people when I write I don't write how-to articles; I write why. Why articles. What's the big picture of what it is that draws us to nature that is so much a part of who we are? And at that time, this was like I said 25 years ago, I became very sick from the normal chemicals used in gardening. I became an organic gardener. This was pre-internet. I had to find out ways to bring products and methodologies to the mid West that weren't common, if at all, used in the St. Louis area. This is another part of my work and a

part of my teachings, how to do things holistically, organically, sustainably. I did develop what I call process, the complete creative process when I work with clients in that I want to make that inner landscape of a person match the outer landscape. I actually do little guided meditations to people to help them find maybe that ideal inner landscape of that ideal place or setting that I think we all carry that with us. The way I came up with this is I was with some my son's 5th grade class (this was a while ago and my children were small). They actually had a science project. They had to design a garden where they were doing like a bird's eye view. They had to use graph paper. They had to find out about plans and all that. But I started out by asking them; I said you know there are so many plants. There are so many ideas of what kind of ideal landscape there should be.

It's really hard to make those choices I said. But I bet inside of you already there is this ideal landscape, this ideal garden. I sat down, and I had them do this guided meditation where we went through just allowing them to close their eyes. I didn't call it a meditation. This was a public school and I just said this was a little imagination experience. I had them close their eyes and just think about the most wonderful place they could be in nature where they felt safe and where they could be doing anything. I just had them go through each of their sense. What are you experiencing? What are you smelling? What are you seeing? What are you tasting, and so on? That took about ten minutes. Then I had them each take a piece of paper and draw or say what they were experiencing. I still have these written pieces of paper. They are some of my most valued treasures. These children of 10 years old described almost, usually very specifically what they were doing, where it was. If they were maybe in their grandparent's backyard or in a mountain or near a meadow or in a jungle. One little girl said, "I was in a jungle and it was so quiet; I could just feel the peace." And you know just these beautiful things and I think we all have that. And one little boy, it was my favorite, (he was a hockey player) and he says, his place was in a jungle, but it happened to have a hockey rink.

Judith: Thanks, funny.

Linda: He said the best part is every time I play I always win. When I go through this process with helping people find that inner landscape to match an outer landscape I think we do have that ideal setting for us and what we want to be doing. There's also a balance that we perhaps want and need in our lives so that maybe we do need a quiet sanctuary where we can be off by ourselves because our life is so busy. But for other people maybe they want

to have their landscape be a place of family get togethers or friends getting together. Those are two very different kinds of settings that would be created based on their own inner landscape; their own needs and how to have a more holistic and balanced life. Also, I think that when we are in our gardens or in nature we experience life more fully than when we are inside. When you think about it, what are the most beautiful smells? Those are the ones we find outside, the woods and the flowers. What is the most beautiful beauty? The flowers and the parts of nature. You know the touch of a lamb's ear or even grass on our bare feet or the rough of a bark. You know these are things we don't experience when we're inside. And they're such a healing quality to experience though all of our senses. And I often say there are six senses when we're outside because we have that sense of space. We have that sense of movement with the sky over our head and the earth beneath us that we don't experience as much when we're inside. Go ahead.

Judith: No, no, those are beautiful, beautiful reminders about engaging our senses number one, when we are outside. But, I love the fact that you take your clients on sort of an inner journey so that they can connect and also honor that which makes us feel a part of something greater than us. You know a part of the peacefulness out there. The soft breezes and like you said the earth beneath our feet. The dot I'd like to connect with you Linda based on all that you've just shared is, when you work with land though, you're giving something to the land though, aren't you, in order to create that garden.

Linda: I think that there's a communication, or I should say there's a communication between the land, the plants, nature, the wind, the sky and the person who opens up to that and knows that and loves that. And I've seen it many times. I had a couple of clients initially when I first started. One was a most loving person and another was much more uptight, to put it mildly. In the garden, where this woman was so loving, my children would feel the difference. I would often take my children with me when they were young when I first started doing this. Often there were swimming pools and they got to swim when I was working on the garden right by the pool. And even my children and my mother went to this one garden and they said why are the flowers so bright here. It wasn't just my interpretation of it. Other people could feel and sense it. The land does respond to how we approach it and how we love it. And you know there are other things to. If looking at the land and working with it so what is there can be worked with in an honoring way to make changes if we are going to be making changes. And

it's a listening. Again, you and I talked a little bit about having a sitting spot or a sitting place in a garden. What's so important for all of us is to spend the time just being, just being in a garden space. You mentioned your elders often talk about 20 minutes of just sitting in a sit spot. When I start working with a garden there are times I have to think of a design and I go in and I'm supposed to be doing something, just a small consultation. That's fine, I can do a quick design. But ideally what I like to do is just walk the land and see it and know it and feel it and things, it's like planting seeds of what might be best for that piece of land. That takes time. There's a sort of germination process. There's this imagination or daydreaming. Again, I remember talking to some kindergarteners once, I said, "You know what? Do your parents or people get mad at you when you get dirty? When you come home, and your clothes are dirty? And they're all, oh yeah, yeah. And I said, "Sometimes do those same people say quit daydreaming?" You know, do this or do that when you kind of look like you're sitting there thinking and imagining?" And again, they went yeah, yeah, yes, yes. And I said you know what? I do that for a living and I get paid. I work in the dirt and I get dirty and I love it.

Judith: What a great way to get a point across to kids that it's okay. It's okay to daydream. It's okay to play in the dirt. You know that's interesting because I came across an article that they have named the component in soil that works on our brain chemistry and more peacefully ness and it's called geosmin. It's the scientific name for the component in the soil that does that. I think we have to remind ourselves that nature is there for us. It's part of who we are too. And we are very similar to nature. We have the four elements in our body. Our bodies are water. They're made of solid structure, which is the earth. We need air to breathe, you know? We have a fire in our cells that creates energy, that gives us movement. It's part of our life force. We forget to kind of tie that in to our use of nature. I love your experiences here. It sounds like you have quite a few. And the fact that you get your clients to take a few minutes and daydream with you with a guided imagery I think is the link. See, that to me is a bridge between your work and what they want. They must go to the inner place.

What is your favorite? Do you have a favorite garden that you've developed for somebody over the years?

Linda: Well, um, there are two I'd like to mention. I did design a garden for an elementary school. It was a pre-school/elementary. I think it was pre-

school and maybe first and second grade, kindergarten. I can't remember exactly. But I call it the 'garden of wonder' because what was so beautiful about this design was that we were able to, what ended up being actually built, was a little different, but there were actually areas of the garden that worked with the five senses and also the sense of movement. And like I say, it didn't turn out exactly like this. One of the plan things was (to create) a labyrinth to have children be able to walk a labyrinth so that they could have that quieting down of walking and that type of meditation. But what I loved was each; it would bring the children into not only the contact with nature but make them aware of their sense and how to enhance those through being outdoors. There was water for the touch, the sense of touch. There was an area for sight. And of course, these are all intersecting. With some plastic panels that would be like stained glass windows, the sun would show through and have those colors. It was really a very exciting thing to do, to design that for children because one of my loves of my work is at times getting to work with children. In fact, in my son's elementary school, I worked with some parents and teachers. We set-up a vegetable garden project. It got written up in Organic Gardening where, how many kids were there? I want to say 200, 400. I can't even remember. Each classroom had their own plot and each child had a square foot and they could put these vegetable seeds that they would harvest before summer.

But my other garden that I wanted to mention was not really a garden per se. It was more of a temporary experience. There's a place in North Carolina, a 1,400-acre Episcopal retreat center, called Kanuga. And there's a conference there called FACE: faith art, creative expression. A couple of years ago, (and I'm going there this coming August), but a couple of years ago the five-day course I taught was called, Creating Sacred Space in the Garden, Planting Prayers. We didn't create a garden per se but what I had all the participants do was find a spot within the landscape there. There are lots of woods. I mean it's a beautiful place in the Blue Ridge Mountains. The (participants) would create, just for those 5 days, in this sacred space spot. And we'd literally either plant a prayer that we wrote into those areas or again use used the four elements. They could be planted in the soil. They could be burned to be, to have that energy go into the air. They could float them – we used natural materials, so it wouldn't be toxic – float them on a pond there. And, I'm forgetting one. Anyway, there were various ways that they could put the energy of what they were working on and creating into this land and create this heart space, sacred space that was very, very special for them during that time. And these were just beautiful experiences.

Judith: Oh, I can imagine. I can imagine that. Especially for both. We need it just as much as the children, don't we?

Linda: Yes. Exactly.

Judith: To be playful, mindful and use our imagination and guided imagery is that bridge that uses our imagination and we can put something out into the world. Part of my intent for these pod casts is to have people understand that we can do something very practically in the here and now. It's not just reading a book about the twenty steps of doing an organic garden, which is over-whelming to me, and I'm a Master Gardener. But it's taking something that speaks to us and put it in very practical ways. I think you've given us a couple of examples of that.

But before we get into more practical tips, what does your partnership with nature mean to you?

Linda: Well I think it's just something that is evolving, and I want it to be deeper than it is. And it's always deepening. But just to be aware and honoring of the beingness of all of nature, big picture and individual pictures, like a tree. Like you mentioned your elders talk about brother fox, or brother tree, or you know sister moon. I think that was actually something St. Francis used but it's just this, like I say honoring and knowing and being able to feel this heart connection and whole-body connection with nature. To feel that energy because there is that energy that we don't, haven't yet identified by science but is part of many, many cultures, many people's experience. I just try to be very honoring and you know even when I'm just digging in the ground and planting seeds I always want to sort of just stop for a moment and thank the land, the soil, the seeds, the plant that's going to be growing. It's just that honoring, being grateful, being aware with whole body.

Judith: I agree with you and again that's what my native elders would teach to is to be present. And that's true of many Eastern traditions. I think one of the hardest things I had to learn in creating my sit spot was to accept just being there in nature without expectation. I can tell you I probably sat twenty minutes in the morning and twenty minutes in the evening for years and I still try to do that today. And it doesn't mean a golden eagle is going to drop in front of my lap, you know what I'm saying?

Linda: I do, exactly.

Judith: But it's just the acceptance of being with that rhythm of nature because nature's rhythm doesn't stop for us. If I get busy the flowers are going to bloom; the leaves are going to grow and they're going to die before I even get out there. You know? So, there's a lesson that they teach us about the cycles and rhythm of nature. It is the same that we have cycles and rhythms within our nature and if we supercede them, so to speak by being so busy that we don't watch our gardens grow and bloom, we really are missing out. In the world of herbalism for example, if I'm too busy and I don't get out there when that flower is ready to bloom I miss an opportunity to get that flower at its peak nourishment blossoming time that provides me with the best nutrition. So, I love what your saying about getting our whole being involved with being out there and maybe slowing ourselves down a little bit so that we can appreciate it. And it doesn't matter if it's 20 minutes or 2 hours out in the garden. What matters is that mindfulness of being out in the garden.

Well, what I'd love to do is I always like to end with 1-3 practical tips for our listeners. Something that they can apply today from your work in your field.

Linda:

1. We mentioned the **sit spot**. I think every garden should have a place where you can sit. Just a chair or a bench, or a stump of a tree, something like that. That you can spend time being comfortable and just allowing nature to come to you. If you do sit quietly you'll notice that more birds or more whatever, you'll notice more. And so that is really important because we often don't allow ourselves to do that.
2. The other thing, I think, I live in an urban environment is for us to realize how important our gardens are, our land is as an arc to our declining populations of insects, of bird, of wildlife that we need to have be part of this world. And I was telling you there was a study here in St. Louis by St. Louis University about native bees. What was found by looking at community gardens and even some abandoned areas where "weeds" just grew (showed) that there were many more species of native bees than in rural areas not that far away. What is really important is for us to be **that place where the insects can live**,

where the birds can live, where the wildlife can live. Now unfortunately I don't have deer where I live. I'm too much in the city. But, you know these smaller things, especially the birds and whatever, possums I have which I love. This realization, that our gardens are necessary and important for us to maintain the monarchs, the insects, (is vital). It doesn't always have to be native plants, but I like to work with those mainly because they're in partnership with the insects that have grown up with them over the eons. So, for example, monarchs for example need milkweed plants. Planting those is very, very important because monarchs can only survive on milkweed plants and that's one thing to consider, the butterflies and the insects. birds need the insects. What if there's a little bit of chewing on some of your leaves. If you really look at it carefully maybe you find out that's a leafcutter bee and they're just chewing a little bit. They're not going to destroy your plant, but they need that to take to their nest so that those bees can survive. I think educating yourself also. And regarding that sit spot, I think what's very important is also to open yourself to the love that you can receive and give to your garden, nature. You know just sitting there doing a quiet meditation with your eyes closed or open where you just literally feel that warmth, that lovingness, that energy go out from your heart area and surround yourself and go out into the land, into the soil, into the sky, into trees, the plants, the animals that may be living there and just allow yourself to know that you have a sacred space in your garden.

3. I'll just say one more thing about gardens. In the West we look at gardens, and our language is that they're usually these quarantined areas. Here's my lawn. There's my garden over there. In Japan and in England, the whole piece of property – the lawn, the driveway, whatever, that is their definition of garden. I have a friend from England. She told me that when somebody called a house, asks can I speak to so and so and that person was out mowing the lawn for example, the answer would be, "they're in the garden". And we don't step into our garden much, you know? Just think of that **whole space** that you are responsible for is sacred space. It is garden. It's an arc that the whole of nature needs, and we can be the caretaker of that.

Judith: Oh I agree. That's a beautiful way to put it too. I get people in my walks, in the events that I go to and places where I teach that often say to me that they're in an apartment or a condo and they only have a deck. I know

that there are some physical parcels in those kinds of complexes where there's no sun. If your deck faces the north you're going to have a very difficult time growing a tomato plant, for example. There are some plants that you can use in those lower light environments but that's the kind of research you might have to do to see what goes there.

Do you have any suggestion?

Linda: Well there's always little hosta, which does well, and they do flower and the bees come to the flowers. If you let the hosta flower, you know the stem with the flowers bloom I have seen bees and maybe butterflies or hummingbirds, I can't remember. But those flowers are very important. There are ferns. Usually you can astilbe and you know depending on the climate those are perennials, but they should be able to survive if it's not too dark. You know you do have to be a little more knowledgeable of how pots will freeze more in the winter if you do leave them out. And there are flowers too, impatiens. Although some of the common impatiens now have the disease that it's hard to work with. I particularly like independent garden centers. You know where we can go and ask what's available that can be put in pots at those places (for our region). As a practical thing, there are some pesticides that are very, very damaging to the insect life and the bird life because of it. And in particular, there are some called neonicotinoids, sometimes called neonics for short. But you can ask at your garden center if they have been planted with that because those are very damaging. It's a chemical that goes into every part of the plant and lives for several years. Any way there is a controversy about it.

Judith: Yeah there is. But they destroy the life of the insects. If the insect population goes down, there's not going to be anything for the birds and then the bird population goes down.

For my listeners, Doug Tallamy's book "Bringing Nature Home" addresses these issues very, very well. Because we want our landscapes to be more sustainable. I like the fact that you're in an urban area and you shared with us that study that shows that urban areas aren't as lacking as we might assume for some of our insects and species. Yes, you don't have deer that walk through but I'm sure there is a mouse or two or a vole or two or a groundhog or two in the neighborhood you know? And they eat certain things in the soil and the grubs and bugs and that kind of thing. And so forth, up the chain of command so to speak. Sustainability is what we're

looking for with all these ideas. My feeling is, when we have a more personal connection with nature, we have a more personal vested interest in nature. And the next step can be looking for sustainability and promoting more sustainability in our own backyards. And that includes people who live in an apartment or a condo that has a deck. They can put some stuff on their deck. Pots are great on decks. The only issue that some of them may have is light. If you face the north, you may not be able to grow much of anything. You have to maybe get involved with your community garden if you really want something, which is another alternative.

Linda this has been really fascinating. I just want to sort of summarize your two tips for today: a place to sit and to value the land by being with the land and creating those bridges. So those are wonderful for my listeners today.

Did you have anything else you wanted to add?

Linda: No, I just think there's so much beauty and love and making us more whole outside in nature in our gardens that we just need more gardeners and gardens need more flowers and plants. And just to get out there and be there and work with it and enjoy it and love it.

Judith: I agree. I agree. To me that's where the relationship is between us and nature. That's where the wholeism is. Is when we understand that we're a part of it, not a dominating force over it, and I think that's been our mindset and that's slowly changing one garden at a time.

Linda: Yes, exactly.

Linda could you give everybody your website please and contact information?

Linda: Yes. I have one website. It has two easy to remember words though there are two different domain names, but they go to the same site. One is, one word no spaces, www.gardensforthesoul.com and the other is www.creativityforthesoul.com, so people can find that. I have a blog that they can access through those websites.

Judith: Great. And you also offer classes and you do some on-line classes, correct? The art work, folks, is beautiful. I hope you check Linda's site out. Thank you, Linda.

Judith: Well I want to say thank you for joining Linda and me at: The Holistic Nature of Us. I hope you feel as inspired as I do by Linda's talk and her very practical advice.

This is Judith Dreyer, author of *At the Garden's Gate* book and blog. For more information go to my website: judithdreyer.com. You will find information for this pod cast. The transcript of pod cast is also available, as well as book, blog and class schedules.

I want to end with a quote from Paul Hawken. 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."

with those words we say good-by and enjoy your day. Thank you.