

## **Sage T. LaPena: Reconnecting Body, Mind, and Spirit with Herbal Healing**

Modern day has us all searching for a short cut to everything. From bullet trains to touch-screen computers, instant potatoes to online shopping, our society is in a rush to get what we need as quickly as possible.

The same could be said for today's medicine. Those being treated and the many skilled doctors who practice continue to hope for a heal-quick, heal-all solution and turn to chemical facilities and pharmaceutical companies to make it happen. In our eagerness to advance, cure quickly, and prescribe medications for every ailment, have we forgotten the benefits of natural healing?

Sage T. LaPena, a Healing Ways Practitioner and Medical Herbalist at the Sacramento Native American Health Center, grew up in a world that many of us have disconnected from. She spent her childhood in the suburbs, like many of us, but with an added dimension that is often overlooked. On afternoons after school or during weekends, Sage spent her time at a creek that was down the street from her house. In addition to your typical childhood activity outdoors, she got to know the plants and elements growing around her.

As a Native American, she was made aware of the natural world at a young age, so fully immersed that she thought it was common practice to learn the names of herbs by the creek and discover how to use them in everyday life. Her early years were filled with trips to the American River, camping in the mountains, and traditional Native ceremonies surrounded by plants and trees. Herbs were everyday life, and as she began her college years, she didn't think twice about her vast knowledge of the plant world.

Sage studied a range of topics from Communications to Dance but was continually drawn back to herbology. She enrolled in a Botany class but was immediately deemed too advanced for it by correctly naming over 100 plants and herbs laid out by the professor. When you ask her how she did it, she'll explain that it was her heritage to know the earth around her. It was a part of her environment and traditional homeland - not a resource, but a natural part of the Wintu tribe that she comes from. "The culture was always in tune with the land," Sage said when speaking about the ways of Native American tribes.

As she discovered the professional world of herbology, Sage attended the California School of Herbal Studies and began a career as a Traditional Native American and Western Herbalist. She has worked in a variety of clinics and as a consultant, reconnecting Native people with their herbal roots and introducing the general public to the value of natural medicine and practice.

Despite her knowledge, Sage is not anti-modern medicine. In fact, she highlights the importance of being fully prepared by learning about all of your options when it comes to medical treatment. "If there's an acute situation where a different type of healthcare is needed I certainly would use it," she said when asked about when to swap natural for modern.

“I am not against modern medicine, but I am against the continual misuse or abuse of antibiotics and just automatically turning to some synthetics, [especially] when you haven’t helped yourself by eating better food, drinking clean water, exercising... those things are of the utmost importance. For me, herbalism is one more way to care for ourselves in a positive way that affects the community overall, and that’s what I can do to contribute. Teach people about herbalism.”

Food and diet is one thing that most commonly connects us to plants. Without leafy greens like kale and spinach, the grains that grow across vast fields, the berries that cover bushes, what would we eat? Furthermore, how would we have constructed the buildings we work in, built the tables we eat off of, weave the fabrics we need to sew the clothes that we wear?

When you think about it, everything we need to not only thrive, but to simply live, is provided by plants. This direct connection between earth and human life makes the plants that it gives us impactful not only physically, but emotionally, mentally, and spiritually.

“Everything we receive comes from Mother Earth and that is a gift that nourishes us. We receive oxygen, we receive the foundations of our homes, all of the things we need [every day] come from plants... If you think of anything you have a serious kinship with, it is a gift from Earth. They smell good, they look pretty, they make us smile, they give us shade, they give us clothing, they give us housing, all of those things come from plants. And they always have.”

There is value in learning to use the gifts that the earth provides and to pay it back by replenishing the irreplaceable resources that grow all around us. As the world continues to search for the quickest and easiest solution to everything, people like Sage remind us to pause, learn about, and appreciate the significance of what nature has to offer.

Learn more about nature’s gifts at Sage’s classes at the Sacramento Native American Health Center and during her monthly herbal walks through Capital Park. You’ll be surprised to discover the many nutrients for heart, body, and mental health growing right outside your door.