

Introduction

I WROTE *HEAL LOCAL* with the belief that our medicine should be local, sustainable, empowering and personal. Healing traditions in the US have progressed in a sinuous path rather than a straight line. At the beginning of our nation there were Native Americans who knew how to use the products of their environment to maintain health and to arrest the development of disease. The United States developed as a melting pot of both what was here when the settlers came as well as what they brought from their own mother cultures. Before long the foundations of Western medicine entered the picture, at times incorporating both native traditions and historical modalities. In the early 19th century, medical treatment was becoming more and more detrimental to the health of the human body. Thomas Jefferson commented at the time, “The patient, treated on the fashionable theory, sometimes gets well in spite of the medicines.”¹ The rise of the Eclectic Movement of healing, going back to the roots of healing and incorporating native knowledge and alternative therapies, came out of this frustration. The windows were opened, and a fresh breeze blew through the halls of medicine. When modern medicine gained its footing once again, it was improved by the contributions of these great Eclectic thinkers. We would see the arc of Western medicine continue on for another couple of hundred years until we come to our present day.

I believe that once again we are at a crossroads in health. Once again, Western medicine has become imbalanced. While it is outstanding at heroic medicine, the system has overstepped its place both from ambitions within and pressures from us, the patients, without. Western medicine is not set up to maintain health, but rather to apply battlefield treatment, to stop the bleeding. Thus we have a symptoms remediation approach based in a triage mentality rather than a focus on treating underlying conditions and promoting overall system balance.

We cannot, should not and need not throw out all current practices. There is no reason to deny ourselves all the best of what is available. However, in this moment, modern medicine is unsustainable. We can benefit ourselves, and that system that contains so many wonderful advances, by simply reasserting control over our everyday health. When we do, we reduce the demands we place on it to an appropriate level. How do we do that?

Local medicine should include changing the mindset of your local garden center to stock the medicinals you desire.



Local

If we see the value in buying our vegetables locally, why on earth would we be satisfied with medicine of unknown origin and handling? Creating a local economy in a community of growers, makers, educators and herbalists is critical for our society.

In the US, the health of our general population is poor to say the least. We have lost connection to the knowledge of self care; health care has come to mean care for the sick, not promotion of health. Not only that, but health care in its current form is financially unattainable for many. To return to a localized health care system is to make health and wellness available to all in a very different form than is popularized in political and media circles. Access to and free choice of the means to maintain health is a basic human right. It is *not*, however, a basic human right to have Western medicine

exclusively mandated for all. This notion of basic human needs is falsely predicated on the belief that everyone desires to participate in Western treatment. A return to balance must involve the use of local plants readily available in backyards and vacant city lots. A renewed interest in education and personal responsibility will help us to own our health decisions, from what we eat to how we choose to live. Finally, it is essential that we turn away from a societal structure that insists everyone is predestined to experience illness and instead embrace a life that is rich and vital every day as a result of balanced health choices.

Sustainable

Much is made of this word, but simply put, our medicine is not sustainable if it does not address underlying causes of imbalance. It is not sustainable if our care providers are overloaded to the point that they are not able to provide their services in a meaningful way. It is not sustainable if we overharvest the plants that we depend upon for valuable medicine. I believe strongly in a whole plant methodology of treatment. We must be careful that our demands on the plant world involve plans to replant, grow our own and wildcraft responsibly.

Empowering

Part of taking responsibility for one's own health care is to understand that health care goes beyond the walls of a clinic, pharmacy or hospital. It is sharing the knowledge of how food, lifestyle and supplementation all have an impact on how well we feel every day. Those who choose to hurt their bodies choose the inevitable health problems that result. Our current system of medicine allows us to choose the crime but tries to help us avoid the punishment. A call to Heal Local, then, is about making us aware of our choices so that we make them consciously.

Approachable

Raising your own medicine and caring for your own health and that of your family cannot be exclusive to only those people who have been raised in the knowledge or who have studied forever. This ability needs



Raising your own whole foods and medicines is a family activity that can be instilled at an early age.

people. However, it can cause some people to become hyperalert and have a hard time going to sleep. In other words, simply assuming that an herb is right for every body based on your own success or someone else's advice is insufficient unless you also take into consideration their personality, the reason for the ailment and the energy of the plant and person together. If you are a beginner, this is important because you might try a specific for a certain ailment and find that you are not getting results. The complicated interplay of chemistry between plant and person may be the problem. Instead of becoming frustrated or abandoning a plan to try natural therapies, it is more reasonable in this instance to simply try a different herb. For instance, in the case of sleep

to be scalable to wherever people live, while also being easy for ordinary people to understand and to readily apply.

Personal

One size fits all does not work in health care, whether it be Western medicine or alternative care. Every body is different, and every ailment comes from a different source of dysfunction. It is imperative that we know our own bodies and those of our family before we design a home health care plan. My family may have more headaches than yours, and your family's conditions may involve asthma. You must design your apothecary to fit your unique situation. It is important also to note that there is no "one" herb that fixes a particular problem. Often there are *specifics*: these are herbs that have been used with great success throughout recorded history for a specific ailment. Valerian (*Valeriana officinalis*) could be considered a specific for sleep problems. It is, in fact, very helpful for many

problems, if valerian isn't right for you, you may try hops (*Humulus lupulus*), skullcap (*Scutellaria lateriflora*), passionflower (*Passiflora incarnata*), lavender (*Lavendula angustifolia*), chamomile (*Matricaria recutita*) or many others.

You can create a local medicine community where you live while occasionally buying something from the other side of the country. You may find something that shows promise in clinical and historical use for an individual health problem, but it is growing somewhere else on the planet. There is no reason why you should feel guilty purchasing it. I recently came across a great plant called jackass bitters (*Neurolaena lobata*). It's from the rainforest of Belize. Not only is its history and efficacy irresistible, but buying it helps to preserve parts of this threatened habitat. The notion of Heal Local is not meant to be rigid. If you can find a plant that does the same thing for everyday wellness that is native to your area, substitute it. Your local community is supported every time you buy something from your area rather than from across the country or the world.

The truth is that there are amazing plants in all corners of the globe. Our bodies are all very different. It just may be that there is a plant from some exotic locale that fits your individual pathology to a tee. There is no reason that your subscription to the local ideology should cause you to avoid buying the plant or miss out on the experience of full health. There is also no need to avoid planting annuals for use in your apothecary simply because they are not native. Family health is a very personal thing, as is how we grow our gardens and what we choose to support with our money. It is simply my intention to create a movement where the bulk of our energy in this area is focused on establishing local healing economies.



Part I: Herbs at Home and in Our Communities





Chapter 1:

From My Family to Yours

FOR YEARS I WAS IN CHARGE OF HEALTH AND FIRST AID ISSUES in our home. It is a stressful position to hold at times, taking on the responsibility of health care decisions and assuming the repercussions when you are wrong. It is also a pitiable position to hold. When the keeper of all the knowledge falls ill, you'd better hope you've left good instructions! I found myself repeatedly instructing my husband from my sickbed in how to take care of me. When you are sick, of course, you need to focus your energy on healing. It is much nicer to be able to close your eyes and have others care for you.

My husband Carson is no dummy; while I was nursing him and our children through various illnesses, he paid attention. He had a working knowledge of the helpful herbs for each ailment. Unfortunately, he would make rookie mistakes like buying me a carton of ice cream for dinner when I was suffering with congestion from a cold. The purchase was well-intentioned, but exactly the wrong thing to serve for those symptoms.

Carson finally decided that I needed to write him a manual on how to treat common illnesses that included natural therapies, herbal remedies and appropriate foods. It had not occurred to me until then that we, as a society, had lost the knowledge required to treat a basic sickness at home. As our Western medical model has moved more into

the forefront, we have disconnected from the notion that what we eat can make us sick. The idea that what we eat can also have a healing effect is not even in the conversation. When we bought into the notion that sickness is healed with a pill, syrup or shot with no other considerations, we lost a wholistic model of maintaining our own health.

As I set about writing the manual for Carson to step into my responsibilities when it was my turn to be sick, I became aware that this book would be valuable to many more families than my own.

Most herbals either profile a set number of herbs and share all the illnesses they can address, or discuss a health issue and list as many herbs that might help as possible. It is my intention to demonstrate with *Heal Local* that knowledge of an endless list of herbs is not necessary to keep yourself or your family healthy.

It is possible to know a handful of herbs very well and use each one for multiple purposes. Most herbs contain a spectrum of active phytochemicals that do not act in the way we are accustomed with allopathic medication. When we receive a drug from the doctor or over-the-counter, we expect that it will only perform the one action listed on the label. In contrast, some herbs can have so many actions in the body that they can practically serve as your medicine chest all on their own.

There is a recent trend toward a preference for the use of essential oils. They require little storage, travel well and are easy to dispense. I would argue that when you narrow down your medicine chest to a few multi-purpose herbs you can accomplish the same thing. Home health care does not need to be intimidating either in the space needed for storage

A weed that is commonly sprayed in yards, plantain (Plantago spp.) is readily harvested and used on our farm to treat a wide range of ailments.



RACHAEL BRUGGER

or in the scope of information that needs to be accumulated before undertaking this important work.

For a number of years now I have been a big proponent of whole plant medicine. I believe strongly that when we isolate components from the plants, as we do in Western medicine and some natural medicine, we are missing out on components we don't understand and are more apt to suffer unintended side effects. There is a responsibility that comes along with speaking this belief publicly. If everyone on the planet went out and started harvesting whole plants from their neighborhood wild places, we would quickly overharvest our natural medicine resources in a very short period of time. In fact, organizations like United Plant Savers were founded to protect our plant allies from just this sort of thing. Read more about them in Appendix A. There

Even if space is limited to a patio or deck, you can grow a significant portion of your herbal needs in planters and pots.



are currently a number of plants that were overharvested in the United States and Canada before we could put plans to protect them in place. We must be able to use our plants, but it must be done in a sustainable way.

A sustainable small apothecary, then, necessarily means using space wisely, growing as much of your own herb as possible (reducing the need for costly and polluting practices in shipping) and protecting our wild herbs. No need to pull from around the globe; instead we can make things right in our own backyards.