

Marion Harless and Kara Vaneck

Where: At Marion Harless' home

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Date: August 28, 2018

Location: Kerens, WV

Interviewer: Emily Hilliard

Transcription: Emily Hilliard

**Length:** 2:00:16

**Marion Harless** of Kerens led a 2018 apprenticeship in green traditions with **Kara Vaneck** of Weston as part of the 2018 West Virginia Folklife Apprenticeship Program, supported in part by the National Endowment for the Arts.

Harless is a co-founder of the Mountain State Organic Growers and Buyers Association and the [West Virginia Herb Association](#), and has taught widely on medicinal herbs, edible landscaping, and native plants. Vaneck is the owner of [Smoke Camp Crafts](#) and has served as vice president and treasurer of the West Virginia Herb Association.

Read our feature on Harless' apprenticeship with Vaneck here: <https://wvfolklife.org/2018/12/20/2018-master-artist-apprentice-feature-marion-harless-kara-vaneck-green-traditions/>

Read Emily Hilliard's article on Marion Harless here and in the Spring 2019 issue of *Goldenseal Magazine*: <https://wvfolklife.org/2019/03/22/the-state-folklorists-notebook-people-need-to-know-about-plants-herbarist-marion-harless/>

MH: Marion Harless

EH: Emily Hilliard

KV: Kara Vaneck

00:00

EH: Alright... actually if you want to come a little closer that would probably be good.

MH: You know after you left last time I thought, were you freezing? Because you were sitting in front of that air conditioner.

EH: I don't remember freezing!

MH: Ok good (laughs)

EH: I'm often cold, but I don't remember being cold that day. Okay. (sounds of chairs moving) Shorten this cord.

MH: It'd be nice if these chairs had sliders on the bottom. Can't figure out how to put them on since they're hollow.

EH: Oh yeah.

MH: Are we better?

EH: Yeah, that's good. So why don't you introduce yourselves and tell me where you're from, when you were born, who you are.

KV: My name's Kara Vaneck. I was born in Cleveland, Ohio in 1984. And now I live in Weston, WV where I farm and garden and make herbal teas and jams and jellies.

EH: How bout you?

MH: My name is Marion Harless and I was born in Steubenville, Ohio, June 29, 1935 and then I promptly went home with my parents to Weirton [West Virginia] across the river and I've been in Randolph County since 1977 and in this house since 1998 and I had a wonderful garden until the Sandy storm (laughs). And I never quite recovered from that. But I still have many, many plants. And I've sold products at the Elkins Farmers Market and taught herbs for many years at the Augusta Heritage Arts workshops.

EH: Why don't you tell me how you first got interested in plants and started learning.

MH: I've always been interested in plants my whole life and I... I guess I just learned things by osmosis the way kids learn the difference between carrots and cabbages and lettuce and I just learned all those plus many, many, many other plants. Mhm.

EH: What about you?

KV: I would say when I was little my mom used to take us on walks and I remember just gathering up acorns, as many as I could, and coming home with pockets full of acorns so I guess my interest in plants kind of started with an obsession with seeds and then grew from there and I started having my own gardens like in high school and then after college worked on an organic kiwi farm for some time and then

eventually made my way to West Virginia where I started farming while I was in engineering and just never really stopped.

03:12

EH: So I know that you call yourself an herbarist instead of and herbalist, and the apprenticeship is "green traditions." Could you talk a little bit about those words and why you use them?

MH: The "green traditions" is... it's very, very broad because I didn't want to say okay, we're just going to do natural dyeing or we're going to do paper making or we're going to learn how to graft fruit trees or etc. etc. And so we just left it as broad as we possibly could and we decided that would be a good title that just passing along information that I have picked up over the years. And that Kara is picking up from me and she will pass along.

And back to my early childhood. I had my first gardens when I was still a toddler and the first things I grew were peas, and radishes and those are two things that pop up in a hurry so my parents were good about teaching that. (laughs) And I still have essentially the same kind of garden I had then. the rows were about 4-5 feet long (laughs) and I remember telling my father when I was 4 or 5, when he would ask my why did I plant things so close together, and I would always be putting radishes in here and there and I would tell him, if there's room for a weed, there's room for a radish! You know, so. And my garden is still essentially the same garden that I've had. It's just many, many, many times bigger. But what was the question? (laughs)

EH: Oh--that's fine--green traditions and herbarist.

MH: Oh, and herbarist. OK, so an herbarist is a person who grows herbs, and uses them, and an herbalist is a person who uses herbs medicinally and doesn't necessarily know anything about the plants! And often herbalists buy everything that they use and I like to grow things. And so even though I may use them medicinally, I'm still interested in the growing part of them too. Yeah, and the green traditions like plastic bags-- Kroger's going to eliminate plastic bags-- and I'm very concerned about the world being completely drowned in plastics and the more green things we can use, the better. So...

EH: So how did you start learning about these uses. I guess some of it's wild crafting, but medicinal use, edible use...

MH: We... we used plants all the time at home. My family had a good sized garden and I think I mentioned maybe before-- my parents bought this land and it was covered with trees and so they cleared the land and the soil was pretty good under it. It was a geological bench, which this is also here. As was my last house a mile away. And the soil was deposited there over the millennia. And good dirt. And so I can remember my dad digging the parsnips and they would be bigger around than his arm and as long as his arm. So. And... so very big. So we had good soil to begin with and good gardening always begins with good soil! And you can make it or you can in some cases just actually luck into it. So... and we had, we had an orchard, so we had pear trees and plum trees and peach trees and apple trees and we had a hillside vineyard. We didn't call it a vineyard, we just called it "the grapes" (laughs). Over in the grapes. And they were Concord grapes except for the top row. There were about 50 grapevines in rows. And the top row was a white, greenish white grape, which my dad and my sister liked but the rest of us didn't care for. And they did make a decent white grape juice, but yeah. And we had-- my dad left a lot of trees standing in what became the yard, or the lawn. So we had about an acre that we kept mowed in and around the trees. And when I was 7, we got a power mower, gas mower, which nobody-- we didn't know anybody who had a gas mower. And my dad very graciously lent it to people-- I wouldn't have lent it to anybody (laughs). They would come in the truck and take the mower away. And my grandmother-- I'd say, you're not gonna

let her use that mower, and my dad would tell her-- all she has to do is let up on the handle and it quits. It's not dangerous.

EH: Right.

MH: And this was a big, REEL mower-- a gasoline R-E-E-L mower. And it was heavy! I mean it weighed twice what I weighed probably, because I was mowing with it when I was 7. You have to go around the trees and there were no such things as weed eaters then, thank heavens. And so we had to weed around the trees by hand. And I would leave the moss and I would always think, "I wonder if daddy cares if I leave the moss?" (laughs)

EH: (laughs)

MH: He never said anything so. So I started moss gardening at a very early age (laughs) and I'm a big fan of moss. And, yes. But we had flowers and shrubs and trees and vegetables and fruits. And did we grow herbs? No. Every now and then we would grow parsley, but we bought you know, sage in a box and allspice and cloves and all of the regular things. We had sassafras trees. We had one sassafras tree in the yard and we never dug roots from it, but... and you don't have to kill the tree to get the roots for sassafras tea. You can go out, follow the branches out and dig down to where you're going to have smaller roots and they're not as deep and you don't have to kill the tree to harvest some sassafras root. But we, we had sassafras tea in the spring and we drank it... it is a blood thinner, but we didn't drink it as a blood thinner. We drank it because it tasted good (laughs). And sassafras-- if you get some sassafras and you have a freezer, well maybe even without a freezer, you can use the same sassafras root for many, many batches of tea. And today it's illegal to sell it...

EH: Because it has a carcinogen?

MH: Because it has a carcinogen called saffrole, S-A-F-F-R-O-L-E and the research that was done by, what are their names? Elvin, Elvin-Lewis-- he and her, he and she, did research with mice and it would be the equivalent, I figured out, of like drinking 32 cups of fresh once-brewed sassafras for 100 years might do your liver in, but (laughs)...

EH: And that's what root beer was traditionally made from?

MH: Root beer is made from all sorts of things, so might be wintergreen--the little shrub, birch-- it's a big ingredient in root beer, and sassafras, and then people will put in all sorts of other things. We have, related to ginseng, we have-- what did you just find along the road?

KV: Oh, um, oh my gosh I can't... spikenard!

MH: Spikenard. Or we grew up calling it spignet-- S-P-I-G-N-E-T. It's related to ginseng and so they might have spikenard in it or aurelia. Spiny aurelia, which is sarsaparilla, it's called-- wild sarsaparilla. But the sarsaparilla that was in commercial root beers was a tropical plant. But it's not the same as what we have here. But people would put all kind of things in it--things they thought would taste good. So it might have some cherry bark in it too.

KV: How about birch?

MH: Yeah.

EH: Would it be bark?

MH: Yes, sweet birch. Black birch. So birch is real common. So you can still buy birch beer and root beer that are just natural ingredients but most of them, even the good ones, have high fructose corn syrup! And ah! You don't want to drink that! (laughs) You want a sugar.

EH: But even when it has sugar it's too sweet.

MH: Yeah, mmhm.

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Yeah, but we did make wild black cherry cough syrup and that's the inner bark of the cherry and so it's quite red and so... that cherry flavor that's in the cat medicine and everything else (laughs) goes back to that inner bark of the cherries. But it was just... put the cherry bark in with the Seagram 7, and so you put it in with some, some kind of alcohol and then we put honey, take the bark out and put in honey and sometimes put in pine tar and the pine tar we had to buy 'cause there weren't any pine trees there. And so we'd buy pine tar and put some of that in, but we didn't always put that in. So, yeah...

EH: That made me think of John Morris and Jen are making their own fiddle rosin from resin.

MH: Yeah, yeah. And so there's... one summer at Augusta we... Mary Kay Stover found this tree-- I forget what year that was, maybe '07 (laughs). Not too long ago, but, getting there. And she found a tame cherry tree on the D&E campus that had some rosin on it. And we took the rosin off and I-- I, people took it home, I don't know what they did with it eventually. It was the next to the last afternoon and we had so many other things planned. We didn't do anything with the rosin, but you can always chew the rosin.

EH: Oh wow.

MH: The pine rosin. They cherry rosin is... is depending on the source... insects will bore into the tree and the rosin will come out, the sap will come out and harden and if it's gummy, it's also likely to have caught some insects so you don't want to chew it. But pine rosin... usually doesn't have any insects. So usually at Jackson's Mill, we'd do the herb conference, did the herb conference there-- you could find a pine tree that had some rosin on it, and everybody-- or a spruce that had some rosin, and you could scrape some of that off and chew it. It was like, kind of like permanent chewing gum (laughs) but it's very, very piney. I mean it tastes like you have Christmas tree in your mouth (laughs). But...

EH: (laughs)

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MH: But it's also, it's also healthy so it's...yeah, but...

EH: I know... is it like pine needles have Vitamin C. Does pine resin?

MH: Mmhm. Yeah. Yes. It has, depending on the kind of tree, it has different things in it, but I'm not well-versed in the chemical constituents of the rosins. Give it to the materials scientist over there [Kara]. But the... a few years ago there was-- I had never seen pine siskins before. I probably have but I didn't remember. And they're in town at people's bird feeders, but I had never seen 'em out here. And they were here that year. This was about 7 or 8 years ago. And I was coming in and one landed at my feet out here under the hemlock tree and it's eating, it's down at my feet looking up at me and it's eating all these little hemlock seeds and like asking me, "why are you letting these go to waste? These are good!" It was just

sitting there eating and looking up, and eating and looking up and so finally I, I picked up a hemlock seed and tasted it and hemlock seeds are tiny, tiny, just pine siskin food size and I swear, it tasted really, exactly like I had an entire Christmas tree in my mouth. It's just an explosion of this flavor. Yeah. It's really, really strong. But it's good food. They are nutritious and the needles are high in Vitamin C-- especially the younger needles are--you can make good tea with it. But it tastes-- it's... it's okay (laughs) It's drinkable! If you make it really strong, it's like a lot of these things. One time, it was the first day of an Augusta herb workshop and this woman had brought chamomile with her and she said, "Oh, can I make some chamomile tea for everybody?" And we said sure-- we always had water boiling or hot. And she made chamomile tea and she dumped like an entire cupful of chamomile blossoms into this pan and oh-- it was so nasty! I... I... and that's what she, that's the way she drank it! I...

EH: Wow. Did it put everyone to sleep?

MH: I... I don't know. But it didn't. The first day of Augusta class always have... well we had snack in the morning and I always gave them catnip tea to drink, and I wouldn't tell... from fresh plants... and I wouldn't tell them what it was. And everybody would guess what it was. And every now and then there would be somebody in the class that knew what it was, but usually not. Because it's very calming and soothing and yeah. I figured everybody needed to be calmed down. Relaxed. Yeah. And then I'd say, some people don't like this because they say it tastes like cat pee, but if you make it very strong it might, but...yes.

EH: So what was your family's heritage?

MH: So on my mother's side just Irish, and my maternal mother, grandmother came from England, but the family was Irish and my grandfather's family had been over here for another generation before that. So my grandfather was, maternal grandfather was born in this country in Carnegie, PA and I, I've been telling people-- for the last several months it just dawned on me--my maternal grandfather was a coal miner.

EH: In Pennsylvania?

MH: Yeah, in Carnegie, mmhm.

20:15

But he got out of the mines when he was 7. So he was a coal miner from 5 to 7.

EH: Oh my goodness. Wow.

MH: Mmhm. And then he was out. Yeah. And his father whose name was Robert Hoag, and my grandfather was Charles Hoag, Charlie, everybody called him. Robert Hoag had been a miner in England and Scotland and Wales, and Ireland. Wait, not Scotland. England, Wales, and Ireland, before coming over here from England, from Ireland. Yeah, so... Hoag. And he had the family name changed legally. It was H-O-G-G and he changed it to H-O-A-G and many others changed it to H-O-G-U-E and so I have cousins in the Pittsburgh area who are H-O-G-U-Es. Yeah, Hogue. Hogue.

EH: Wow.

MH: Oh, I know what I have to tell you...

EH: Yeah, I know H-O-G-G is a common name. Common Appalachian name. Especially in East Kentucky.

MH: Which is?

EH: H-O-G-G. Hogg.

MH: Mhm. It still is. In Texas also. And the one famous family-- Ima Hogg and Shesa Hogg? They named their daughters and Ima and Shesa, which is... Ima I know is true, but I don't know about Shesa (laughs).

EH: That's cruel

MH: S-H-E-Z-A. I don't know, yeah, in Texas the Hogg family was rich.

EH: But your parents had some of this knowledge of making the...

MH: Yeah, and then... and so everybody had it then. I mean, you know, if you lived in Ireland you ate nettles and all sorts of... many, many, many plants! Lots of good information in those books. Yeah. And on my dad's side, so my dad said that three Harless brothers came from Germany in 1860 to Giles County, Virginia to be commercial carrot farmers. And carrots-- carrots are white originally. And so Queen Anne's Lace... Bill Lynch did this wild foods thing last spring, but he didn't go very far! (laughs) And the man he talked to said that Queen Anne's Lace is related to carrots. No, Queen Anne's Lace IS carrots. It's wild carrot, and it was called carrot you know, before it was called wild carrot.

23:00

(laughs) And it was called wild carrot until Queen Anne was in the, on the throne. And but carrots weren't orange and so the French started with the orange carrots and I guess it went to Germany. I'm not sure. But they came over to grow carrots commercially and then, and so that was the Harless aspect. And then I see all these names in the paper--the Stovers and the Pauleys, so my maternal, my paternal grandmother was a Pauley and I think that her mother was a Stover maybe, I'm not sure. I've never checked into the genealogy. I don't have time. But... (laughs) or a computer! (laughs) But and so it was German and French and English and Native American and there's a really good program--oh the name just jumped out of me. What's the Public Broadcasting reporter from Shepherdstown? Liz McCormick. Liz McCormick did an interview with Nikki Giovanni and it was replayed not too long ago on Inside Appalachia. And Nikki Giovanni points out that when Native Americans were escaping from the Trail of Tears, etc. and the slaves were coming, that they were always welcome into West Virginia and there wasn't any discrimination. And it's a really good interview.

EH: I like Nikki Giovanni. She's wacky!

MH: Yeah, she was here in Elkins for 3 days a couple years ago.

EH: Recently? Oh.

MH: Yeah. Maybe it was a couple, maybe 6 years ago? (laughs) It's been a while. But... and she made one interesting comment that really struck home with me. She said, West Virginians have this concept of enough that you don't really need to keep acquiring more and more and more and more. That you can just have enough. And I think the world needs to learn that. And I wish everybody could listen to that interview.



EH: Yeah, I think that's really true.

MH: But... and so the... Ann Pancake who wrote this novel...

EH: *Strange as This Weather Has Been?*

MH: Yes, *Strange as This Weather Has Been*. Ann grew up in Romney, but the novel's based down in the missing mountains and she, the grandmother in that novel knows all the plant's names and all the uses. And my dad was just like that. My dad grew up in Logan. And moved to Weirton as a young man. And he was uh, he must have been successful. He cut timber, I know, but he had a pack herd, that probably attracted my mother who was a teenager (laughs). We have pictures of him and his pack herd and these girls and my mother always told him they were his cousins. And then when I was like 50, she said, "no they weren't his cousins!" (laughs) She said I just told you kids that. (laughs)

EH: Oh no! (laughs)

MH: They were his girlfriends I guess. But... but he had this pack herd which, yeah. But he knew all the plants and all the uses and he and my mother would have different names for things like this plant right out here that the wind blew over in the big storm. Ironweed. And so he called that horseweed. And it's called that down in the southern part of the state. And touch-me-not he called water weed. My mother called it touch-me-not, so we grew up calling it both and then when I was maybe 14 or 15, I learned, oh this is jewelweed. Jewelweed. And uh... we didn't, we used it for nettle stings and this is wood's nettle. It's different from stinging nettle. Stinging nettle is European and it's an invasive species here. Or can be. But I never saw a stringing nettle until I went to Dot Montgillian's house with some group that I took over there to see her herb things and... outside of Jackson's Mill and she had stinging nettle plants. And later I discovered 2 clumps of it in the pasture of my old house a mile away but... or hayfield, not pasture. And, but we were... I have a brother who is 13 months younger and a sister who is 33 months younger-- I don't know how my mother survived our childhood but she did (laughs) and we were always in the woods. So I grew up in Weirton but Weirton-- it was Weirton Heights and Marlin Heights and Holiday's Cove on the river and Weirton and they combined all of them into an incorporated city of Weirton. And so it stretches from the Ohio River to the Pennsylvania border and then to King's Creek on one side.

EH: Yeah I was just there at the Serbian Picnic Grounds.

MH: Yeah, so there are a lot of woods in there. (laughs)

EH: Yeah, yeah.

MH: Yeah, so we... they started out with 3 acres and then acquired 4 more and then acquired 3 more so we ended up with ten acres and a good part of it was woods.

EH: And was that along King's Creek?

MH: No, we were... a small creek bordered our property and then there was another stream across the road. And I'm sure they both had names but we just called them, "The Creeks" (laughs) "The Creeks" and then we were about a mile from King's Creek. So we went swimming in King's Creek. Yeah. And out little streams were fun to play in and had lots of organisms but not really big enough to swim in. But yeah. And... so anyway... and so back to jewelweed and touch-me-not. And so Kara said to me the other day that she kept touching the blossoms and they didn't pop. Do you know touch-me-not?

EH: Well is it the same as jewelweed?

MH: Mmhm.

EH: Yeah, yeah.

MH: Did you ever play with the seeds?

EH: Uh-huh. Yeah.

MH: And so the... the seeds kind of split and the greens split and the seeds pop out like little springs and so we were trying to find a seed fat enough to pop. So there might be one out there now.

30:28

EH: They were just too little.

MH: Yeah they were too skinny still. They weren't mature enough. So... jewelweed. And so then when I went to nature camp-- conservation camp-- it was the week before... when I was 15, or 14? Uh... I wasn't 15. Maybe I was 15 later that summer. But 1950, yeah. Anyway! Conservation camp. George Briding (sp?) was the naturalist at Oglebay Park and he ran the... a large segment of the nature, of the conservation camp at Camp Cesar in Webster County and that's where I learned jewelweed.

EH: Okay.

MH: Oh! Maybe I learned it in biology class. Yeah, I learned it in biology class. But jewelweed-- but he showed us-- you roll it through the water and it has like a mercury, silvery appearance. Or when it rains and the droplets land on it there's like a shower and it's still repelling the drops and they bead up on the surface and it looks like jewels.

EH: Oh, yeah.

MH: And then one year in Augusta herbs class, a young woman said, Oh I thought it was because when you peel the seed and the seed--the mature seeds are black--when you peel the seed it's turquoise inside. I said, "Oh! I never knew that!" (laughs)

EH: That's cool.

MH: But she discovered that on her own I think. But yeah. Turquoise inside. But we were taught, you don't eat jewelweed because it's poisonous. And it is edible but it's very laxative and so I think somebody in my dad's family had eaten too much of it. So... anyway, we didn't eat jewelweed. And we didn't eat plantain, which is very good. That little leaves taste like field mushrooms.

EH: Oh really?

MH: Yeah, the baby leaves do. Taste like raw mushroom. Yeah. And uh... they're very tasty. I found this out on my own, but we didn't eat plantain. We ate dandelions and bitterweed and bitterweed is wild lettuce and there's a lot of it right outside here (laughs).

EH: With dandelion, would you eat-- I mean you would eat the greens and eat the blossoms?

MH: We didn't eat the blossoms.

EH: Oh okay.

MH: We ate, we ate the leaves, okay? And we didn't eat them fresh-- I mean they were fresh, but they were... well, you want the recipe?

EH: Sure!

MH: So you (laughs) you fry some bacon and you take the bacon out and you take out most of the grease and you leave a little bit of grease in the skillet. And you put vinegar and water and salt and pepper and sugar in-- this is German. And then you put the dandelion--you pour that over the dandelion leaves. And you wilt the leaves.

EH: Oh yeah.

MH: Okay. But I don't do that today. I throw them in the skillet-- throw them around real fast and then take them out. And same thing... and my dad would always say, now get a couple bitterweeds! And we cut... cut the dandelions and bitterweeds off at the base cause it's a rosette and you just cut it off at the base-- we didn't dig them and take the roots in etcetera, we cut them off. And today I don't do that-- I just pick the individual leaves. It's much easier than trying to pick the grass out and so on and so forth. And then you have hardboiled eggs and you slice up the hardboiled eggs and put those on top and then you take some of the bacon and you crumble it and put it on top and it's called wilted dandelions and bitterweeds! (laughs) And that's actually published in... AAUW here. American Association of University Women did a cookbook quite a few years ago and it was the winner for Southern Living Magazine that year, which was a big honor. And that recipe is in there. Yeah. Along with a recipe for tortilla soup (laughs) which is...

EH: Yours?

MH: Not traditional West Virginia and largely stolen from Lucinda Hudson. Do you know that book? It's Southwestern Herb Cookery maybe, or something like that? And you can't forget to take the big book!

EH: Oh, *Jemima Code*?

MH: (laughs)

EH: Yeah, I love...I love tortilla soup.

MH: But the... what was I saying?

EH: Dandelions...

MH: Oh, dandelions and bitterweeds, yeah. We didn't eat milkweed-- we didn't know about eating milkweed, which is really good. And the dandelion blossom frittata that we talked about down in Lewisburg? I just, I came up with that quite a few years ago and I can't believe people in Italy don't eat that, but I've never seen a reference to it.

EH: Because they eat zucchini blossoms and squash blossoms.

MH: Yeah! Uh-huh. And they definitely eat dandelions. You can find many, many, many varieties of commercially grown dandelions-- the seeds come from Italy-- a company called Seeds of Italy is a good one (laughs)! It has many kinds of dandelions. I actually bought dandelion seeds one year but I didn't plant them. I couldn't bring myself to plant them! (laughs)

EH: Yeah, I noticed that in Portland that the dandelions-- I was out in Portland earlier this summer and I noticed the dandelions were very different than what we have.

MH: They're all kinds and just the regular species there's so much variety so it might be very toothy or almost no teeth and red stem and green stem and yeah. But we had a cherry tree all around there are huge cherry trees that have big sweet cherries on them. I don't know if they're still common today, but we had a huge double trunk cherry tree--the lowest branches were probably 40 feet off the ground and it had big, big cherries. Like regular store-bought Washington state sweet cherries, yeah. And we couldn't reach them but a neighbor up above on the hill uh... oh heck. Uh--the name keeps jumping out of my head. The daughter taught pysanky-- she taught Easter egg decorating at Augusta. Mary... and Johnny... and the dad was John.

EH: Was this in Weirton?

MH: Mmhm. In Weirton.

EH: Oh yeah, I've spoken with her.

MH: Yeah, and they would bring down a great big ladder and they would get-- and the tree was on the bank and so the base was down farther, but if you put the ladder at the top of the bank which was right next to our garden, you could, Johnny, the son could get up to the lowest branch, and they would get up-- then they would get up there and they would pick the cherries and would get bucketfuls of these huge cherries every year. And the son was killed in WWII and my dad would not ask the father to come back with anybody to pick the cherries because he thought that would be too painful a memory for the father. So we got the cherries that fell if we were lucky. The chipmunks got them, but yeah. But-- and so that was a tree that we didn't plant and we didn't cultivate but we were able to use the fruit from and we also had, in addition to our tame grapes we had wild grapes that we picked every year for jelly. And we made grape juice and tomato juice by the gallon and so we would make like maybe 50 gallons, 50 gallons of grape juice, 30 gallons of tomato juice, plus canned tomatoes and we canned 300 quarts of peaches every year! (laughs) And have a lot away.

KV: How would you make the tomato and grape juice and things?

MH: We had-- I have one now-- we had a colander... you probably know its name.

EH: A Foley food mill?

MH: It's a cone (clears throat) Mnnnh. It's a... it's right there-- I could get one out and show it to you faster!

EH: (laughs)

MH: It's cone shaped and there's a handle...

EH: Oh yeah, okay.

MH: It fits into a 3-legged tripod type thing and you put the things in there and you have a wooden cone shaped thing and you turn it around and around and around and the juice comes out through all the holes in the cone and then you have to take out the seeds and the skin, put in more and you keep doing that, and you set this over a big bowl or a big pan and you just keep doing that. It's labor intensive, but made good juice! (laughs) And we did that with the grapes, and we didn't know about grapeseed oil, but I'm sure my dad would have made grapeseed oil! (laughs) And now they had grapeseed coffee.

EH: Did you make wine?

MH: Yeah, we made wine out of everything you can think of.

EH: (laughs)

MH: Strawberries, blackberries, we didn't have blueberries. Uh... currants, peaches, plums and grapes. Grapes, grapes, grapes. And we made sweet wines and my uncle Ricky who is Italian made dry red wine which was called-- everybody called it this including my uncle Ricky-- daygo red-- it was a dry red wine. Italian-- from Italian wine. And so we would uh... we would have some of that too. A couple bottles of that. And one of my jobs was-- "go down in the cellar and see if blah blah blah is working yet!" (laughs) So and "working" meant that whatever it was was fermenting and I would go back up and say, "no it's not working yet!" or "Yes it's starting to work!" (laughs)

42:30

Yes, but we made lots of wine, but we gave most of it away. We were big at giving things away but I guess I still do that. But we...one time somebody came to visit and they brought a bottle of sweet cherry wine. We didn't usually make wine with the cherries. It was sweet and put it down on the table in the kitchen and my mother said after a while-- go see what my sister was doing. And I walked out into the kitchen in time to see her fall over in the chair. She had drunk the whole quart of sweet cherry wine! And today my parents would have gone to prison right then, I'm sure! (laughs)

EH: Oh man, that's like the Anne of Green Gables raspberry cordial-- I don't know if you remember that.

MH: (laughs) Uh-huh. Yeah. We made raspberry wine... and blackberries. But yeah. We had... we had purple black raspberries-- black raspberries. They were quite purple and my mother said they tasted like perfume and I remember that Oakey the mailman came and dug them all up and took them away to his house because my mother didn't like them. And we didn't have tame blackberries. There were many, many wild blackberries around. Great big and my brother and sister and I sold blackberries for years. We'd pick them and so-called water buckets-- 2.5 gallon galvanized buckets were \$2 a bucketful (sings it) at the beginning.

44:33

EH: Wow

MH: Yeah, yeah. As opposed to \$6.99 for half a pint! (laughs)

EH: Yeah.

MH: Yeah, the price went up over the years. And then when... I had 2 aunts who would come, Aunt Margaret and Aunt Harriet would come when the peaches were ready, to help with canning the peaches, and after enough peaches were canned and some for the wine, then we kids could sell the extra peaches, and so we sold bushels of peaches and got to keep the money. And grapes after all the grape juice and all the wine was made, and the grape jelly and the grape jam and eat, eat, eat, eat. We could sell grapes and so we sold bushels of Concord grapes. Yeah. And I remember every year, Mrs. Garrison and Miss Summers who were 2 elementary school teachers who were sisters: "Are the grapes ready yet? Are the grapes ready yet?" And we could always count on them for a bushel a piece, but yeah.

EH: That makes a very good pie.

MH: Mmhm.

EH: Concord grape pie.

MH: We never made grape pie. We never made elderberry pie. Oh, we made elderberry wine too. But yeah, not with the blossoms, but with the berries.

EH: Did you do elderberry syrup?

MH: Not then. Yeah. I didn't make elderberry syrup until (sighs) it's been a while. In the 80s the elderberry jelly didn't set and it became elderberry syrup and it was so good on pancakes I thought-- why would you make elderberry jelly? This is really good. I bought a pint of elderberry jelly at Shop and Save 2 weeks ago, because there were no elderberries.

EH: Yeah.

MH: It's like the wild black cherries-- I think all the pollen got washed off. And the cherry trees were loaded with blossoms. But there aren't any berries, or any cherries. But yeah.

EH: We'll make Kara talk for a little while. (laughs) So why don't you tell me how you first got into herbalism and talk about meeting Dot and working with her.

KV: Sure. I guess I've always been into farming so I've always been into plants, but I hadn't thought too much about herbs other than growing basil and cilantro and kind of the common ones that you grow with your plants to stave off pests. But then I guess around 2012 or 2013 I met--while I was working at the ceramics plant I used to work at in Buckhannon called Corhart--I was researching mold makers in the area and Dot's youngest son Kirk Skaggs is a mold or word worker and makes cabinets and things so I approached him to make the molds for this new process we were starting at the plant, and I noticed some of Dot's products in his shop, including her-- she used to make capsules, everything from a PMS capsule to ease cramp and menstruation pains to high blood pressure capsules and all sorts of things, which she would fill with plants that she would dry and then powder and I didn't realize that Dot was Kirk's mom and Kirk said, oh yeah, that's my mom's products--maybe you should come out to the farm with me. I go there every Sunday to visit her and so I started doing that and I got to know Dot and see her farm every week and we would spend time in the cabin and she-- at that point her health was going down a lot so she could walk a little bit but we didn't get to take as many garden walks as I would have liked. But she did show me a lot of stuff and that's when she started teaching me how to make jelly and the herbal teas and she had a drying room and I still dry my herbs the same way that she did which is just-- it was kind of a small closet that she had filled with shelves that were just made out of hardware cloth and she would line

those with either newspaper or newsprint paper, tissue paper, whatever she had available and she had just one household dehumidifier in there that would allow you to dry the herbs. So we would collect herbs and cut them and put them in the drying room and then process them together and I just got really into herbs that way I guess. So... yeah.

EH: And now are you continuing-- I know you're continuing on the name of her company? So maybe talk about that.

KV: Yeah, so she passed away in 2015 and no one in her family really wanted to take over the business or had any interest, so her husband Bob Montgillion asked if I would want to do that and of course I was honored and decided to set up a kitchen and an apothecary in what used to be my kind of a garage space at my house and I'm still continuing to make all the products that she formulated, which includes over 25 different types of jams and jellies and we actually just finished making a bunch of elderberry apple jelly and the elderberries were harvested by Dot's middle son Carl who still lives with Bob on the farm and Bob still--this year he turned 94 and earlier this spring he and I were harvesting purple dead nettle and dandelions together so it's pretty neat to be able to still work with him and her middle son Carl is the one that harvested all of the elderberries which came from the plants that Dot planted which are now huge and really productive. So it's been really nice. The whole family has kind of started to come together now that we're continuing to make things and also in a little bit larger quantities than Dot was making.

And, yeah it's been really challenging-- some of the things have been really challenging because I learned how to make the jelly from her but a lot of the medicinal aspects of the herbs I you know, just didn't get to talk to her about because she made so many different things, so I've recently started with some of her medicinal tea blends including a bronchial blend and a high blood pressure blend and... the high blood pressure blend, one of the main ingredients is hawthorn berries and leaves and that really helps and then the bronchial blend contains things like coltsfoot and gill over the ground or creeping charlie or also called ground ivy. And amongst many other things. And yeah.

EH: Are you doing the capsules too?

KV: Yeah, I'm still doing the capsules too. I do the common cold capsule which contains ground goldenseal root and ground echinacea purpurea root blended together and then put into capsules. But I've only been doing them upon request, so if I get people-- some of Dot's old customers that ask for them, I still make them for the long-time customers but I haven't really put them out there yet, just because I think I have a long way to go as an herbalist. I would say I'm more like Marion-- I grow a lot of herbs and I actually have a lot of herbalists that come to me to get herbs to use in their formulations. Hmm?

EH: You can say it.

MH: Where'd you get the goldenseal?

EH: (laughs)

KV: Oh, the goldenseal I've actually been ordering from Frontier because I don't have a good um... patch of it going yet. But I have planted a few roots on my farm to try to start a patch, but it is an herb that is endangered and it's definitely something that I want to cultivate and get to a point where I can sustain. And that's another reason I don't sell it at any sort of scale and just make those capsules kind of by request because the populations of plants are just so small. There are a few patches like in, in and around Lewis County but of course I don't harvest from those.

EH: And are you using the same jam? I think you were saying you were reducing sugar?

KV: Yeah, we've... so it took a while to get all of the recipes down and Marion had mentioned that the elderberry jam that she made didn't set, or jelly that she made didn't set and so one of the things that I've learned while making the jelly is that if the pH of the batch is below 2.9? Or is above 2.9 it will not set. So elderberries are actually one of the fruits that have a higher pH so sometimes the elderberry is difficult to set and you have to add a little bit more lemon juice to get it to get to that gel stage. But yeah, so I'm still making all the flavors and we have reduced the sugar by 30% and in some batches by even more than that to try to bring out a little bit more of the fruit flavor. So we're still using the basic recipe ideas but with just less sugar to make it a little more healthful and nourishing.

EH: Nice. Why don't you talk about the plant and herb community in West Virginia. And you founded the West Virginia Herb Association?

MH: I didn't. I was against it.

EH: Oh, okay!

MH: (laughs)

EH: (laughs)

MH: We had Mountain State Organic Growers and Buyers Association, started in the late 80s with I keep wanting to send in a letter to the Gazette on this in a marketable and with the many, many, many things from alfalfa to zucchini and we're including bison and blueberries and many other things in there and the person behind that group was Keith Dix who was part-time at WVU as an I think originally as an adjunct professor, and I can't remember-- I think he's really a community organizer. He loves to organize things and he well before that, Linda Cooper who wrote this novel which I still haven't looked at in this form, Linda (sighs) I met Linda in the spring of 1978 at Allegheny Highlands Conservancy meeting at the DNR operations center in Elkins. She and her husband, then-husband Dave Elkington and she's Linda Cooper, back to her maiden name now. And she grew up in Canaan Valley. And she's like Keith except she's often-- she's either looking for the conservation aspect of it and sometimes how to make money. And she started this venture called backroads adventures and she got me and Chip Chase from over at Whitegrass in Canaan Valley and a number of other people to do anything. So Chip did star talks, I know, and I think he did a couple other things. And I did roadside weeds, other kinds of weeds, medicinal herbs, culinary herbs, lunches, dinners, etc. etc. etc. And people would-- it's like Airbnb only people, instead of staying all night, came for a lunch, an afternoon, an evening or in Chip's case with astronomy, later evening. And we all had fun doing this! And I had people from all over and I suppose the others did too. But none of us were making any money! (laughs) Even though it was great fun and so through Linda and Backroads Adventures, I met a lot of people. And then in '78, I also that year started teaching herbs at Augusta and 2 weeks I would do. I did 2 weeks in '78 and then in '79 and '80 I was also Augusta director and I did 1 week of herbs still, which was not, not the best of ideas, but... (laughs) And then in '81 I went back to 2 weeks of herbs. And we also added at Augusta Doug Elliot and he did 2 weeks and then some years we had Robert Hunsicker who was a botanist and he did 1 week. So we had 5 weeks of herbs at Augusta and what was the question? (laughs)

EH: The community...

MH: Oh, the community of herbs. Okay. So through my Augusta classes and the Backroads Adventures, I knew a lot of people. Oh, and also in the fall of '78 I started teaching fall organic gardening for the college and it was called oh heck... it... Margo Blevin ran this program originally and it was community education. But for mostly fun things, so like winemaking and winetasting and all sorts of things. And I



did... the first class I did was fall organic gardening and then I did organic gardening in the spring and I added something else to that. And I did many, many things. Edible landscaping, traditional Appalachian medicinal herbs, I did a few years. Have a natural Christmas, I did that for a number of years, and so I had all these names of people. And so this young woman calls me from Morgantown and she wants to come down. It's February-- I said, oh, there's a lot of snow out there! (laughs) I don't know what we could see! And she said... and so she was a graduate student. I said in what? And she said, well I have my own program, it's one I made up, so it has some anthropology, and some of this, some of that. And so I said, well you could come down if you want to. And so she came down and spent the day and gave me 40 dollars or something, I don't know.

1:01:40

And before she left she said, she asked me if I knew Keith Dix and I said no and she said he wants to start a statewide organic grower's group and I said oh! And she said could you send him some names of people? And so I sent him 27 names and I think almost all of them became founding members of that group. And he (sighs) and I can't remember what year the Herb Association started. Uh... but one of our members uh, Dot was a founding member and I met Dot because I heard that this woman was selling herbs at Jubilee-- did I know her? Was she a competitor? I said, she's not a competitor-- I don't know her. And so I got in touch with Dot and suggested that she come over and take part in the Augusta Festival which she did. And at that time her daughter-in-law was her apprentice and really worked with her for many years. And so Dot did the Augusta Festival which was very successful for her, and she loved it because it was 1 day. It wasn't like Jubilee where she usually sold which was several days. Yeah. And she made more money at Augusta with less time and so after her daughter-in-law died, I can't remember her name--sorry! She quit the Augusta thing because it was still a lot of work getting everything together and bringing it over and setting it up and she had a lot of products in it. Yeah. And so I met Dot that way and so she was on the list. And then Myra Bonehage Hail had moved to Weston area about the same time I had come here. Dot had a year ahead and Myra a year after I came back into West Virginia in '77 and so Myra had called me and wanted to know if she could come over and spend a day. And that was summer. Yeah. Early summer of what year... the year before the Herb Association. The year before the Organic Grower's started, so it was in the late 80s. And so Myra came over and I met her after work across the street and I suggested she stay at the Warfield House BnB cause they had nice plants there too. It was across the street from the college, so I met her after work and we went out to my house and walked around and looked at things and I think we cooked dinner and then the next morning she came back out and we did some... walked around and looked at stuff and talked and we went into Mary's green house and looked at the many herbs that they have for sale and talked some more and went back out to my house and she left and so that's how I met Myra. Okay. So now Keith Dix at... not at an Organic Grower's Association meeting, but at it was then called the... it's now called the Small Farm Conference. It's called the Direct Marketing Association. West Virginia Direct Marketing Association--it's all the same people. Tom McConnell and Doug Degew (sp?) and so forth. But the Organic Grower's were going to have a little meeting which we did just wasn't anything real formal. But and so Nona Conley who's from down in not Clay County...

EH: Calhoun?

MH: Maybe. I can't remember (laughs) but Zeke, Zeke Wood was the extension agent and Myra, not Myra, Nona and Zeke were kind of partners and they were part of the Organic Grower's Association and Keith says to me, "I think we should start an herb group." I said, why do we need an herb group? (laughs) and so he said this a couple times and so at this Direct Marketing meeting at the Marriott, there's a mezzanine, there's steps there. Okay, so the Herb Association started under those steps and so Keith said, "Okay, I'm gonna get Nona and you and Myra and Dot." And so here we are under here, and I'm saying, but we don't need a separate group we're already in this group! (laughs)

EH: Right, right.

MH: Yeah, and he kept pushing and pushing and Nona-- Nona was in favor of this and then right away Dot and Myra were too. Okay. If you want to have a meeting, I'll come if it's at my house. And so... so those 3 came and then Keith sent two more people Linda Kristin (sp) from Morgantown, who's an herbalist and she's also deceased and Nicole-- I always have to ask Jane Birdsall (sp?) what her last name is. It's not Stodd. Anyway, she moved back to Canada. And Nicole Molnar (sp?) who had been in one of my Augusta classes and was also Dot's apprentice then after her daughter-in-law died. Nicole lives in Ohio now. So Nicole, Nicole, Linda, Nona, Myra, Dot and I and not Ann Romance, Ann Romance came in later. Who was the 8th person? Oh, Sue Myers who's... ran the greenhouses at WVU. And so Keith sent her down too, so Keith sent 3 people to that initial meeting. And the others I knew. And so they said... we're in the dining room at the other house. Okay... so Keith said, you have to have a conference. Okay, we have to have a conference. Okay, who's going to be the speaker? I said how 'bout Steven Foster? They said oh, we could never get him. How would you get in touch with him? I said, you call... what the Eureka Spring, Arkansas information and get his phone number and talk to him! (laugh) and they said, how can we do that? I said, I'll do it! And so, so I did and we'd already decided. The Organic Grower's met at Jackson's Mill and so we decided we'd meet at Jackson's Mill too since there's lots of woods and grounds and so forth.

1:09:40

And people knew how to get there. And so we planned, we start planning the conference at our first meeting (laughs) and around this table. Different glass, same table. (laughs)

EH: (laughs)

MH: And so we're planning the conference and Keith says, well you need to have a workshop. Okay, we'll have a workshop. Okay, how about ginseng growing? Okay, we'll do that. Okay, so I call all these people-- Dot makes the arrangements to have it at the farmers' market in Weston, and I call Gary Schwedock who I'd never met, but I'd talked to on the phone. And he had White Crane Trading Company in New York City. And he was a big ginseng dealer. I mean he went to China with the ginseng. And he came and then we had oh, what's his name. The Votech teacher from-- was he in Preston County? I can't remember. But he had ginseng... he was growing woods ginseng. Farming it in Maryland and Pennsylvania and West Virginia, and he was using his Votech students or teaching them, at least. They were his summer labor also. He paid them (laughs). He came. And then Zeke Wood-- the extension agent and Tom Cook and ah... another extension person from down in that area. Three extension guys were already working with ginseng. They came... did somebody else come? I'm trying to think. Anyway. Anyway we had-- I think 20 some guys showed up for the workshop. Dot and I--Myra wasn't there. Dot and I and Nona and so we were essentially providing food (laughs) and coffee. Uh...

EH: So... and does the group still exist?

MH: That group, three years later had more than 100 people in their section of the herb conference. And they had split off to another group and uh, we did a workshop at the Elkins Library on... these people all over the state... nobody knew what anybody else was doing. Okay? And so I decided, we got to get these people together. I'll give you a copy of that program.

EH: Oh, great.

MH: And so I got the library, Dot brought the sassafras tea-- it was Earth Day, Ramp Festival, and something else in Elkins, all the same day, and we had I think 45 people show up? Including the chief of

Monongahela National Forest and etc. As...as audience, not as speakers. And speakers were included (sigh) it was up in Canada. She took my herbs class at Augusta. She was a PhD from Morgantown and oh... it's resource management--it was Phil Grafton's program. I don't know if the title had changed yet to non-timber forest products, etc. etc. program. Anyway, she was one of our speakers and she came from the ginseng conference at Pipestem, where they had had like 120 people. And they said then that there were probably 10,000 ginseng diggers in the state if you counted everybody who dug it just for personal use. And yeah... and so that ginseng group grew very big and I don't know what they're doing now. Uh, the last time I saw Tom Cook was at a conference at Frostburg. He was a speaker and I was a speaker and Linda Christen (sp?) was a speaker, but they... they were very active and they went to China with the extension agents to see what they were doing in China and they gave a presentation on that at one of our conferences. Yes, and so we did that workshop, and then we had the conference. Oh no, so then we had the conference. Oh no, so before that...

EH: You don't have to get into the whole history.

MH: Oh yes I do!

EH: (laughs)

MH: You should know me by now! (laughs)

EH: I just want to make sure we get to the apprenticeship stuff too.

MH: Oh, okay. And so then we had another meeting at my house and so I had called Steven Foster in the meantime and he answers the phone, "hello!" he was so excited. And I thought wow! And he was waiting on a call from Australia. And he said, and so he told me why he sounded so excited as he was sitting there and waiting for this call. And he said that that date that we wanted him, he was going to be in Australia. If they were offering him this and he was going to take it. And I checked back, yes--Australia wanted him and I said, well how about next year at the same time. Can we arrange for that? And so we did. And so these people come back to my house and I tell them about Steven Foster and they say, well who can we get? And I said how about Maureen Rogers. Well none of them knew Maureen Rogers. And she had been in an herbs class too and she was at that time living in Michigan but she had moved to Maryland and she was working-- she's a CPA but she was doing herb work and dried flowers work with Kramer-- it's a big outfit for dried flowers at that time. And I said she could really talk about the business aspect of it. And they said, how could we get ahold of her? I said I can go call her right now. And so I did. I went into the study and I called her. And she was delighted to come and she was wonderful and so she kept coming and then she started coming to Myra's lavender fairs. Myra started having lavender fairs and Maureen would come down for that every year. And so I haven't seen her since the last lavender fair and I don't know how she is or what she's doing. But she bought a business called The Business of Herbs and she had the herbal green pages which she did for years-- it's a very fat directory of herb things all over the country. Yeah. And... and our first conference Maureen couldn't believe that we were new and it was our first conference (laughs). She said, this is the best one I've ever been to! Anyway, that's how the herb group got started. And according to Myra's version of the history, it started at the conference! I don't know how she thinks we got to the conference (laughs). Anyway, it was all against my better judgement! (laughs) We could still have been the Organic Growers-- the Organic Growers might still be going if we hadn't started the herb group. And so the herb group has had over 800 members since its inception. And we've had 3 days' worth of programs and 2 days' worth of programs and this year I think we have one day's worth of programs. So... and it moved from Jackson's Mill for a lot of different reasons. Goodbye.

EH: And where is it now?

MH: It's going to be...

KV: Teays Valley Conference Center outside of Charleston.

EH: Okay!

MH: And there aren't going to be any plants to walk outside. Might have to take our own plants.

KV: We hope to move back to Jackson's Mill next year when we can have (unintelligible)

MH: Yeah. But that's how the herb group got started. And so, so there are people all over the state. But like our governor... not this past spring but... was it in 2017? I think. Maybe 2016. He brought in a man from North Carolina to do ramp walks at the Greenbrier and this man and in the Charleston Gazette--he doesn't know why West Virginia doesn't do anything with ramps! And we have a man named Glenn Facemire who has a book-- big fat book on ramps and sends ramps all over the country if not the world.

EH: Is that Ramp Farm?

1:19:03

MH: Uh... probably. Which county do you know? Glenn Facemire. I don't know.

EH: Somewhere over here.

MH: I don't know what county he's in. Doesn't matter because I can't remember where he is. But yeah, he grows ramps commercially. Yeah, he grows 'em commercially. So-- and I met him first at... the first Ramp Festival in Elkins, in the city park. Long ago. 80s. Yeah, mmhm. And so he's been speaker through the herb group too. But even the governor doesn't know about things in this state. And so when he was talking about, remember the interview with a basketball player with the ringworm on her leg? Did you hear that last spring?

EH: Sounds vaguely familiar.

MH: Yeah, and he doesn't know about jewelweed! Jewelweed is a superb fungicide. One application kills ringworm.

EH: Oh wow, I didn't know that.

MH: Yeah, it's very strong. Alright. Goodbye. (laughs)

EH: (laughs) Alright. Why don't you tell me why you were interested in this internship, er, not internship, apprenticeship, and working with Marian specifically.

MH: She's beginning to regret her...

KV: (laughs) No, not at all. Well I met Marian through Dot at one of the WVHA conferences at Jackson's Mill and although we have... I guess it was 2014 that we met? And then actually I was talking, I was at Augusta and talking with Bob Smakula and he had mentioned Marian when I told... we had go to talking about herbs and he mentioned that Marian used to teach at Augusta and so I had heard her name again and then I attended one of her talks and herb walk at Jackson's Mill and she just took so much time-- I had so many questions after the walk and she took the time to kind of answer my questions and just from the

walk I could tell even in--it was probably a 100 yard walk that we took-- we saw probably 20 different plants and I could tell how knowledgeable she was and just I dunno... I liked her!

EH: (laughs)

1:21:40

KV: So um...

1:21:40

(laughs)

EH: Nice.

KV: Yeah! When she called me and asked me about the apprenticeship, it was-- I think I've said this before--a no-brainer to get to spend every Monday, well you know, well also I came here once to drop her off and she took me on a brief tour of her garden. Then I was really sold. (laughs) Knowing that I would get to come and spend time with her in her garden uh, with more frequency was really enticing. So, it's just been so wonderful to watch the garden change over the course of the year and learn new plants every week and take home cuttings and seeds to propagate and whole plants. Yeah! So we've had quite some adventures.

EH: Why did you want to lead an apprenticeship and lead it with Kara?

MH: Because somebody said-- we have a new vice president, and she's young! (laughs)

EH: (laughs) Is that rare?

MH: And she's been working with Dot and I said oh! I have to meet her. And so, yeah. So then when I saw last fall the announcement in Goldenseal on this apprenticeship, and then in the Inner-Mountain, and it was towards the end of September and I think the deadline was October 1st maybe? I can't remember. Yeah. And in between there we had the herb conference and Forest Festival with the Weaver's Guild, except it... which I was going to be at, a demo, talking about natural dyes and needle felting. And... and so somehow in that time, we got the...and so I decided that I would ask... well when I first read it actually I thought of the high school girl who was sitting behind me at a bee meeting the previous May, and she had the Strausbaugh and Core, which is the Flora of West Virginia with her, and she was saying, "Everybody should have this book!" and I thought, who is this kid? (laughs)

EH: (laughs)

MH: You know, so and so I thought, ah, good! I will see if I can get her. And she's not old enough to drive. She might be now. But if her mother would bring her out here... and then I read the things that you wanted somebody who was already in the field and doing stuff, etc. and so I thought ah! Kara Vaneck! And so I asked her and so we somehow got the proposal together in that short period of time and she typed it up fortunately and we sent it in and here we are! (laughs)

EH: (laughs) So why don't you tell me what you generally do. You meet once a week, right? And what you work on, what you've talked about and discussed. Just an overview!

MH: (laughs)

EH: I mean, you can go in depth if you want!

MH: (laughs) My voice is giving out.

EH: Yeah, I know, I don't want to wear you out. (laughs)

MH: A couple of times we've just sat here and talked and well... last time she did a video of the baskets! (laughs) This was not in the plan and so you're going to get a copy of this video.

EH: Great!

MH: And I took these baskets are sitting here because Ruth Blackwell Rogers came over on a Sunday afternoon before you came the last time-- was my excuse for the house not being cleaned up-- and then they stayed here for almost 6 hours and this girl's name, young woman's name was Talcon. I don't know her last name. She's from Ohio and she was doing willow baskets at Augusta. And so I told her if she came back before she left I could show her some willow work and also something she didn't know about-- the white oak baskets that is done in the style of willow.

EH: uh-huh.

MH: It's called rod basket, rod basket and this is Homer Summers from Charleston.

EH: Okay.

MH: Yeah. And (clears throat) and I was telling her about that. The style that the original people who came over Germans and British people had never made white oak baskets and so they tried to make willow baskets out of white oak.

EH: Ah.

MH: Mhm. (clears throat) and then I told her that this one--we had (sighs) it's everything is tied into everything else.

EH: (laughs) Did you make these?

MH: No. Bill Cook from Toms Brook, West Virginia--no-- Toms Brook, Virginia who used to teach white oak basketry at Augusta made that one. And then Rachel Nashlaw, Handing Down (the) Basket by Rachel Nashlaw and Cynthia Taylor? Do you know that book?

EH: I know Cynthia Taylor. I don't know the book though.

MH: Yeah, that's their book.

EH: Okay.

MH: So Rachel made this one and that market basket that's up on the closet. Yeah, but that one. So Culture and History sent Rachel to Germany and England for a whole year to study willow basketry. Do that today? Haha.

EH: No. That's amazing.

MH: And so one of the people she worked with in Germany was Michael Tearshman (sp?) and she brought, she made the arrangements for Michael to come over and do workshops around the country in willow baskets and the first one was here for our weaver's guild. And so he did Friday night and Saturday and part of Sunday baskets. And everybody made a French cheese basket and these are the baskets that...it had a little toggle in there which is out on the sun porch somewhere. They would take the cheeses to market in this, and they were still doing this in the 80s. Okay. And they leave the baskets. And I imagine people took them home. I can't imagine just trashing these. And they make these baskets in 15-20 minutes.

EH: Oh my goodness.

MH: And so one of our willow basket makers, Joni Newbert (sp?) said, "That's impossible!" And I said, well maybe, but I watched him make this one in less than half an hour.

EH: Jeez.

MH: Okay. And it has some dogwood in it from my old house because-- we were running out of willow that the bought and so the willow-- I think probably came from Ohio but yeah. And so I was telling Talcon about these, if she came back, I'd dig these out and she could see them. And so I left a message for her, I got them out and left a message and she didn't come back but then I thought oh, maybe Ruth wants to see these! And Ruth was gone. Ruth is back now. So I thought, should I put these back? And they were hanging on an herb drying rack and the cord broke and so, I need a new cord before I can put them back. And the jute that I bought this summer has rotted already. And so the plants that I had tied up with jute are all down, all over. My indigo, my ironweed, etc. And so, that's why the baskets are sitting here!

EH: And you were talking about baskets.

MH: And so last week we talked about, we did the video on the baskets which I didn't know was going to be a video. I thought, oh, look at my hands, oh. And also a bracelet, a willow bracelet. Do you know Ike Yakim?

EH: Mmhm.

MH: Yeah, and so he does real fine willow work and so Michael gave me a bracelet that's of willow. I'll show it to you when you come the next time. You are coming back, aren't you?

EH: Yeah! Absolutely.

MH: (laughs)

EH: (laughs) I'm sure I'll make many more trips.

MH: And... one time we went to a nursery. Nurseries. Two times we went to nurseries. But we also-- we talked the whole way. We talked from 8 o'clock in the morning until twenty-til one the day we went to Lewisburg! (laughs)

EH: Oh my goodness

KV: That was a highlight.

MH: (laughs) Yes, yes. And so you can tell I just talk! (laughs)

EH: Yeah, great. So you go look at plants at nurseries?

MH: We look at plants and so there's usually... even if we just walk down the middle of the garden, there's usually a new plant to see each time. So last time she took home a cutting of a red impatiens. That's just out there, so it can be red. Okay? And I told her that I'd never seen a pollinator at this until last week I saw a sphinx moth come down and he went away right away. And it's the first sphinx moth I've seen since they put the second cell phone tower in. Insects are (makes "kaput" noise).

KV: We also saw a white lobelia.

MH: Yeah. Yeah. The great lobelia is usually blue and the buds are white, and I'm always... surely someday there's going to be a white one. Well, there's a white one out there. Yeah. So she took its picture and she can have some seeds (laughs) when the seeds get ready. But and so... the other day... here's a black swallowtail, probably a spicebush swallowtail, he's visiting every one of those... deep-sticking the proboscis in, getting nectar from every one of those red impatiens. And then the deer noticed that we'd taken a cutting from one, I guess, and the deer said, oh this is good to eat, I've already eaten the white ones (laughs). Here, these are red! Hmm! (laughs)

EH: Uh-oh.

MH: Yeah, this is somebody's deer with a brown leather collar with a pink reflective streak. Strip.

EH: I remember you talked about this.

MH: Yes, so I haven't seen him lately, I just see what he leaves. Yeah. But... anyway, I know about the deer spray and I have religiously done this ever since I learned about it, but... and I learned that. I always learn something every day. But that master gardener's class, when I did a workshop for them on herbs... a couple times. But the last one I did... they'd been out to the West Virginia Botanic Garden? And somebody asked a question about deer and I said, oh let's not talk about deer because then we can save that for the very end if you want. And all the master gardeners said, oh we know now, we know what to do for deer. Of course I said what? And so they told me about the milk. So you put--this is George Longenecker who just recently retired from being director there. He... I don't know how he came up with this and I never did get to talk to him.

1:33:30

But maybe I will someday. And he put 20% milk, 80% water spray once a month in the summer and every 3 months when the leaves are gone, you know. And the deer won't eat that stuff. Okay. And it's amazing and it works and I had 5 hemlock trees and one fall I didn't get three of them sprayed but I got 2 sprayed and I go out to get the wood every day in the snow when we had snow and oh! Look at those hemlocks, they're so beautiful-- where are the hemlocks? They ate to the ground the three...

EH: Wow.

MH: And these were just you know, tall. They ate them to the ground overnight. They were gone. Yeah, mmhm. They were gone. The 3 that did not get sprayed. And that REALLY made me a believer. But you can watch the deer-- they come up to... this is the flower. They come up and their lips quiver over top of it and then they come back up and go eat something else. Yeah. They won't eat it! And so I said to these people, uh, what kind of milk? And they say, oh it doesn't matter-- you can use skim milk or two percent or whole milk, it doesn't matter. I say, well, if you need twenty percent and you can use skim, you don't



need twenty percent if you're gonna use whole milk. And so I put about an inch, around an inch, maybe less, of milk in the bottom of a gallon jug, fill it with water and then just to be nasty, I put a couple shots of hot sauce in it.

EH: (laughs)

MH: (laughs) And shake it up and put it in the sprayer. And so... and that works. And my sprayer-- I've been using it for years. The pump quit-- it was just going up and down and nothing was happening so I got a new one and then it... Linda sprayed the hostas and she left the milk in it. She left solution in it. So I was cleaning it. And I couldn't get it back together so I told Kara-- take it, take it. Get rid of it. Give it to your friend for her yard sale. Whatever! So I need a new sprayer. But meanwhile the deer is eating everything. But... what was the question?

EH: Oh, I was just asking what you were working on in your apprenticeship. (laughs)

MH: Oh yeah, and so she's learned that about the deer! (laughs) If in the--like right now, the bucks will start rubbing the velvet off the antlers, and they don't pay any attention to the milk cause they're not eating. And so an old neighbor at my other house-- former neighbor, she wasn't old-- she had a hillside that they keep mowed. And the deer went right up through the middle of that hillside. She puts in a garden like right here. Here's the deer path--right here. And we're all saying, what's she doing? And so she put up a line and she put plastic bags all along it and they were blue and white and she had them like this far apart and so the deer did not bother her garden. (laughs) And so we were all saying... there's the corn, there's this, there's that... deer didn't bother it. And so-- comparative psychologist [Harless' former profession]-- okay. What is it about these bags-- is it the movement? And so I finally decided that it's... the blue ones I dunno what colors the deer perceive that blue as, probably grey. But the white in the wind is like a white-tailed deer flashing and it's so wired in that they don't adapt to it. It's an escape signal.

EH: Yeah, yeah, I see.

1:37:44

MH: It's a discriminative stimulus for "get out of here." And so if you take a... so I put them up one year and then the next year I thought-- oh, I can just cut up kitchen bags in strips and put that... well the first rain, what was a nice broad thing was dodododo it collapses into this little accordion like pleat and there are all these little strips which deer did not pay one bit of attention to! And so if you take a white plastic shopping bag, get a stack of them... you know you got the handles here... and cut down the middle, and then you can take the handle and tie it around the branch or a trunk or a small thing... and wind will catch in it and blow. Very effective. And it keeps the bucks from destroying the trees and shrubs.

EH: Oh, okay.

MH: Yeah, they still knock down-- I have a couple planted in elacampane over on the other side as I call it. And milkweed. I had so many milkweeds year before last, and so I think-- get my bag I'm going to get milkweed seeds. No-- overnight they knocked it down. Every milkweed over there. Flat on the ground. And so I was going to go back and get seeds I never did. And they knock over the cup plants and the elecampanes. Just... and then they get the sumacs and the sumacs seem to survive alright. I mean there are new ones coming up all the time but if they get (sighs) like I have some little magnolias out here and a dwarf red buckeye that I got from Dot. I started some from seeds but this is a Dot, Dot, Dot. I got mine...when I move mine, buckeyes come out very early and they finish very early. They're finished already. Uh, and I moved it--they were already out. And they didn't make it. We had-- went down to 8 degrees after they were leafed out, and it killed them. Once I started from seeds. I got 2 from seeds. But

she started from seeds and so one is out there--it's this tall. It's bloomed several years but the deer have gotten it three different times, because I thought it's so little they won't bother it. No! It's down to the ground again--we start again. But yeah, anyway...

EH: ...the apprenticeship.

MH: So we look at plants and we have eaten a few things and tasted some things and smelled a lot of things and pinched off leaves and dug things up and made cuttings and yeah. And then I have a bunch of different shrubs that I want her to get starts from. So, yeah.

EH: And why do you feel it's important to share and continue this?

MH: Because the world cannot live on plastic alone (laughs)

EH: Just a few bags for deer.

MH: (laughs) I don't know what I'll do without plastic bags and Ziploc bags. (laughs) Yeah, I remember writing in something for Rodale a long time ago that if I could just grow Ziploc bags in the garden it would be-- I could be self-sufficient. (laughs). Yeah, but I think if people knew the many uses of plants, that we would have so many fewer problems in the world, like this opioid crisis. Like I have terrible dentures and I never quite got finished because I couldn't stand to go back to get the permanent ones, and so these are my ones that they were checking to see if the fit would be okay and I'd already been there 3 times and I could not make myself go back to get the real ones and the way I wanted them. Because everything in that dentist's office is plastic. Which Grade Coursera in a recent article in something or other is bragging that every doctor's and dentist's office is plastic. Yes. That's right. They're killing us! And the... and so the dentist gave me a prescription which I got filled at the closest pharmacy for 12 oxycodone, which I never took. And so I had some witch hazel with me and it was very painful and this was the first visit? Second? First visit, yeah, 'cause I had had teeth extracted. I was trying to wiggle them all out because they had said it's 65-100 dollars for each tooth removal. I thought, nah-- so I got three out. I thought, I can't do this any longer! (laughs) And so, and so the dentist, this was up at the Bridgeport hill, but he just lives, or has a place 2 roads over and... and so I swished some witch hazel around in my mouth and the pain quit. I was in incredible pain having all those teeth pulled and I was down to 19, cause they kept breaking. Why? Cracked enamel. Why? Because if you have hot food and cold food at the same time, the enamel starts cracking. And so when I was little we were taught, if you're going to have something cold, you can't have something hot for 20 minutes and vice versa. And so when you have iced tea and hot soup for lunch at the cafeteria and then you have ice cream and coffee? And then the enamel cracks. And so they were breaking from cracked enamel. Anyway. And when the doctors and the dentists hand out opioids for things that could be--there's no problem if you just have witch hazel.

EH: Or even Tylenol.

MH: Or even Tylenol as had been pointed out recently in some of these stories, yes.

EH: I mean I had septum surgery a few months ago and he said get Tylenol and I got Tylenol and he gave me like 20 oxycodone pills and I took 1 and it didn't work as well as the Tylenol. And no I have all these-- should I flush 'em down the toilet? What do I do?

MH: No... then they go into the water.

EH: I know, that's why I haven't...

MH: And so... (laughs) people say mix 'em with the cat litter and put them in a bag and put them in your trash.

EH: Yeah.

MH: If you have a cat, or your neighbor's cat.

EH: That's good.

MH: And then for witch hazel, like poison ivy, it's terrible that they give people corticosteroids for poison ivy! And jewelweed, it's in over the counter medications for poison ivy, but just straight jewel weed is... I started to say hours ago that woods nettle (laughs) woods nettle-- so usually jewelweed and woods nettle are growing. If there's woods nettle, there's probably some jewelweed right around and you can put it on so... yeah. And the same for poison ivy so... and... hmm... what else have we learned?

EH: Yeah, I was just asking what the importance is.

MH: Oh, yes.

1:46:18

The importance. And so people need to know this. And people will say, oh we're going to forage, well you see this all the time, foraging stories and if New York City was cut off or if the ocean water is coming up the Hudson, as it does on the tides, and into New York City, and people say, oh no problem, we'll go forage in Central Park if we don't have electricity or this that or the other thing. There's not enough total biomass I think counting the roots and the bark and the whole trees and every lichen and moss that's in there to support New York City for one day. And people go "foraging"-- I have NO idea what they're picking.

EH: (laughs)

MH: And what conservation measures they should be taking. Yeah, is this the last one? Tough patootie? Once I taught English as a Second Language part-time for several years at D&E and for Washington Corporation and one Japanese student one time who was just really big on you have to eat new things and each new thing you eat adds a day to your life and I said to him one time when he was preaching this-- what if, what if this is the last one, or these are the last 2 animals of this kind. Would you eat those? Of course! He says. I think this would be the attitude of a lot of people! You know, me first. Yeah, so. But people need to know about plants and especially tress and the fact that hmm... they're disappearing and so, now scotch pines died a year ago spring-- of a virus. New information from the American Horticultural Society, in an issue before last of their publication, there's a new beetle in Florida that eats members of the laurel family. Now this is bay laurel, bay trees and here in West Virginia we don't have bay tress, but we have sassafras and spicebush and those they said will probably be exterminated. And so we already have a problem with beech, we have a problem with... well the chestnuts are gone, essentially, we have a problem with ash, we have an ash borer, we have a problem with hemlocks with the wooly adelgid. There's also a spruce adelgid. Norway spruce, or not Norway spruce--don't plant them despite the fact that the Arbor Day Society will send you 10. I don't know what you would do with 10. Colorado blue spruce-- the virus is attaching Colorado blue spruce. And out west we have all the pine bark beetle disasters and when trees are stressed--this is old, old, old research. Stressed plants send out signals to insects as they... come in and finish me off and then I won't spread this disease to any others. So it's altruistic behavior. (laughs)

EH: Wow.

MH: But people don't know anything about plants it seems to me. So, well especially when you hear things... well this is meat not plants. I don't understand why people are killing all these cows, why don't they go to the supermarket and buy their beef?

EH: People are killing cows?

MH: This woman said this actually. "Why are people killing cows, they could just go to the supermarket and buy their beef!"

EH: Oh, oh! (laughs)

1:50:21

MH: (laughs)

EH: That's funny.

MH: So that's the level of information. Like carrots! I mean people don't know where carrots come from!

EH: Well yeah, I was working in Vermont right out of college and a lot of kids didn't know that they had the tops. You know they'd never seen--they'd only seen baby carrots-- that doesn't even look like a carrot. This is Vermont! (laughs)

MH: (laughs) The other green state!

EH: Yeah!

MH: The other green mountain state. Yes. And so we just do a lot of things and so that green bag that's sitting there-- that chair has things that have to go somewhere. And so the green bag is not part of that. The green bag has mordants in it. And so we're going to mordant some wool. She's going to come over with a friend of hers who's a fiber artist and the buckets are out on the porch to put the mordants in and then those 2 things will be gone and the house will be a little neater. (laughs) And then once she has some wool mordant then she can do some natural dyeing. Oh... this is a Ziploc bag of tree colors (walks away)

KV: Oh yeah this is for...

MH: And so this I mentioned.

EH: Oh wow.

MH: These were sitting there on the chair last year after Forest Festival when she came over and said, what's this? (laughs) And so these are... this is a way I devised to do the sample cards many years ago back when I first moved here, back in the summer of '78. And so this is alum, chrome, copper, iron, tin and then these are nothings and this is... cotton and linen and this is nothing also. And some of them have sisal on them also. And then if you have the sample card you can put it in the dye bath as you're starting to heat things or not and you can pull it out after a few seconds, 30 seconds, a minute, and you get different colors. So for example, with elderberry, if you have a slurry of fresh elderberries and you have your card made up like this and you dip it in, you get ice green.

EH: Hmm. Wow.

MH: But if you leave it in for a minute, there's no ice green.

1:53:17

EH: Huh! Wow, cool.

MH: Etcetera. And so like with poke? (sighs) some dyes... you don't want to hear a lecture on this! This is a whole day! (laughs)

EH: (laughs)

MH: Some dyes are fugitive. Which, elderberry is fugitive! Her friend dyed with her leftover elderberries slush, their pomace, they made some dye and her friend died cotton washcloths with the elderberry and they're nice soft pastel colors but they're not going to stay.

EH: Yeah, right.

MH: They're like old coverlets. Sometimes you see orange--that was probably red to begin with. It was probably dyed with madder. Or it was died with poke which also turns orange. Yeah. And sometimes you'll see a real lacy coverlet, and that's because they had an iron mordant and their fiber rotted.

EH: Ooooh.

MH: They say, how did they weave that?

EH: Ahhh.

MH: Ahhh... they didn't weave it that way--the wool part rotted out! (laughs) And so anyway. These are all tree things and so there aren't any really bright colors in there except for maybe uh... Osage orange. Is Osage orange in there? I don't think...

EH: Well I want to go out in the garden but let me just ask you the same question-- what is the importance for you learning it and continuing it?

KV: I think aside from all of the uses of plants, once a person experiences growing plants, it becomes such a pleasure. It's something to kind of live for there's--if you have a garden, every day something new is happening so maybe there are some seeds to collect or maybe one of the seeds you planted is coming up or the leaves are changing color and it just adds a whole--for me it's like a purpose of life! (laughs) I think it also serves... growing things also serves to bring communities together and you'd asked a question about community before and I was telling Marion earlier today that I started this farm stand at my house and it's a pay what you can afford farm stand and what it's sort of evolved into is impromptu trading post for different gardeners in the area. So this past week, I'd say in the past 10 days, I had one farmer come who had a bunch of leftover yellow squash that she'd grown and a bunch of yellow zebra tomatoes she brought over and then added to the stand and then in exchange she took some wormwood plants and chamomile plants and then a couple days ago another lady came by and said, oh I've got all these pears and she dropped those off and several other things--some cucumbers. I'm not sure what she took in exchange, but so now the stand is full of a wide variety of fruits and vegetables that we're offering to the rest of the community and it kind of gets people to come out of their houses and instead of just going to the store and not really interacting they're getting the opportunity to people other growers and...

MH: [unintelligible]

KV: Oh yeah! And Lewis County First which is a small organization in Lewis County trying to you know, make improvements to Weston and bring the community together a little bit, hosted a National Night Out, where-- it happens in cities across the country-- and it was initially started I guess by the Neighborhood Watch Organization but it has kind of become just a night where people go out and meet their neighbors and so at that event I had a bunch of seeds that I'd saved and I had my neighbor friend Hannah who's 9 help me package them into little envelopes and label them, and so at this event I brought a whole big bag of seeds and just walked around with a big chalkboard sign that I wore and handed out free seeds to people and it was so exciting to talk with people about gardening and people were asking questions-- can I plant these now? And how long is it going to take them to germinate and it was a pretty great way of bringing people, I don't know, getting them to think outside the box of just having a walk... a regular yard with grass, which reminds me of one of the first books Marian recommended-- Marian usually sends me home with a couple of books, several of which I still have to bring back 'cause I'm still working on--but the first one was *A Weed By Any Other Name*. And the whole book is just about the importance of letting weeds grow in our yard and how useful many of them can be. We've already talked about dandelions being useful and then lambs quarters is another common weed which is really great just to throw in. I like making fried potatoes and then just throwing lambs quarters in at the end. Add a little bit of nutrition and you know...

MH: I like the fact that she told them if they planted their cucumbers now, they could still have cucumbers this year. And that that was really exciting. Yeah. And I hope they did.

EH: Yeah, right.

MH: I didn't. (laughs)

1:59:23

KV: (laughs) I hope so too.

EH: Yeah, my cucumbers are almost done. But maybe I'll do another round.

KV: Yeah! There might be time. Last year we didn't have our first frost until, in Lewis County, until beginning of December.

EH: Yeah. You never know. I went skiing in Canaan in December. Everyone was very excited. Before Christmas.

KV: Oh yeah! That was huge last year.

EH: People were psyched. But yeah, anyway. Um... thank you both so much. I'm sure-- we should have a follow-up conversation to zero in a little bit sometime, but just looking for an excuse to come back.

MH: Jennifer was here and... or Roxy-- I can't remember which asked: How much had we learned in 10 months and... 10 months! 10 months! It hasn't been...

2:00:16

END OF TAPE