

EXCERPT OF RECORDED INTERVIEW OF KAREN BROOKS, PART 1

TALKING ABOUT THE USE OF STINKWEED

CONDUCTED BY JENNIFER ANDRULLI

IN SOLDOTNA, ALASKA

DECEMBER 30, 2021

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JENNIFER ANDRULLI: This brings up a -- a wonderful point. And so, uh, there's many forms of ethnomedicine. Plant medicine is one spoke of ethnomedicine. And what you do in your work is you blend body work, healing hands, plant medicine, together to provide care for patients.

KAREN BROOKS: Well, that's true. And I also use spirit medicine, you know, the spirit of the plant, the spirit of the land. I then started picking artemisia because that's Alaskan sage, and it's so pungent, and it's such a powerful medicine. I learned from the Elders -- they call it an Interior stinkweed. In fact, they still use it. Everyone knows what stinkweed is. And around the same time, I started picking arnica, I started picking artemisia. And that -- you know, and I, you know -- wherever I'm picking, I always create a name or an image in my head about what that plant is doing. And artemisia holds up the riverbanks, because I would pick it off the Tanana River. And it also grows in really dry, um, banks on this south side. And it holds all that dirt and rocks there so they don't fall into the river.

JENNIFER ANDRULLI: You -- there's about four different types of artemisia that grow in Alaska, and you're picking *Artemisia frigida* on the riverbanks.

KAREN BROOKS: Right.

JENNIFER ANDRULLI: And this is spirit medicine. It's used in many ways, like you said about arnica. This particular plant is used internally, externally for different illnesses, but also the spirit medicine. Do you want to talk a little bit about arnica or artemisia and spirit medicine?

KAREN BROOKS: Well, I started picking it and making smudge sticks. And smudge sticks are used to clear the air, to get rid of negative energy. And then, there was a time when I picked up my friend Debra, the herbalist, and brought her down to the herbal conference in Cooper Landing, and I had hurt my back severely. And in my reading of artemisia, I found that, you know, yes, it can be used for many things and is used for sore backs and bruises. The indigenous people, when they would sweat, they would use the succulent artemisia, the forest artemisia, and they would switch. You know, they'd hit the backs while they were in -- in sweat lodges. Uh, it helps sore muscles. I was driving, uh, Debra down to Cooper Landing, and oh, it was a bad -- I felt it rip in my lower back. I stopped. I said "I gotta stop and pick some artemisia." When you pick a pile of artemisia, and you let it sit, and you -- a couple of hours later put your hand in the middle of that pile of artemisia, it is hot. It was -- I mean it has -- it's very high in nitrogen. So, I picked a great, big bundle and I stuffed it up my shirt and down my pants and sat. And my back was warm. It was like having a heating pad all the way down. I think that probably saved me, even though the injury was severe. Um, it probably helped me not be more

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hurt, I think, by having that on that long drive. I could barely walk. But it helped me the whole weekend.

JENNIFER ANDRULLI: So, these are two plants that are helpful for muscle aches and pains. And you tend to make your oil separately. You'll make an arnica oil, you'll make a artemisia oil. And after those have been created, you would blend them together at that point.

KAREN BROOKS: Yeah, sometimes I would blend them, sometimes not. Um, you know, I started it be -- making these oils because people wouldn't buy 'em and -- and so I just really love doing it. I'm going out -- and harvesting plants is very wonderful.

JENNIFER ANDRULLI: Now, um, can you talk a little bit about the use of small amounts of artemisia internally for parasites and gut health?

KAREN BROOKS: Oh, yes. Um, you can make a tea, and it's good for colds. It's good for parasites. It's good for coughs. It's good for upset stomachs. I think, it's -- again, you ask the plant. You know, ask the plant what -- I learned this from Debra. One plant has many, many applications. And when you're looking at one particular ailment, you would maybe prepare it a different way, and you would give it in different sequences depending on what it -- what's going on in the body.