



WOLVES, WEEDS, AND WILD WOMEN

an interview with Vanessa Chakour of Sacred Warrior
photos by Shay Harrington

RAVENOUS ZINE What experiences, especially as an activist, led you to found Sacred Warrior? Where does the name Sacred Warrior come from and what does it mean to you? Do you identify as a Sacred Warrior?

VANESSA CHAKOUR Sacred Warrior evolved through my journey of healing and work in fields of wellness, the arts, social and environmental justice. I often felt burnt out and frustrated having to compartmentalize my work, and though I was fighting for the earth, what I really needed was to rekindle my relationship with the land. As I explored my connection through herbalism and other practices, I realized I was surrounded by plants with rich history, folklore and medicine. It felt like a deep remembering. I began to notice more, fall more deeply in love with the earth, and feel less and less alone. Separating people from their rich histories and cultures of earth-based

wisdom and traditions has been a method of disempowerment that's led to deep trauma and ecological devastation. I created Sacred Warrior to help us heal and restore this connection. I share practices that have helped me heal and offer experiences that deepen intimacy with the natural world. When we love something, we take better care of it and often become fierce defenders.

As a martial artist and activist, I identify with the warrior archetype; in particular the goddess Artemis, fierce defender of the wild. I believe a true warrior has courage to go within, look at oneself and heal. A Sacred Warrior listens to the strength in their sensitivity to stand up for what is most precious in life and will peel back layers of conditioning to come home to who they are. I want to inspire others to claim their innate power while deepening relationship with mother earth. Staying strong

is vital when working toward the well-being of others and our environment.

RZ Your bond with the earth is prevalent in your practices and work. How did you develop this relationship? In what ways can we authentically deepen our own connection to the earth?

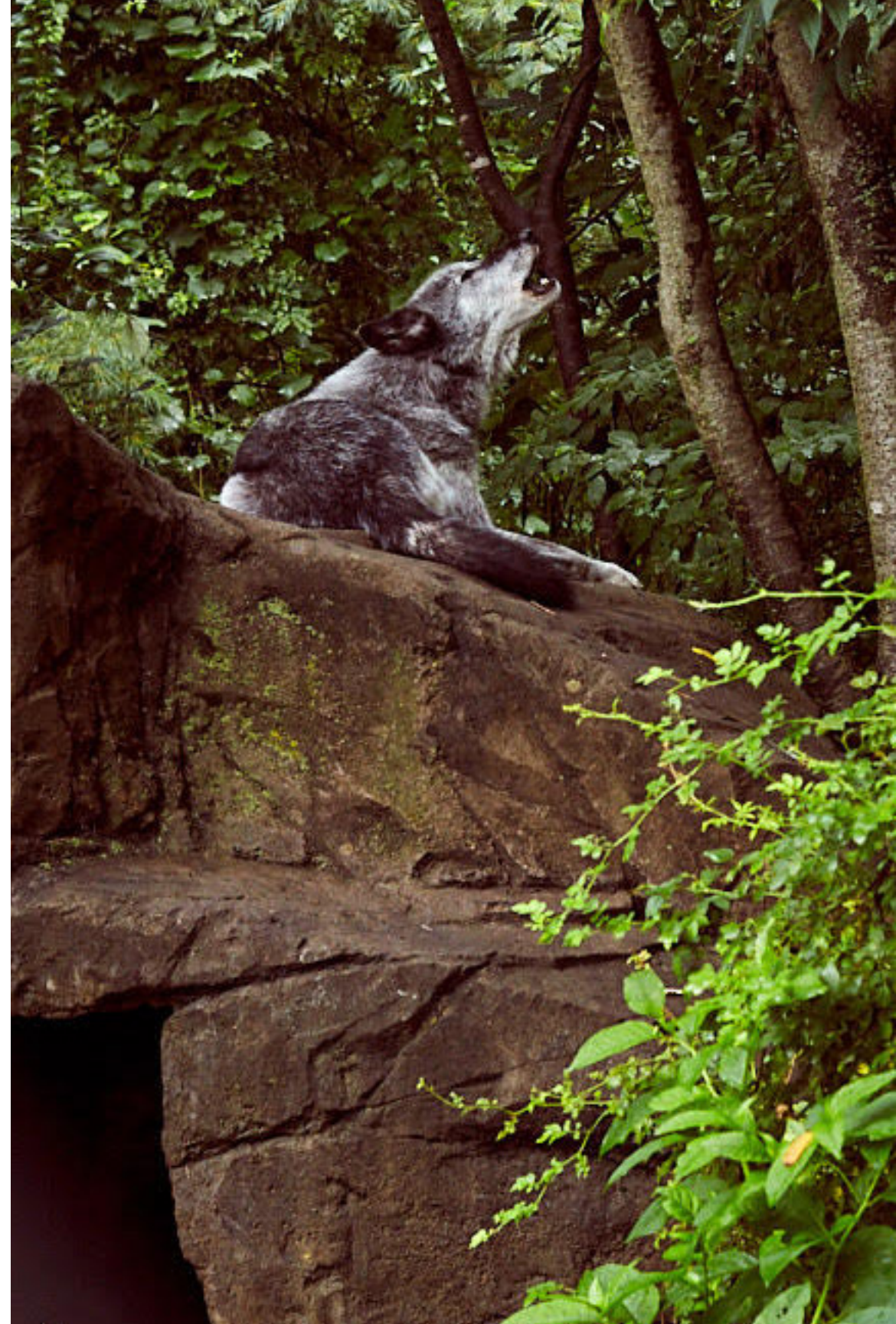
VC I've had a deep relationship to the land since I was a child. I was fortunate to grow up in Western Massachusetts where I played in the woods all the time. I've also had an emotional connection to plants and animals ever since I can remember. It's been a profound joy and deep sorrow. I believe our connection to the land is innate and something we all long for. There are plants and animals each of us are drawn to. Learning more about them and their role in the ecosystem can be a good place to start..

I also encourage people to connect with plants where they live. To learn about the wild ones growing through cracks in the sidewalk, in the forest or in vacant lots. To look at them as though for the first time. Notice their shapes, textures and colors. Spend time with the ones they're most attracted to. Meditate with them and learn who they are. We all have access to the language of nature if we can slow ourselves down enough to listen. Medicinal plants are everywhere and can be a bridge to a deeper connection with ourselves and the

earth. When we work intentionally with plants, they see us for who we are.

RZ You've mentioned difficult past experiences related to your health. How has your journey helped you to develop personal wellness practices and a more holistic way of living? You're also a boxer and developed your own movement practice. How did you come to your current understanding of your practice? What does boxing allow you to unleash?

VC Yes, my journey has forced me to dig deep. It started with severe asthma and allergies from the age of two that landed me in the hospital many times. I experienced the trauma of sexual abuse that led to an eating disorder as a teenager. Then, I fractured my back and neck in a car accident at age 15. It was the car accident that served as my initiation to the path of healing that continues today. The experience broke everything open. I was in stillness for months so couldn't avoid myself or the trauma I'd locked inside. The floodgates opened and all I could do was focus on healing. I journaled incessantly and began to understand the connection between belief systems and healing. When I started to rehabilitate my body, I questioned my perceived limitations, learned about the body-mind connection and worked hard to become stronger than I'd ever imagined I could be. My curiosity and desire to perform at my peak led to a formal meditation





practice and eventually to the field of herbalism. Everything became a spiritual practice for me and I knew deep down in my bones that everything is interconnected. It wasn't just a concept. So, exploring a regenerative way of life was the natural evolution of it all.

When I moved to New York in the mid 90's, I found boxing. It was an obvious next step for me. A way to push boundaries and in a way I never had before. Training as a competitive fighter led me to release intense anger I'd held from sexual abuse and to claim innate power. I was able to confront fears and explore sides of myself I'd never met. The Sacred Warrior movement practice I created with boxing at its base, integrates principles found in nature and holistic healing traditions. The earth is our source of power, as is our sensitivity. Martial arts can help cultivate the internal strength needed to embrace the power of our sensitivity. This in turn, allows us be more attuned, aware and to communicate more directly with nature. I'll also be certified to teach archery soon. I look forward to incorporating this into my offerings so women can channel their inner Artemis.

RZ A great deal of your work focuses on teaching. When did you begin to see yourself as an educator? What is your educational philosophy and how do you incorporate that into your offerings?

VC The role of an educator came naturally to me. I love to share what has helped me grow. I bring people into experiences that awaken their instincts, intuition and innate strength. I want to give people tools to heal themselves and uncover their unique gifts in relationship with the land. Education and recovery of instinct is also vital because of the miseducation and colonized conditioning that's led to much of the destruction we face now. I try to make all my offerings as immersive and multi-sensory as possible. In many ways, I feel that I facilitate a deep remembering; helping people uncover what they know in their bones to be true.

RZ When it comes to rewilding, you discuss how our society has a misunderstanding and vilification of components that are central to your work- for instance, weeds, wolves and wild women have unsavory connotations but are really vital elements. How are these related to one another? What can we do to help ensure their safety and continued existence?

VC Wolves, weeds and wild women are fierce, resilient, and cannot be controlled. Embracing the wild aspect of ourselves means embracing our powerful, instinctual nature. That, in turn, illuminates our truest role within earth's systems. Predators are stewards of the ecosystem. Education is important when it comes to



wolves and weeds. Countless studies have shown the ecological imbalance that occurs when keystone predators like wolves are eliminated or at risk. We, as predators hold the same traits and responsibilities. When we deepen our understanding, we can recognize our role as ecological stewards and make peace with the fierce parts of ourselves.

It's insane that people still poison the land to get rid of plants like dandelion that of are some of our most nourishing wild foods and medicines.

We need a serious rewiring. What we do to the earth, we do to ourselves. I encourage people who've come to Sacred Warrior retreats, courses or plant walks to educate others and get involved wherever they can make an impact and be heard.

RZ Especially in your work with weeds and wolves, it can seem like an uphill battle against societal perceptions of these plants and creatures and the drive to eradicate them. How do you deal with the sadness and trauma you feel when seeing these be attacked and how do you turn that grief into action?


VC The practices I've talked about above have been vital, along with healing rituals to process and release grief. As difficult as it feels at times, my emotional connection to these plants and creatures is what drives my work. There is a lot to celebrate and to fight for. If we focus on the amazing beauty that is here, it can

energize us. I still grieve, but my love for these creatures and motivation to do the work overpowers it. No matter how much we lose, there is still so much beauty and magic in the world to celebrate.

RZ What are some resources readers can explore when learning more about regenerative living?

VC First, look closely at what you buy, where it comes from and learn which corporations exploit people and the planet. Everything we do has an impact. Then, begin to take a look at your overall consumption and where you might be able to use less. Composting is important. Find out where you can bring food scraps to nourish the land. When food winds up in landfills, it contributes to climate change. Terracycle is a great resource for recycling and upcycling soft plastic packaging and other items that would otherwise wind up in the trash. Joining a CSA (community supported agriculture) can be a great way to support local farmers and eat healthy, nourishing produce. Better yet, grow your own food in your backyard or in a community garden. If you don't feel a connection to the earth or the land around you, begin to cultivate that with some of the ideas above. When we have an intimate relationship, these things feel less like a chore and more like caring for ourselves and what we love.

Follow Vanessa and Sacred Warrior at @sacredwarrior7



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