Melungeon Voices Podcast Season Five Transcript, Episode One: Phyllis D Light and Lindsay Kolasa

Lis Malone: Welcome to the Melungeon Voices Podcast, presented by the Melungeon Heritage Association. My name is Lis Malone. I am the podcast producer, and I am truly honored to welcome everybody to what is now Season 5.

And of course, joining me, it wouldn't be a podcast without our president, Heather Andolina. Heather, welcome to the newest season. How are you?

Heather Andolina: I'm fine. How are you, Lis?

Lis: I'm wonderful. I'm always very, very thrilled and excited and warm and fuzzy whenever we kick off a new season. Especially love working with you and always fascinated by the lineup each year.

And bravo to you and the MHA for doing such a fine job finding such interesting voices to add to the programming.

Heather: Thank you, Lis. And I think this season we've got quite the lineup.

Lis: I think you're right. I have a hunch. I think I have an insider's hunch. I won't give away too much this early on in the season. So, this is our nickel season. Big five, as we always say. Somehow, we made it. Actually, not so somehow. There's a lot of hard work and dedication from a lot of wonderful people.

So, without further ado, we have a lengthy introduction to get through, especially because we're kicking off the season. Let's start off, as we do with every season, with the presidential address. Heather, whenever you're ready, take it away.

Heather: Thank you, Lis. Welcome back to what is now the fifth season of the Melungeon Voices podcast. I am truly honored to serve as the board president for the Melungeon Heritage Association and thrilled to continue this journey of insightful conversations with you.

To start off, I'd like to mention the success of this year's MHA Annual Union Conference back in June. And to give a special shout out to MHA member Judge Beverly Scarlett, who along with the assistance of her nonprofit organization, Indigenous Memories, the MHA was able to host an amazing union conference, thanks to the collaboration of Beverly and her team, the MHA Executive Committee, our wonderful speakers, MHA members, and dedicated volunteers. Now, on to the fifth season of the podcast.

Once again, I'm teaming up with our dedicated, hardworking, behind-the-scenes producer, Lis Malone, and presenting another amazing lineup of episodes. In this season, we'll delve into more Melungeon and Appalachian ancestry, history, and diversity, while bringing you" "engaging discussions with researchers, thought leaders, and everyday individuals who have fascinating stories to share. Our goal is to create a platform where an array of voices and perspectives come together to share stories and knowledge on not only Melungeon ancestry, but also mixed heritage and Appalachian culture.

Don't forget to subscribe to the Melungeon Voices podcast on your favorite podcast platform so you never miss an episode. And we can't do this without you, our valuable members. If you're not already a member of the MHA, please visit our website today at http://www.melungeon.org and click the Join Now button at the top of the page.

Memberships, grants, and generous donations from listeners like you help to keep our organization running and directly fund special programming such as this. On behalf of the entire MHA Board of Directors, we thank you for joining us, and we can't wait to connect with you.

Lis: Thank you so much, Heather. A beautiful presidential address as usual. So much nicer than some of the other, I guess, real presidential addresses that we've heard in real life. But for the MHA, you're spot on as always. Always love to hear you speak to the people" "You know, Heather, I think we should do Heather for President, President, right?

Heather: Yeah, totally. I have your vote, right?

Lis: We're going to talk offline about this. I think we've got an idea.

Heather: You want to be my vice president?

Lis: Oh, no, no, no, no. I'd be like the behind-the-scenes person. I'd be like your advisor.

Heather: Okay, let's do it.

Lis: There are so many more qualified people to be vice president. Okay, but enough about our presidential aspirations. Let's talk about episode one of this new season. And this week, you are joined by two very knowledgeable guests.

And you're going to tell us now about Phyllis and Lindsay.

Heather: Yes.

Phyllis D. Light is a fourth-generation herbalist and healer, and has studied and worked with herbs, foods, and other healing techniques for over 30 years. Her studies in traditional Southern folk medicine began in the deep woods of North Alabama with lessons from her grandmother, who's herbal and healing knowledge had its roots in her Creek and Cherokee heritage.

She has a master's degree from the University of Alabama in health studies, and has experience in both clinical and private settings, including working in integrative medical” “clinics in Birmingham and Huntsville, Alabama, in addition to herbalism and nutrition. Currently, she is the director of the Appalachian Center for Natural Health, and continues to maintain an active private practice, and consults with clients, and offers health educational classes for businesses. Phyllis is also the author of Southern Folk Medicine, Healing Traditions from Appalachian Fields and Forests.

Also joining us is Lindsay Kolasa. She is an herbalist and social services worker. Due to a health crisis that began in 2001, has followed a long and winding path of healing, breakthroughs, and insights.

She has dealt with trauma and recovery, the microbiome, transgenerational trauma, biodiversity, and tending the fractures in various forms of modern relationships. This journey has taken her to places such as the mountains of Western North Carolina, to the Pontic Steppe of Ukraine, to the coastlands of California, and to the red clay hills of Eastern Mississippi. With 10 years of social service work and another 10 plus years of working with clients through her herbalism practice, Lindsay has assisted a number of people in revealing deep and lasting shifts in their lives.

She describes her work as trauma-informed and soul-based, utilizing tools such” “as narrative medicine and compassionate inquiry,” creating a container of presence, curiosity, and insight in her practice. For today's episode, we will be discussing Southern and Appalachian Folk Medicine with Lindsay and Phyllis. We will talk about what Southern and Appalachian Folk Medicine is, its origins, and how it's connected to the Melungeon people.

Lis: Well, let's get this season started. Let's listen in.

Heather: Hello, Lindsay and Phyllis, and welcome to both of you to the Melungeon Voices Podcast.

Hi. Hi, there. Thanks for having us.

Heather: First things first, I'd love for each of you to tell our listeners about the first time you've heard the term Melungeon and how you discovered your Melungeon ancestry. Lindsay, let's start with you.

Lindsay Kolasa: It's actually from Phyllis that I first heard it, and it makes sense why I said, hey, Phyllis, you have to be on this podcast with me. So yeah, I took an herb course with her. A storyteller and musician from Appalachia named Doug Elliott had recommended that I reach out to Phyllis Light because I had returned to Mississippi to do some personal work and I had been studying herbalism out west, and he said, oh, well, if you're in” “the south, you need to study with Phyllis Light.

So, I found her and then she started opening up the south to me and my own ancestry in ways that I hadn't considered or pondered before. She really started creating a lot of texture and filling out the narratives and opening up that world to me.

Heather: And Phyllis, where did you learn of the Melungeon's as well as your personal connection?

Phyllis D Light: That was probably the first time I read it. It was probably about 20 or 25 years ago. I ran across an article and this was kind of a big new thing at this time period. I was reading this article and it just explained my family. In a way, nothing else had explained my family. That sent me scurrying to investigate it more.

In the beginning, there wasn't a lot to find. It was kind of like limited Internet or maybe even pre-Internet, as far as finding lots of things to be able to search and things would just pop up. But it sent me scurrying into magazine articles and books and the Internet, trying to figure out exactly what this meant, not just for my family, but for my whole community because where I live had been, for many years kind of isolated to some extent.

So genetically, I mean, first time we had a family reunion, just the local people that came, there was like 275 and that was just people who drove a few miles. You know, so it was like everybody stayed in the community and there was not a lot of outside folks coming in. And Lindsay probably experienced some of this in Mississippi because this is just the deep south in Appalachia.

And I would say it's probably only been in the last generation or two, when kind of American culture and workforce became so mobile, that people were moving away from their hometowns, you know, for and traveling the world. So, this was kind of like pre that pre time period because I grew up in the early years 60s, 70s, 80s, you know, so it was still kind of isolated. But it just explained to my family and it explained and again, this is like my family is saying, oh, well, we have this heritage or this heritage or this heritage, you know, and there was no genetic" "testing.

It was just all visual. In the early days, it was like looking at facial features, hair, skin tone. You know, these were kind of the things I looked for and looked at in my family and in my community.

I was like, that's got to be Mellon June. Got to be. It's got to be this article.

Heather: You're both herbalist, healers, and experts on Appalachian and Southeastern folk and herbal medicine. Phyllis, what is Southern and Appalachian folk medicine and what are its origins?

Phyllis: Well, that's probably like a whole podcast by itself. So, I'll try to give you the very short version. You know, so the South, the deep South, was originally settled from the Gulf up, and the South had been explored and settled about a hundred years before the pilgrims landed at the Plymouth Rock thing.

So, you know, the Spanish first came in and roamed the whole Southeast and set up colonies and forts. And the French were more on like the coast in Florida, but they also did. And then they kind of like move, mobile, New Orleans, these were like French towns.

But all this was happening way before the Northeast was getting settled. The Spanish interaction with Native Americans were like immediate and of course also annihilating. And it's estimated that about 90% of the Native Americans in the Southeast died of diseases that the Spanish brought, illness, and annihilation.

That was the first interaction is like Native American plant use meets the humoral medicine of Europe. The Spanish brought with them their Moorish slaves. So, there was some also interaction there because they tended to run away and connect with the Native Americans also.

So, these were North Africans. All right. And then later you got the Scots-Irish coming in, you got the English coming in, you got the...but this is all Europe. We're just going to call that Europe even though each country had its own folk medicine. The conventional medicine of the Thai period was based on Galenic medicine also called Greek medicine, also called Humoral medicine, which is very much what the Spanish brought in.

We have Europe, Spain and Northern Europe, British Isles. We have Native American and then later of course, slaves are brought in from Africa and we have that influence. So, within 150, 200 years, this is the blend, but initially the first 100 years is mostly Spanish.

I find Southern folk medicine is vastly related to Mexican folk medicine, for example, because Spanish, local indigenous people, plant use, of course, a different cultural background, different language, but you can see commonalities and I've talked to fakes about that. In Mexico and in northern South America, Central America, they didn't have quite the same European influence the Deep South did, but the Caribbean's did. I find a lot of connection with the Caribbean's and Southern Folk Medicine, and I've talked to folks about that.

This is kind of like the origin and like I say, it could be a whole podcast, but we can look at it as kind of like three main, three to four main kind of groups coming together. And this fuse, this was a cultural informational fusion that created Southern Folk Medicine over about 400-some-odd years.

Lindsay: Yeah, yeah, the Native American, European, and African, those were like some of the main. And then you have South European and Northern European, or I guess Central, but those are the main one. Yeah, and it is interesting how, I just remember finding this article years after

I'd studied with Phyllis, and it was about like some of the Melungeon medicine ways, and it was talking about the blood stoppers and talking off warts and stuff like that.

I sent it to Phyllis and I said, I really think Southern Folk Herbalism and Appalachian Folk Herbalism, it's just Melungeon, it's Melungeon medicine. And so, we were going back and forth on that messaging each other, and it just, it all started clicking for me. That it was, you know, the Melungeon Folk that were continuing these traditions.

And Phyllis taught me also that in the deep South, with the opening of hospitals, I guess that would have been maybe in the 30s and 40s. Yeah, it really was the African, African, you know, mixed, you know, there's a range of African. But that really was the community that continued Southern Folk Medicine, you know.

Phyllis and Darryl Patton and some other people are really outliers in terms of, you know, what's viewed as the white community. But it really was the Black community that kept these traditions alive because they weren't permitted to go to the white hospitals. So, I found that was an interesting twist in the lineage of Southern Folk Medicine.

Phyllis: Yeah. And I would, I'm going to add to that, Lindsay, the pockets of poor white people who are in such poverty, they couldn't go to the doctor either, you know, which was like, my family, of course, is kind of mixed. But it was like, you know, if you were poor and you were white and you were in Appalachia or parts of the deep south, I mean, like my grandfather was a tenant farmer.

So, there's still these pockets, I think, of really poor white people that carried on the tradition to you.

Lindsay: Absolutely. Yeah. In more remote areas, like you're saying, in your area, northern Alabama in the foothills of Appalachia.

I also remember, you know, you saying, talking about Tommy Bass is, Tommy Bass is one of Phyllis' main teachers and one of Tommy's main influences. I thought that was an interesting twist to that story as well, if you wanted to share a bit about that.

Phyllis: Yes, one of his teachers, well, Tommy, Tommy's parents were British immigrants and from a family of herbalist in Britain, folk herbalist in Britain, they end up in" "Northern Alabama. But one of his teachers, besides his mom and his dad, was Aunt Molly Kirby, who was the black midwife that lived at the foot of the mountain. And he absolutely helped gather herbs for her and she taught him.

And she said she had gotten too old to go up and down the mountain. So, she, you know, and none of the local, her local relatives or anybody in her community wanted to learn about herbs. But Tommy already knew quite a bit from his family.

And so, they just got together and she became one of his teachers.

Lindsay: Yeah, I remember you posting that picture. And I, I just wanted to know so much more about her. I'd love to know more stories about her.

Heather: This is all such great information. Lindsay, why do you believe herbal and folk medicine has lasted longer in the Southeast and Appalachia than other parts of the country?

Lindsay: It's where it originated, first of all, you know, with the history that Phyllis laid out, all of those hundreds of years have transpired and really infused itself into this place, into this culture. And I think there's the added benefit of the mountain range. And during the Ice Age, the entire place was covered in ice except those mountains, which secured an enormous amount of biodiversity.

So that when the Ice Age receded and the glaciers receded, it was these mountains, these beautiful mountains that were repopulating the area with an enormous amount of biodiversity, which for any plant lover or any herbalist, you just, you know, your mind is blown every time that you're in the mountains, or if you're living in them, I mean, you're just living in a medicine chest. So also with the Civil War, you had, you know, that was in the mid-1800s. So, you had rations and you had an embargo basically on the South.

Provisions weren't making it here from other areas of the world, nor from the North. So, the South had to rely on what was local and available. And it really had a draw on the medicine traditions that had been simmering there for all these hundreds of years.

I think that's another reason that it lasted so long. And with the fallout of the Civil War, and the years after that was this enormous recovery period. More lives were lost, of course, you know, in the South than in the North.

And as a Mississippian, more lives were lost in Mississippi than the rest of the deep South and the South in general. In these areas where there was an herbal medicine tradition where you have people who can use what's available in the environment around them, of course, all of those things became paramount during the Civil War and the aftermath when there really wasn't a lot of circulation in terms of goods coming in from other places. And it really does have an enormous amount of biodiverse wealth.

You know, the whole, the first thing that was traded out of the US out of the early colonies was sassafras, right? It was this whole sassafras. I mean, sassafras was more important than gold almost at that time.

So, and that is a truly deep and important herb in the South. Of course, a bit controversial now because of some, I think, limited studies done on mice. But very deep and very important tradition here in the South was sassafras.

So, I think it makes sense. And then, you know, I think the South hardly ever recovered from the Civil War. So, you know, we still have health impacts in that are affecting people.

I would say heart disease and things like that are still transgenerational, in my opinion. I think that the Civil War definitely underscored these Southern folk traditions and herbalism and then the isolation that Phyllis has talked about earlier, where, you know, you've got the same generations of families there for quite a number of years. Where I'm from in Central Eastern Mississippi, I'm seventh generation, the town that I was raised in.

And I do want to say, just as an interesting point, that I found out that my ancestor, this is my fourth great grandmother's brother. I mean, I'm really digging here. His name was Hiram Brasher.

But he actually opened up the church. And Phyllis and I, I reached out to Phyllis. He opened up the church that Phyllis met Tommy Bass in the basement of that church.

So weird. Yeah, isn't that so interesting? But I just loved that because it made me feel more connected to her and more connected to what I learned from her too.

Heather: That is so crazy.

Lindsay: It is. The intermingling of the South all the tangled webs. There are many of them.

Heather: Phyllis, is there anything you'd like to add to that?

Phyllis: You know, I think Lindsay did a really good job. I would just add the extreme poverty that has been in the South since kind of day one and continued after the Civil War, after the Great Depression, into the 60s. I mean, really, the South didn't really, truly recover financially or economically from the Civil War until the 1990s, if you can imagine.

You know, so it was, I think, Lyndon B. Johnson, was it Lyndon Johnson or John F. Kennedy who read The War on Poverty and that was all about Appalachia and the Deep South.

So, it just took a long time to recover and you use what you have. And what people had was folk medicine and their traditions and hunting and gardening and food ways. And, you know, it's the big picture of survival. And that's what continued. We were really just now beginning to lose it. And I hate to see that.

And the last kind of like this new younger generation, you know, is like they don't want to know about it. And so, you know, I unfortunately I'm just seeing some of these traditions go to the wayside and in many different areas, many different countries, not just the Mulligans. But, you know, it's kind of like a tipping point, I think, in our culture and our society.

Heather: Phyllis, what are some of the key herbs used in Southern and Appalachian folk medicine? And what unique healing properties do they offer?

Phyllis: That is a really vast question. I will begin by saying with all the native plants, we know what we know about them traditionally because of Native American knowledge and usage and sharing. So how could you not honor that tradition and carry it on?

So, I want to just say how much that is appreciated and I think not often talked about and especially in herbalism today. We could start with like golden seal, black cohosh. Those are probably two big ones that receive a lot of investigation scientifically.

Number one for me is American ginseng. We could talk about American ginseng for the next two hours. It's that an important herb in Appalachia and into the deep south because of its kind of panacea ability to work on all the different body systems, including hormonal and endocrine systems.

It's my number one go-to herb, but it was a chief herb for Native Americans also. My family were wild crafters and gathered herbs in the woods for resale and forest farms. That's really kind of the wrong word, but had wild patches of American ginseng staked out.

They're in the community like, this is our patch, stay away from it. This is where we harvest, stay away from our patch. At that time period, this was a very serious thing because it was cash money and you lived or died by what you gathered out of the woods.

So American ginseng, black cohosh, golden seal would probably be the three top ones. But there are many, many, many other ones, black walnut. Wonderful.

Food and medicine. So, pick one and I can talk about something, but there are just so many wonderful plants. In Alabama, Alabama is, I want to say the fifth most biodiverse state in the Union, but it might be the fourth.

I can't quite remember if it's the fourth or the fifth. There's more biodiversity in Alabama than the majority of the other states. So, there's so many plants here, so many different species and they all have their own healing attributes.

I don't know them all. I mean, I can go out in the woods and I could probably name 150, maybe 200. And that's because this is what Tommy knew.

And each one of those plants have a use, but that means there's probably a thousand other plants I don't know how to use, whose use has kind of been lost over the generations from Native American usage. I can give you just kind of like a little bit of each one, American ginseng, currently known as an adaptogen, which helps our body adapt to stress. It has an action on the endocrine system, particularly the HPA axis, hypothalamus pituitary axis.

It helps us deal with stress a little bit better. A tiny amount goes a long way, so don't use large amounts of American ginseng. It was the only plant my dad used.

I gathered my, I started in the woods when I was 10, having my family, so that was our cash money crop. It's also a great digestive aid. It boosts the immune system.

It has so many wonderful qualities. It helps balance the hormones, reproductive hormones, black cohosh. It traditionally is considered a nervine, that it helps our nervous system work better.

More modern research has it categorized as a phytoestrogen. I go for the more traditional usage. It is useful for fertility.

It's useful for initiating labor, especially when it's tense, there's tenseness and anxiety around the labor, especially when there's tenseness and tightness and stress like, am I going to get pregnant? I'm trying to get pregnant, that kind of thing. Really super useful for that.

It does have some phytoestrogen activity for sure, but it's not at some main use. It was traditionally used for any kind of damage to the neck like whiplash. It was the whiplash remedy when your neck got jerked.

It was a spinal cord remedy. It was a peripheral nerve remedy. It was considered to help rebuild the nervous system.

That was black cohosh. Golden seal, anti-infective, contains both hydrastine and berberine. Active against many different pathogens helps boost the innate immune system.

Can be used topically or internally. Black walnut helps kill parasites. And traditionally, parasites were a huge deal.

We don't think much about parasites these days because we have like city water and we wear shoes. But, you know, back traditionally, if you're walking around barefooted and you're drinking out of creeks and streams, you know, there was hookworms, pinworms, roundworms, tapeworms. And so black walnut was a major herb against parasites.

But black walnut also has an action on the lymphatic system, helps move the lymph. It supports thyroid. It was a primary thyroid remedy in the deep south because we were far away from the ocean.

And there was no iodide salt. So, what do you use, right? There's a tenon in Southern folk medicine that the plants with the deepest roots have the strongest medicine.

This came from, interestingly, both Native American and European folk medicine had this. The deeper the root, the stronger the plant. So, trees were considered stronger medicine than little ground covers in a traditional point of view.

Because the deep roots of the trees are bringing things up from deep in the ground like the minerals up. Black walnut was one of those plants, like pine was one of those plants, oak was one of those plants. We could go on and on.

Another really good plant was evening primrose, which is beautiful. The whole plant was useful. You could boil and eat the roots like potatoes.

Evening primrose seed oil is still sold in health food stores as an anti-inflammatory omega-6 fatty acid, help reduce inflammation in the body. It's considered balancing to the female reproductive system also. There were some very key herbs.

Heather: Lindsay, were there any that you wanted to add or?

Lindsay: Well, maybe Phyllis can talk a little bit more about this one later, but asafetida is not native, of course, to this area, but it became big in Southern Folk Medicine. Peach leaves as well. I think for me, when I think about what became Southern Folk Medicine, peach that was brought over by the Spanish most likely, and that it naturalized in Appalachia.

When I lived in Western North Carolina, I would find feral peach trees everywhere, and great pest resistant fruits, and the leaves were used traditionally, and Tommy Bass used peach leaves quite a bit. In peach leaves, they're used as a nervine as well, and they're really calming to the nervous system. They're also really cooling.

Peach leaves need to be used completely dried. People need to know that when peach leaves are wilting, that it does emit a chemical that will make you extremely nauseous, and it's problematic. You need to dry peach leaves completely, or make your extraction from very fresh peach leaves.

I just want to say that because if I'm going to talk about peach leaves, that's important. And part of what Phyllis is talking about with the loss of these traditions are the ways of handling the herbs, knowing what part of the plant to harvest, knowing when to harvest, knowing how to harvest and prepare them. So, all of that is extremely important and can be lost in a blink of an eye.

And with peach leaves, it was also used for also women who were pregnant and nauseous. They can drink peach leaves to help calm the stomach. I've used it a lot for heat, general heat along the gastrointestinal tract.

So, to bring down that, bring down the acidic excretions, bring down the heat and the inflammation. And it really is just a delightful taste to it. I just, whenever I see peach leaves, it makes me so happy.

And people, and I'm thinking, giggling to myself, people think it's only about the fruit, but there's so much going on with the leaves. And then quickly poke, poke Phytolacca americana or decandrian. That plant is just so far out to me.

And from poke salad to, you know, using the root for medicine, which is another one to be very, very careful with. So, I'm going to, you know, say that as well. Yeah.

So those are the ones I wanted to add.

Phyllis: I have an asafetida story. Asafetida is from Northern Africa, Middle East. You know, it's a spice in Middle Eastern cooking.

And it came, I'm assuming it came with the slaves, but I haven't been able to document that for sure. But definitely Middle Eastern, Northern Africa. So, it has a bulb kind of similar to garlic, but it stinks like more.

And so, when I was a young girl, we wore necklaces to school, and we called it a ziphiid, not asafetida, but little kids would call it a ziphiid. And our parents would put these necklaces of bulbs around our neck to keep us from getting sick. You know, it's like, you know, we stank.

And so, they created distance between us and the next person. That's how I thought it probably always worked. Nobody wants to stand next to you if you're wearing one of these necklaces.

Well, when I was in elementary school, Huntsville, Alabama, became kind of the hub for the space industry and sending the man to the moon, and the rocket was developed in Huntsville. So, we had this influx of people came in. We had a school teacher come to our school and she was like aghast.

Here we are, third graders sitting with this stinky necklace on. She went straight to the principal and said, I am not teaching in a school with all this superstition. What is this backward place I have been moved to and I'm teaching there?

We have got to get superstition out of the school. It was such a big cry amongst the Northern transplants coming into the area. We couldn't wear a necklace to school anymore. Then our parents complained about they're sick all the time. Something worked. We called it a zippeite.

I've run across many people like my age from the deep South whose family did that. You wore this necklace to school. But I think that's cool.

Heather: Yeah, I do too. I'd like to just add really quick for our listeners out there. Please consult with your medical professional or an herbal expert before trying any herbal or plant remedy on your own. We have two herbal experts right here on our show.

So, in what ways might Melungeon medicine run either parallel or congruent with Southern and Appalachian folk medicine? Lindsay?

Lindsay: Well, I spoke to this a little earlier, how I had been reading about what, at least what the Internet deems as Melungeon folk medicine. There are a lot of things that I would definitely dispute in terms of the validity of the claims. But when I look at the baseline of, and what seems practical and what I would imagine, people would be doing considering the influences to this part of the country, then I think it is Southern folk medicine.

It is Appalachian folk medicine. There's no difference to me. I do think it's really important that people realize what we have here in the South.

We have an unbroken system of medicine from, let's see, 400, 400 plus years ago. Phyllis wrote about it in her book, Southern Folk Medicine. That's right.

Yeah, it has the blood types. Just like in Ayurveda and just like in traditional Chinese medicine, there are constitution types and in Southern folk medicine, there are blood types.

That reflects the constitution, which is important to know when you're working with people and with herbs. You want to know where their physical constitution, where it goes in terms of hot or cold or wet or dry. The same thing with the herbs that we're using.

We have this deep traditional system. We have an enormous amount of biodiversity. It's a celebration of what we have left from the earliest contact, Native American, European influences, African.

I feel like it is this celebration of what has survived. A lot of tumult and a lot of tragedy and a lot of collaboration and beauty. I think it's important to continue these traditions as much as possible.

Heather: Well, Phyllis, Lindsay mentioned your book. Would you like to share information about your books, where our listeners can find them as well as your website address?

Phyllis: Yeah. My books are on Amazon. The main one folks might be interested in on this podcast is Southern Folk Medicine, where I really get into all the history from the moment the Spanish came, all the way up to present day plus some herbal stuff, plus traditions and it's also my family story.

It's also growing up in a cotton field, which I did and growing up in the woods because these were my two sides of my family. My mom's side of the family, my grandfather was a tenant

cotton farmer, so I ran around the cotton fields all the time when I was growing up and pick cotton. I can pick cotton with the best of anybody these days, I could.

My dad's side of the family was native heritage, grew up in the woods, I started learning to identify plants when I was like 10. My family was a fusion right there with the two sides of the family coming together. It's also my family story as we go through.

And hunting and all that plus plants plus Southern Folk Medicine. So, I think it's entertaining if you're into history for sure. And you can find that on Amazon, Southern Folk Medicine.

Heather: Nice. Thank you. And Lindsay, would you like to share information about your website?

Lindsay: Yeah, you can go to http://www.lindsaykolasa.com. And I've got some writings on my blog and ways to contact me and everybody's and some audio links on there as well. You're always welcome to go there and enjoy that.

Heather: Is there anything else either one of you would like to share with our listeners?

Lindsay: I just want to say, I think it's interesting being on this Melungeon journey, finding out about my great-great-grandmother, who is visibly a mix of Native European and African. And everyone in the family always saying, oh, she was Cherokee. Of course, that's always what they want to say, she's Cherokee.

And so, I got into the DNA and I started digging and I'm like, she's an ape Cherokee. What else is going on here? And a friend of mine, she's a forensic scientist.

She looked at the image and she goes, oh, she's got African, European and native in her. And then I found that to be true. And her son, my daddy, Matt, had six toes.

And later I found out that's a big Melungeon in quality, you know, six digits on the finger or the toes. And you know, my mom always told me that growing up. She goes, yeah, daddy, Matt, can you take off his shoes?

Let's see his six toes. And I told her, I said, mom, don't you know that that's a quality of Melungeon ancestry? And she just didn't know.

And I think, you know, people in my town, they were working so hard to become, you know, not other. And they wanted to become the mainstream whites and not have issues with landholding and not have issues with all the things that unfortunately you know, what had happened to Native Americans and also Africans once they were freed, they were such a push to try to move away from those histories. And I think a lot was lost.

And it's been a huge reward for me to go back in my family tree and try to uncover stories and find out who these people are and to tell their stories. And I mean, I have a lot of people that I feel connected to in my tree. But when I look at Betty Taylor, my great-great-grandmother, and she has on her farm dress, but she has on a beaded necklace and her beaded earrings, and you can see that she is" "just this mixture of this deep and fascinating and rich story of early America.

I feel so proud of her. And I don't think that people of that time could say that about themselves then, unfortunately, because of the climate, the cultural climate. But I feel so proud of her.

And I feel so proud of the Melungeon people for their creativity and their resilience.

Heather: Exactly right, Lindsay and Phyllis.

Phyllis: Right now, I'm investigating kind of like plant-based Southern Appalachian plants and the Korean connection. So that's becoming kind of like this path, divergent path I've been going down. I started with my dad; he was in the Korean War.

And my dad was brown. He was totally brown, jet-black hair. I didn't even look like his daughter.

I mean, because I had bright red hair. We would go places and people would not know we were related. I mean, we look that different.

But my dad was in the Korean War. And he said he always wanted to go back there and live because it looked like where he was. And my dad, being an herbalist, was like, they have the same plants, you know.

They have so many of the same plants. So, then it started me and my middle name, I'm sorry. My middle name is kind of like a Korean middle name.

That got me thinking about plant connections. And so that got me digging deeper into plants. And so, there's Korean ginseng, there's American ginseng.

And when I say Korean, I'm also including not just the mountainous area of Korea, but I've got to include some parts of kind of like what is now Northern China. And so, then I got to dig in a little bit more and it was like, who are the ancestors of Koreans, Mongolian hunting tribes? Who are the ancestors of Native Americans, Mongolian hunting tribes?

There was this like connection. How many generations is, I don't even know how far back that would be. But there is like this connection there.

The only other country in the world that lays a claim to hot peppers is Korea. And there is like a lot of discussion because they were like, no, hot peppers only came from the New World. But in Korea, they have like documentation back literally hundreds of years before Columbus, of them using a" "hot pepper.

And so, they have a ginseng, they have peppers, they have bell flowers, we have bell flowers. I just found all of these plants in common. So then, and then ancestral connections with the Mongolian hunting tribes, because that's who kind of like crossed the Bering strait and became the forebears of Native Americans.

But then I've started investigating, do we use these plants the same? Did this information kind of move with Native Americans? You know, move with tribes if you see what I'm saying.

So, it's sent me off into kind of this other, deeper, look at my ancestry. And so, in my ancestry, digging back into deep ancestry, East Asian. Okay.

You know, so the ancestry was actually there. So, it was like plant use, but a lot. So why is this little area of Asia in this little area?

Well, it's a big area of Appalachia. Why do they share like more than 50 percent of the same plants? And they're using plants in the same way.

Why is this true? And so, then I discovered that back in the time period when there was a supercontinent called Pangea, there was a subcontinent called" "Laurasia. And when it moved, part of it became Korea, part of it became Appalachia.

So, in the deep south Appalachia, we have native earthworms, not in the rest of the country. And they're the same kind of earthworms that are in this part of Asia. And I'm like, there is, so I'm digging into these other connections that are sending us back.

So, we are all the same. We are all one.

You know, I keep coming back to, we are all just one. You know, at some point in time, who knows?

Heather: We are all one. That is all so interesting.

Phyllis: Yeah, isn't it?

Heather: It was truly a pleasure speaking with both of you. Thank you so much for being a part of the Melungeon Voices podcast.

Phyllis: Thanks for having me.

Lindsay: Thank you for having me too.

Lis: You've been listening to the Melungeon Voices podcast. On behalf of myself, Heather Andolina, and the entire MHA Executive Committee, we'd like to thank all of those who participated in making this episode possible. For more information, you can visit them on the web at melungeon.org.

That's M-E-L-U-N-G-E-O-N dot O-R-G.” “The information, views, and opinions expressed in this podcast episode do not necessarily represent those of the MHA. Melungeon Voices is presented by the Melungeon Heritage Association.

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