

WLRN transcript, INTERVIEW WITH LINDA CONROY for Edition 56: Women & Animals

PETTERSEN: So, Linda, can you tell our listeners a little bit about the land that we're on right now and who you are and what you do?

Linda CONROY: Sure. My name is Linda Conroy, I am an herbalist and a community organizer and *:laughs:* ...I wear many hats, and the land here I purchased about a year and a half ago. I had been looking for land that I could offer my women's herbal apprenticeship programs on, and that I could, you know, co-habitate with animals and plants, and so I found this land it was affordable and it was near the location where I wanted to be, and so it works really well. It's an interesting land on the edge of town. I think a lot of times, people who were women who are healers, and sometimes called witches, live on the edge - on edges, and sometimes I feel like...it's just curious to me that we live on these edges. So, the land is really special; It's been something I've been getting to know, so I spend a lot of time when I'm working with plants, animals, the land - getting to know the entities that I'm living and being with. I don't try to go in the way that our typical culture does and conquer the land, so, I'm watching, observing, seeing where things want to be. And the animals fit into that so nicely because they teach me and they guide me on what they want and what they need.

PETTERSEN: Awesome. Why do you think it's important for women to have a good relationship with animals?

CONROY: Well...you could even phrase that differently into say that women just have had relationships. *:laughs:* You know, we talk about our familiars, and there are familiars - they're beings that we've co-evolved with - you see goddess images from, you know - that always have relationships with animals - Artemis and, you know, a lot of other goddesses. And so, we've had relationships with animals always, and it's important for us to maintain those relationships; They are part of our lineage and are part of our heritage.

They're part of our relationship to the natural world and the land. They are of the natural world. We're animals; We're of the natural world. And so even going into that relationship and thinking about how it's a collaborative relationship, it's not conquering relationship, which is really different than our typical patriarchal culture. But you know, we're drawing on our his- our herstory, and all the relationships that we've had, you know, even pre-Christianity.

PETTERSEN: And what are the roles that the animals in your life play here at the homestead?

CONROY: So I've been raising, rabbits particularly, for over 20 years, and one of the reasons I chose rabbits is they're pretty easy on a small homestead. This is the first land that I've actually purchased, and so typically I'm renting land and so it's been easy for me to move the rabbits and have them in my environment. And they're small animals so they're easy to handle and to work with. So, the relationship with them, and their role is that they play multiple roles: One, they act as fertilizer for my garden. I'm an herbalist, I raise a lot of plants and grow a lot of plants, and so they provide fertilizer for the garden, rich incredible fertilizer. They also provide companionship. I always say the animals get me outside all winter long. You have to go out, you have to tend to them. You have to bring water to them. They keep me engaged in life and I love that. That's super important. That's more than companionship. It's really about moving into that place intending and being of service. And so I'm of service to them and their service to me. And so then one of the other things is that they provide food. So I have ducks and chickens and rabbits, and they all provide food for me. Nourishment. So I nourish them and they nourish me. And we live in that life/death/life cycle that is the natural world.

PETTERSEN: Mhm. And would you call that a symbiotic relationship then?

CONROY: Symbiotic is one way to say it, yes. "Mutual". There's definitely an agreement there *:chuckles:* when the animals come on to the land...Or

they're born here, *:chuckles:* some of them are born here. You know, we're in relationship, we know what we're doing together and why we're doing it.

PETTERSEN: And really, because we are animals we've always been in relationship with animals and there's a patriarchal relationship to animals which is one of dominance and what you're practicing here is a mutual relationship with animals where you help them and they help you.

CONROY: Right, absolutely. And it's interesting because the animals often tell me what they want and what they need. I have some new dogs on the property, for example, some young ducks, and so I'm learning from them about where they want to be, how they want to interface with the other animals; I've integrated them so that they can easily become a part of the, I guess I'll call them the pack because the chickens and ducks all live together. And they live, you know, really harmoniously. But they kind of guide me to what they want and, you know, at one point, all of the birds started telling me they wanted more time on the larger area of the property so I started letting them out at the end of the day, and they put themselves to bed at night.
:laughs:

So it's really fascinating to follow their lead a lot of times, but also be conscious of providing protection for them because they are vulnerable, like the chickens and ducks are vulnerable to birds of prey, so I make sure they're not out in the open area all day long because they would probably get eaten by some other animal of prey so... And that has happened. I, you know, have to provide protection. I've put solar lights out so raccoons can't get to them and that kind of thing.

PETTERSEN: And while you're talking I'm thinking about communication and how we speak using words, but it strikes me when I'm out with the chickens here, it sounds like they're talking, the way they cluck - do you feel that you kind of speak their language and how do you talk to the chickens? Do you talk to them like you talk to people?

CONROY: Mhm, I do, and I silently engage with them as well. There's a language that happens y'know, sometimes I'll be saying, Hey! *:makes a chittering kind of noise:* You know, call them over to me, But then there's the- just the energetic energy that goes into communicating with them. Like right now I'm trying to encourage them the ducks to go into their own building at night. They like going in with the chickens *:laughs:* like they think they're chickens. But, so I'm just standing with them and saying, Hey, go ahead, It's good, y'know.

And I'm saying that out loud but I'm also saying it silently and just cheering them on, and it takes a while, you know, to be with them and have some, y'know, patience and, let them find their own way, rather than me forcing them to go into this building, like I'd rather them find their way. And so it's that way with all of my animals, my cats...like when I first got my cats, they were kittens and I kept them inside, and they've really wanted to go outside. They were just itching to get outside. And so, you know, we've learned a way to be collaborative about them having their time outside, and so that's a mutual relationship that we've developed and figured out a way to make it work for everyone with me and them.

PETTERSEN: Mhm. Can you talk about how you communicate with the bees that you keep?

CONROY: Mhm, yeah. So it's very intuitive. It's interesting because I've done a lot of reading about how to keep bees and, this is my second incarnation of keeping bees, on this property. I've kept them previously at another location where I used to live. And in that location I actually kept bees with someone else who was much more controlling about what happened with the bees. So here I've been working with them really intuitively, and again watching them, listening to them seeing what what they might like, seeing where they might want to be placed; And that was even a thing, moving the boxes around before they got here to see where do these bees want to be, and they ended up in a place I wouldn't have thought of, but it has turned out to be the perfect place. And I do that with every being, I mean I've had plants in pots

where I've moved them all over the property until the energy feels like yes, this is where you belong, this is where you want to be. And so that's the way I'm working with all the beings on property and in my life.

PETTERSEN: Yeah, I mean, life is within all of us; It's within the plants, it's within the animals...Do you think that it's also within the stones? I mean, aren't we in relationship- like, there's Mother Earth too, right? What are these distinctions between animals and plants and the earth itself?

CONROY: Well ultimately there isn't any, right? I mean, one of the most beautiful images I like to give to my apprentice students to think about this is, if you've ever sat by the ocean or another large body of water, and just merged, and you can really feel that we are part of nature; We are of nature and every other being is as well so, how can we, you know, live that way? I think this is one of the biggest challenges we have today is how do we merge with nature? How do we work with nature? Not trying to conquer it, not try to control it, because it has its own expression. And so, being an herbalist, I encourage my students to sit with plants, but you can sit with animals. You can have a sit spot in a place in nature and watch animals come to you. I can't tell you how many times I've been sitting quietly and some animals just come up, and they won't even be affected if I'm just merged with nature. But if I'm walking really loudly and making a lot of noise, they won't come there me. And so we can live in harmony. And certainly indigenous people around the world, including all of our ancestors at some point, someplace on the planet, you know, co-habitated with nature, and had this sensibility, and we all can find it inside of ourselves. And so it's how I will choose to live my life with the animals, with all of the beings on the land where I am.

And in gratitude, I do want to mention - you know, we're talking about the land; The land that I live on is a Ho-Chunk land, and, y'know, there are indigenous people who- I'm not the owner of this land right now; I'm keeping it. Yes I purchased it, but I'm keeping and tending it and caring for it, and honoring that there are indigenous people whose land this originally was...or is really.