

Dane Zahorsky: Welcome everyone to the second episode of Practicing Community. Dane and Marisa here. We're gonna do just a quick opening and then dive right in. This is a poem that I've used before and Marissa tumbled across again today if feels perfect to set the intention and really ground in this world that we're in now just a few days past Earth Day. So wherever you are, if you can close your eyes, sit up straight, take a few good deep breaths and just be with us in this moment. This is a poem called Lost by David Wagoner.

Dane Zahorsky: Stand still. The trees ahead and bushes beside you
Are not lost. Wherever you are is called Here,
And you must treat it as a powerful stranger,
Must ask permission to know it and be known.
The forest breathes. Listen. It answers,
I have made this place around you.
If you leave it, you may come back again, saying Here.
No two trees are the same to Raven.
No two branches are the same to Wren.
If what a tree or a bush does is lost on you,
You are surely lost. Stand still. The forest knows
Where you are. You must let it find you.

Dane Zahorsky: Welcome. I'll pass it over to Marisa and she'll introduce our guest and we'll get started.

Marisa T Byrne: Thank you for that Dane. Today we're gifted with the chance to talk with Larry Hobbs. Larry has worked in a variety of both humanitarian and nature based work throughout his lifetime. From a field biologist studying whales and dolphins, to a psychotherapist working with individual and family systems, to a teacher and naturalist leading wildlife expeditions worldwide, to years of Rites of Passage training at the School of Lost Borders. Larry has dedicated many years to the 4H Challenge Program embedded within the Washington State University's extension program with a vision of making Rites of Passage available to all 4H youth. Although still conducting river dolphin research in Southeast Asia and teaching and leading natural history trips around the world, Larry's passion rests in guiding Rites of Passage and in sharing his knowledge of

the ways we interrelate with and understand the natural world that supports us all.

A big welcome to you Larry! So great to be with you again so soon! You've led such a full life! To start, can you trace for us the path through your life and how you first encountered the work of nature-based rites of passage?

Larry Hobbs:

Well my father was in the forest service when I was born and I spent a lot of time in the mountains when I was a kid with my father, with my family, and all I ever really wanted to do in life was to be able to eek out, a living camping, being outdoors. That's all I ever really wanted to do. It turned out that the easiest way to do that after going to school was to become a wildlife biologist. So I spent a time studying whales and dolphins, porpoises, manatees, and sea lions and polar bears and all the marine mammals. I love the ocean, but I love the desert too, but there was always more. There was always this yearning for, for more. So I uh, ran into a man by the name of Gregory Bateson probably I think will be known as certainly one of the greatest, if not the greatest thinker of the 20th century because he introduced systems and the paradigm that we need to be shifting into the inner connectedness. The inner relationship piece that's been missing from our culture. So Gregory was a huge influence on me. I spent seven years in an and around issues of how do we be on this planet in a good way. I first met him in Hawaii where I was studying dolphins, spent two years studying wild dolphins on Kealakekua Bay on the big island of Hawaii and some of the things that we had to do and the practices that we had to do, like we had to kill one to take it for food. Just darn near killed me and every time I'd have a question I would go to Gregory because he was the first person who ever made any sense to me. As a, a teenager. I was pretty lost and I found alcohol and drugs, and the police found me stealing cars. It was kind of an interesting thing to do, much more interesting than anything else living in the city.

Larry Hobbs:

So there was this problem of Larry that started when I was just very, very young, a problem to my family, a problem to the police, to the schools, to the church, because I was lost and no one seemed to be living in the same world that I lived in and uh, except when I was out in nature. And that was always a real home for me. So I worked with marine mammals, my graduate work was putting radio transmitters on gray whales and spent three years down in the lagoons, in Baja California studying them and behaviors. And, because the technology's really helped to understand what the animals are doing, I went crazy. There wasn't a safe marine mammal in the world for my putting radio transmitters on, in technology, diving. We just didn't really know much about these animals. And I loved having real honest to goodness data and I love kind of being a cowboy and I go out there and, how do you catch a gray whale? Well You lasso em, you know, so a lot of stories like that, put the first radio transmitters on polar bears, satellite transmitters, trying to figure out because of the oil drilling and the loss of dining areas in the higher arctic. So put radios on them. That was wonderful. But there was just, this is missing piece. And uh, I was in therapy myself. I was, uh, you know, I 'm looking deep inside and finding a hollowness, and an emptiness there. And then I, uh, so I decided that I would quit the whole world

of, of marine biology and, and wildlife biology and going into the world of psychology. And I thought, cause I, I come to a very high position in government and research and a lot of money in my research, but there was still this problem of Larry and this emptiness.

Larry Hobbs:

So I decided I would become a therapist because I thought they must know something and then I went through, my whole training was working in the field and I finally realized that I still didn't know anything, so I decided to become a teacher of therapists and then maybe I'd know something and um, I became a teacher of therapists and something cracked inside of me because I still didn't know anything. And so, you know, years went on and uh, I decided that there were other things to be done. And along came work taking people all over the world as an expedition leader and leading expeditions to the Arctic and the Antarctic and Amazon and all through Indonesia and so forth. So there was a lot that lead up, but there were still that emptiness inside, this problem of Larry that everybody tried to solve, including me.

Larry Hobbs:

And then I got a call from a friend of mine Wally Herbert, who's the greatest explorer polar explorer ever been on the planet. And we were very close and his daughter had died tragically. And he gave me a call because he had gone around trying to find some healing and he ended up with Steven and Meredith in Big Pine, California and he went on this crazy thing called a vision fast and he called me the day he came out of four days and nights, fasting alone in the wilderness and he said, you gotta meet Steven Foster and can Steven Foster has gotta meet you. And so I called up Steven and I said, well, uh, you know, Wally says I got to come down there. So I guess I do, cause I trust him. I trusted him mostly because he knew that I didn't want to do some Indian wannabe thing. I wanted something that was really solid, really grounded. And uh, I didn't know anything about it. I never fasted before. I knew nothing about what they did, but Steven said, well there's a two week training coming up. But it's full. And besides, you really need to have fasted before. I said, well, that's great. I'll be there. And I just showed up anyway. And, uh, because something called me some deeply called me and I went and did this crazy thing with Steven and Meredith, and it was the first time I actually the first that Steven had this congenital lung disease and he had to be taken out off the mountain. But when they told the story, something really significant happened, I came back with my story and I told it and I was still hoping to have the problem of Larry solved. And they didn't, they didn't solve the problem, but somebody had made a tape, one of the other participants, uh, a tape of my story and their mirroring and they gave it as a giveaway. So I took that and I was driving home up 395 and I was really pissed off at Steven and Meredith because I came down there. I spent two weeks, I spent money and they hadn't solved the problem of Larry. And I was furious. I wanted my money back, I was done with all this woo woo crap. And uh, I put that tape in my tape deck on my truck in Reno and listened. And I wept all the way to Susanville was about two hours away. And um, what I realized later was that they were the first people who ever really didn't try to fix the problem of Larry. They actually listened to what I had to say and listened to my story. And that shifted everything in me. And that started me off on this other road to doing these rites

of passage. I still do, I still lead eco tours all over the world, but my passion was working with people in the wild.

Dane Zahorsky: Thanks Larry, that vision of you in the truck is really stirring in me and u, I want, I want to chase that tale but maybe before we do, let's ground a little more, kind of building up the foundation of some of these meaty concepts feels important. One of the things that I've learned in this field over the past few years and that I think is kind of applicable across fields is that in order to really truly communicate we have to define our terms, we have to know what we're talking about. And so I, I wonder if you would discuss a little what you use words or think about words like nature, or rites of passage. You know, what do they mean to you in specific? What are your experiences of them and how have they changed over the course of the time that you've been doing this work?

Larry Hobbs: Really good questions because the, the significant part of my childhood were in, in nature. I mean I lived in Los Angeles area so there was not much there except in the alleys were I'd mostly cause trouble, but nature can be in an alley, it was a refuge for me actually because it wasn't a place where everything was cultivated and made neat. It was a place where there was some chaos, where there was a chance for interesting and different things to happen. Um, but there is something that happens in, in nature something that happens in ceremony in nature that changes everything. And I think it's what Steven called the big lie and that is that we are not connected to the natural world, that we are somehow separate and different and that is the big lie and it's to create real change in social justice, real change and environmental relationship is going to take that shift from thinking that we're separate from nature to being part of nature. There is no separation period. And when I, when people who go out into nature and spend time there, especially alone, fasting where there's nothing else to do, something shifts inside of us, a lot of it feels pretty mysterious to me because I'm a male and I'm a scientist. I want to explain these things, I really can't. But I do know from my own experience and experiences of hundreds of people that I've been privileged to work with that something fundamental shifts inside of us. And it may be that we have a lot of kids in common and they may go back out into their environment and they may be thrown in jail again or something, but something has changed inside them and they come back oftentimes and they say: Oh, I didn't quite get at that time, but yet there's something really essential to me that I need to do.

Larry Hobbs: So we always tell people that the incorporation that is bringing this back into your life takes about a year. But of course it can be longer or shorter, but you'll come to the forks in the road along the way in that incorporation time, that time of bringing these experiences in nature back into your life where you'll just have to make a choice and sometimes you'll choose to do things the old way. Sometimes you choose to do it the new way and knowing that there's no right or wrong way to do that. You're just making choices. Um, over time you just become more part of this infinitely interconnected, beautiful world. So especially as I get older, you know, it becomes a part of the mystery that there's the giving into the mystery that is really required to live, to live our part. That

part of the system of nature that's us. And I think that's a. and that's what happens out there whether you like it or you don't like it or understand it or you don't understand it, does happen and it happens over and over and over. And it is precisely the change that I think that we needed as a species. If we're going to survive on this planet.

Marisa T Byrne: So what I hear you say is what fundamentally shifts is this idea of connection.

Larry Hobbs: Absolutely.

Marisa T Byrne: And that idea of connection provides an avenue now to walk in making decisions that lead to further connection or that continue with the disconnection. Is that right?

Larry Hobbs: Exactly. Exactly, because we're shifting in our culture. We have to, it's required of us at this point to shift from a kind of linear relationship to the world where A leads to B, which leads to C and it can be a fairly well known path, but what we need to switch to as a relational world because that's the way the world actually is and we needed to learn how to fit into the infinitely interconnected relational world rather than this idea that somehow we're separate. We're different. We can do whatever we want and ignore the consequences of an inter related world.

Marisa T Byrne: And there's no place better to see that than to actually go and to be a part and observe ants or birds or weather or those pieces where we can experience the infinitely connective relational world. And so the fasting, Can you talk a little bit about how that helps to dive into nature?

Larry Hobbs: Well we're always so busy in our culture, where even just around food where we're thinking about it, we're buying it, we're preparing it, were eating it, we're cleaning up after it, then we're thinking about the next meal and when you take that away, just that, alone, it's terrifying. And then you take away the telephone and the, and the books and the television and then all the media, all of that stuff. You take that away and it's even more terrifying, you know, with kids or adults when they go out oftentimes, oh man, this is great. I'm going to get away from this stuff. This is going to be fantastic. And then two hours go by and, say, Oh my God! I've never been alone. We are never alone in our culture. We're doing something. And the fasting allows not only the spaciousness and the terror to come, you got to meet that terror. And it turns out that the terror is me. It's not, it's not out there. It's actually me. And when you get through that and then all of a sudden you actually start seeing the world, you start seeing and relating. I, I just finished my own fast walking fast on the San Pedro River in southern Arizona and I was walking in the river a lot of the time and with the river and the metaphors that come out are endless, whether it's a river or watching an ant or a sunrise or whatever it is that's in front of us instead of watching it, you are part of it. And that changes everything.

Dane Zahorsky:

I really appreciate how you brought in food and how much our lives are really built around it and the various unspoken ways we organize around it, I've often seen young folks that I've worked with in teaching meal preparation as a lifeskill have their minds blown when they realize how large a force it actually is, especially within a community context. I also really appreciate how you break down fasting into it's component parts, I think it tends to be one of more accessible paths to that liminal space, and is quite familiar to many folks in the Youth Passageways community, but for those not as familiar with the various approaches to passageways, it feels important to take a moment and acknowledge that it's an incredible practice that also stands within a huge constellation of ways that various cultures have been and are with those wild places. Following that thread and maybe weaving it in a bit more, a question that naturally arises is why for you, this practice, in this way with these people? Those being the School of Lost Borders, 4H, the WSU extension. etc, why is this the practice that you've dedicated your life to?

Larry Hobbs:

Well, partly it's just because that's what great spirit or whatever showed me, uh, when I went out with Steven and Meredith, after I had done that initial two week training, I went back and did a month long training and then when Steven was dying I actually moved to Big Pine to help with his dying and also helped carry the School through the transition from a kind of a ma and pa outfit to a little bit more of a business under Joseph and Em, and everything that was done in that ceremony made sense to me it fit into places inside of me that had been empty. I had to learn about doing ritual and ceremony. I didn't know anything about that and I've found that as I entered into that ceremonial world, that magic things happened, that, uh, that instead of seeing something from the outside when it's held in a ceremonial context, I am part of it. So I'm part of nature and part of this whole magical thing that can happen when things are held in ritual space. I had been a therapist, a family therapist, and, and it did fine and there's certainly a place for that, but there's also something fundamental that's missing in the office space, the separation from the natural world that yeah, change can happen, but it's very difficult for healing to happen in the therapeutic relationship. It can, but that's not the focus. The focus is like you've got a 1956 Chevrolet and it's not running right. You just kind of change the spark plugs and you know, flip a switch or two and it's all going to be good. That's not really the way healing happens.

Larry Hobbs:

I was very lucky while I was working as a therapist in Seattle to belong to a group of people who wanted to specifically bring healing into the therapeutic relationship and we spent five years together every Wednesday morning exploring that. How can you bring healing into the therapeutic relationship. And I think we made some real headway because we looked at it as a system where we were part of the family system or part of a social system. But it was still missing that, that what feels and felt like a central component to me, which was actually being out there in nature where you're faced with your own fears and you have to make decisions based on that. When you hear the growling in the middle of the night or the twigs breaking near your camp, you have to respond to that, and you have and you have the opportunity because you're in a little bit of an

altered state. Not a lot, but a little bit of an older stage. You have the opportunity to actually watch yourself and watch your, what you do, and then the biggest magic for me in this particular approach is really two-fold. One is setting an intention, a clear intention going into, to the sacred are liminal space. Setting an intention is critically important because it sets into action things again that are unexplainable to me, uh, where over the next year, after you've done this ceremony, the world will present you over and over and over with situations that will test your intention, that will say, am I the person that I used to be or am I this person that I'm claiming, this intention that I have? Critically important for transformation, for healing.

Larry Hobbs:

The other part of it is the hearing, listening and speaking, the story that you have and having it mirrored back to you in a good way. Where the mirroring is not fixing you, my dear friend Joseph tells people, and I've begun to tell people when they come to the ceremony, you're not broken when you get here and you're not going to be fixed when you leave, because it's not about fixing you. It's about healing, which is an inner process. And um, so having the story mirrored back, that's the magic that happened to me with Steven and Meredith. They just mirrored back my story. They just told me what actually happened out there because when you're in your story, you don't know what's happening because you're in it. But a skilled person can reflect that back to you without tarnishing, without changing it much, you know, it's pretty clean, near. And just being seen, just being witnessed is critically important to healing. In the 1980's when I was training to be a family therapist, they, uh, University of Washington was very involved in trying to quantify how therapy works so that we could make it into a science and a, which is an important piece. There are things about that that we need to know. There was one study done where they had people in crisis talking to a therapist, to a person of the clergy, to a neighbor next door, and a few other people, family members, and what they found was that the healing, actually was about the same, and the underlying conclusion was that it's witnessing that's important to us. Just being witnessed, not being fixed, not being changed, but just being witnessed and the change and in the healing will actually emerge out of that, organically. We want to know exactly why it is and what we do and how it happens in when this happened, well do this. We want that mechanistic way, because that's where we are and our culture and have been, but the world is asking much more of us now. The world is asking us to trust the unseen trust forces that we don't understand and in nature, one of the things that I used to teach a course called Science as a Way of Seeing and I took undergraduates out and uh, kind of artsy folks and liberal arts people and uh, who hated science or we're scared of science and we'd do all these kind of crazy things and nature. And uh, it was interesting to see, I got a comment from one of the students one time in an evaluation that said, well, I was taking a course on spirituality and I was taking a course on science and I got more spirituality in my course on science that I did in my course on spirituality. And we talked about it and it was that, that we really treated the whole system systemically than science is a good thing. And spirit is a good thing in psychology is a good thing. So yeah. Really an important piece that we, that we be in the outdoors, that our stories get heard and that we get mirrored and that we go with an intention.

Dane Zahorsky: I love that you spoke specifically to the idea that nature is asking more of us and that there is a response there, which actually feels like a perfect segue to come back to one of the other threads, the Wayfaring fast that you and Marisa both have just experienced. I wonder, Marissa, if you'd would lay some groundwork and context and offer a little about your own story just coming back from Arizona and then we can dive into whatever waters arise from there.

Marisa T Byrne: I was fortunate enough just last week to spend some time on the San Pedro River by way of the dream of a man named James Mahoney. His dream was to have a fast, a vision fast, but a walking vision fast, much like the walkabout. And Steven Little, who's been mentioned a lot today from the School of Lost Borders was also really interested in this way of what it is to go on a journey. During a vision fast, the fasters or participants are alone and often have one home base that they can choose to venture out from and then come back to. Whereas in this wayfaring fast, the fasters walked over 15 miles in about four and a half days along the San Pedro River in the middle of the desert, about 10 miles north of the border of Mexico. I assisted on this fast, helping hold the base camp, and got some precious time to connect with the nature there: the koatis, the Vermillion Flycatcher, and the white tailed deer, as well as the flowing desert river. For you Larry, what did the traveling inspire or invite in a different way than for instance a specific place that you would have been at? How did the movement inspire a difference in the fast for you?

Larry Hobbs: The vision fast, the vision quests are about death and rebirth. That's what a rite of passage is. It's actually a death to the old way, to the old position in society, whatever that is, that you're there to be claiming, to be making an intention around. It is a death and rebirth. And so the, the underworld journey that Steven loved and did a number of times with people was really, a different kind of manifestation of that death and rebirth. Um, the river as a metaphor was fabulous. I mean Steven didn't do it on a river it, he did up in the desert, in the California desert. Um, but, the movement itself mirrored the movement in life for me and there really was no way to avoid the, the fatigue, times when, because fasting and walking in and around above through the river, there's no way to avoid, at least for me, the thoughts of almost paralleling, getting older, that you're getting tired and tired, less and less energy as it goes along. How am I going to cope with this? What is nature showing me along this river that can help me go gracefully through this life. I mean the Buddha, aging sickness and death. That was the deal and we're all faced with that and yet we avoid that and until we can embrace it fairly fully, we're not going to live very fully, you know. And so, um, yeah, that sense of moving through to a new home, it was quite different from staying in a home and going in and out of it perhaps during the days, but very, very different experience of parallel to the movement in life. Subtle but very profound for me.

Dane Zahorsky: I love that you spoke to the idea that nature is asking more of us and that there is a clear response there, which feels like a really good segue to come back to the the other thread of the fast that you and Marisa both have just experienced. So I wonder, Marissa, if you would lay some groundwork and context and offer a

little about your own stories just coming back from Arizona and then we can dive into whatever waters arise from there.

Wow, there's so much there, especially the way your imagery of the river seems so connected to the work of another one of our 'yelders,' one of the Youth Passageways guardians, Gigi Coyle and her work with Kate Bunny as well as many others on the Walking Water pilgrimage to walk from the Owens Valley Watershed all the way into Los Angeles and to be in that journeying and interacting with the water, and to invite some of the same ideas and reflections I'm hearing you describe.

What's most exciting, for me, as someone who's just learning about this new way of being with fasting or at least, one of many other ways, is how pertinent and how clearly connected it feels as a response to our changing world, world in the liminal space of climate change, and the newly growing population of climate refugees or those wayfarers robbed who've been separated from their homes through violence, or left as the only way to survive and protect their families, that we're all in a process of trying to understand what it means to be from a place and what it means to be amongst many, to be indigenous or settler to seek or to root in one's homeplace. There are so many different threads being here woven together. And it leads me to ask, if the world not, not just your inner world, or your, immediate experiences, or even problem of Larry, but, but the problem of the world, the relevance of and urgency of what is so clearly happening in the world right now. How did those fit into your experience? Or did they?

Larry Hobbs:

I did set an intention before I went on the walk. And the first piece of it was that, uh, I work in prayer for wisdom. And it wasn't so much personal wisdom as wisdom that we need to move forward, wisdom, I mean the word could have been love or compassion or inclusiveness, but I use the word wisdom because I think of wisdom as being a knowledge of the system that we're in rather than just the pieces of it. And so I was walking in that sense of prayer or a open reception to whatever messages the river was giving and the, the natural world was giving and the metaphors where were endless. I mean, one of the main ones was that we, that we really need to pay attention to what's right in front of us. I can get lost in, you know, in worry and fear. Fear is one of the things that's really plaguing, you know, all of these issues that we're facing are fear-based. Doesn't matter which, you know, you're talking about climate change, environmental destruction, social justice. It's all about fear, gender equality, racial equality. That all comes from fear. And the fear often is, is somewhere down the line. It's not actually what's happening right now. What's happening right now is just what's happening right now, and the river was great for that because in these walking things, because I can get all lost in thoughts and emotions around what's going to happen around the next bend or what does that sound in the night or what's going to happen, but it's always out in front of me. And one of the really important messages was no, you just need to take this next step and you need to take it in a peripheral or receptive manner.

Larry Hobbs:

So, for me it was totally relevant to, to, to dealing with all these polarities and differences that we're facing in the world today. Most of that is based on fear and we've got to learn to overcome that. And part of the overcoming of it is realizing that we're all together in this. Every breath we take is, you know, 500,000 molecules that Mozart breathed, you know, or, the person next door breathed, you know, uh, at that level where we're all in this together. And, and when we can see that clearly that it's just what's right in front of us that's important and it needs to be dealt with. A lot of that fear just goes away. And to me that was metaphor for exactly what's been called before, uh, in these times, these very challenging times. I live in an area of where the political climate is quite different from my own political views and for me to listen carefully and rather than respond and reject what people say because they don't agree with me or I don't agree with them. It's an extraordinarily difficult practice because I gotta, you know, I, I get challenged or hurt or scared and then I don't listen to them, but if I can just go with the river, go with that flow. Then, it's actually beautiful. Uh, I just talked one of my buddies who's, you know, out where I live is a big gun advocate and an NRA person. And I asked him about this deal with the kids and he says, ah, these kids are just being brainwashed by their parents. That's why they're showing up. And I said really! And that brought up some feelings, but instead I just, I said, well, what do you think the, what do you think the problem is? You know, because he was standing, it's not guns that's the problem. So he said, well, you know, it's that our values, our whole system is a mess. Isn't that beautiful, you know, to just listen and to hear that wisdom out of this guy that I would have just, you know, could have fought with and gotten nowhere, just keep the polarization going. But instead I heard this beautiful wisdom, you know, because yeah, it is. Guns are just pieces of metal, you know, it's that we've lost the values that value each other and human life and that's something that can be regained. And I hear it from all the people that go out questing pretty much. But especially I hear it from the kids, you know, they really get that we're interconnected and how important that is.

Marisa T Byrne:

So one of the ever present questions in our incorporation work for us as guides or mentors is the piece of self care. And a question that comes up again and again is how do we maintain good self care in these times where we're often giving so much. I've heard from you that you do a yearly renewal fast. What does that do for you with your walking intention? And what other ways do you find that you are able to incorporate caring for yourself while caring for others?

Larry Hobbs:

That's such a good question that is so difficult to do. But it's essential. Yeah. I do go out in a fast every year or two, sometimes I host a renewal fast for Pacific northwest guides every two years and that's certainly part of it. I think that being in connection with other guides is really important for me to talk about. It is, and you know, I'm very lucky in that I live out in the mountains, I live in a place where I can walk out my back door and...yesterday I walked, there was a river, the beautiful Cle Elum River is about a half hour walk out my back door, so I was walking and I saw a deer and then there was another deer and it turned out there were about 12 deer and it's the same group that I've been trying to become part of this group of deer for a couple of years now. And um, they're

pretty standoffish, I haven't seen him this year and uh, but just to be quiet and still and stay there and within 20 minutes or so, uh, they were within a couple of feet of me. They haven't let me touch him yet, but I'm working on it. But, but to go out into nature on a daily basis for me is really important. As well as to surround myself with like-minded people as much as I can within the environmental work that I do. But also in the, in the rite of passage work, I spoke with a number of people on my way over driving here to Seattle today, uh, other people that do this work important to get that kind of support because it's not part of the mainstream we're not, we're kind of thought of as kind of the crazy edge of the red-headed stepchild of the world. And it's important that we be able to get support from one another.

Dane Zahorsky: I would say that has been the driving motivation behind, starting these conversations in the first place is, I don't know who first said it in this network but this idea of a community of practice has really been at the center: what it looks like to be fallible, and learning how we do it and failing together so that we can succeed together. So, we begin to transition towards closing out our conversation, I've got just one more question, though Marisa may have others.

Dane Zahorsky: It was interesting to hear just a minute ago, you speak to a few different words. One of those being love, which is a place I tend to always come back or gravitate towards. I've been a fan of the theologian Teilhard de Chardin for a very long time. And one of the things that he talked about was that love was the most natural manifestation of human behavior that connected us to the world and that when we show love to each other, when we practice that, that intention setting and that vulnerability and openness that we were in so many ways, being the feedback loop of nature coming back to itself. And I, I just wonder in your experiences with young people and your experiences with adults, do you see that practice of vulnerability, of openness and love at the center or how, how would you describe what comes out of these experiences that you have? And when we come back out of them, how are they returned or reflected by the communities that are calling us back?

Larry Hobbs: Well, the image that comes as I listened to you talk, was, it was actually of the youth when they come back out of, you know, three days and nights out in the wilderness alone and there's something in their eyes, there's something in the way they are, that I'm in tears every time I'm just weeping, I welcome them back into the circle. And it's true for the adults too. But something about the kids. And, invariably it comes up when they're telling their stories, how, you know, these are teenagers. I mean, I was one, where I didn't, I didn't have a place to experience these things. But, uh, they always talk in gratitude for their parents. I mean, and it, it's not prompted. This is just what happens out of the ceremony, out of this time alone. They just realize how grateful they are for schools and parents and things that they've done. A lot of them were fighting against it. And if left to their own devices, they end up being in the same kind of mess polarities that we get into. But, something shift, something happens out there and our hearts are open and, and when I came out of just this recent fast, but every time I come out of a fast, I end up with this time of just openness and

vulnerability. That is, almost kind of scary. You gotta shut down and survive in this culture. You really do. Just driving here, coming over the pass into Puget Sound Basin I can feel myself closing down because there's so much, and we're going to end up having to protect our selves and the ceremony opens it up so that we have, that seed has been planted. No matter what happens when people go back, that seed has been planted and I sometimes people ask me, well you're sending these kids back to the same mess they came from. And is that a really unethical thing to do? And my responses is that I know that there's more and I can't just do nothing. And I hundred percent believe that the seeds have been planted. They've been germinated and that they're going to sprout and the we can't and should not be able to control that. That's part of the process of just emerging out of who we are, which I get full circle back to what you said about, about love and interconnection. That is our ground to being like me coming over into the city. We protect ourselves from that because it's too. It's too vulnerable, is too scary to just be out there. And uh, the quest, the fasting time gives us an opportunity to have at least experienced that in our lives. And we may go hold up again.

Dane Zahorsky: It reminds me of a story that Steven told me one time, about, they had this kid who was terrified of the dark, absolutely terrified of the dark and uh, but he went out there and he did his three days and nights alone in the wilderness. And something shifted inside him. And he went back home and they didn't hear anything. And about six months later in the San Francisco Chronicle, there was this article about the cat burglar. This was a burglar that went out at night time and was stealing electronics, All over Marin County up north of San Francisco. And so they, then the police couldn't find this person and there was stuff disappearing. And finally somebody saw a person going up into a cave on Mount Tamalpais, carrying some electronics and they told the police and the police got him. And it was this kid, you know. So we don't know what's going to happen. You know, my fantasy is that he'll be thrown in Juvie, and finally get it and he'll this work to other people, you know, because he'll get it, the seed has been sown no matter what it looks like at this point. I have seen it over and over with kids that kids come back, uh, because we'd been working in the public schools for a number of years, have been able to have the opportunity to go into the graduation in the school district. And uh, the kids will stand up and say, you know what's happened to them out of this experience and it does break it down so that they can, they can experience that interconnection.

Marisa T Byrne: Thank You for that and for those stories. And as we're closing here, nature connection looks like so many different things. It looks like Eight Shields programs that are sprouting up all over the United States. It looks like medicine walks, it looks like fasts. It looks like an intentional walk in the park. Our conversation today has heavily focused on the vision fast and that's one way of connecting. However nature connection can start with something as simple as a different way of looking at things: a witnessing, through sitting with a flower and its scent, listening to and watching the birds. This can begin to open our connection, open our hearts, open our minds, just open ourselves to the connection that you spoke of Larry. What nature offers is connection to a

broader scope of life. To where we came from, to right where we belong. And we thank you Larry, so much for spending this time with us. Thank you. It's been really a pleasure to listen to your stories. And to hear the wisdom of your own story and how you now lead others to this work. And we thank the listeners here as well. Here we are in my home in Seattle, with birds flying around, part of the more than human world too! So before we close, are there any final words you have Larry?

Larry Hobbs:

Well, I would just love to speak a bit about different ways in which this connection can happen. Because Steven and Meredith were always teaching us just the bare bones and they always encouraged us, make it your own, whatever that is. I've been lucky enough in training people for our many years to encourage people to do that. There's people using this. We wrote a paper recently where we documented, there had been 50 youth organizations in the Pacific Northwest that have been directly affected by it people who have come and trained with us just to do this kind of work, but they've taken it back into their workplace and innumerable different ways from a, a walk with a client in the park or one woman's working with kids who are really having a really rough times within in public school system and taking them out and they walk with an adult in the woods because they can't be left alone. There's, there's infinite ways to do this. I would encourage everyone to, to find their way, whatever that is, but that the work itself, the connection with nature, I think is, is critical for our survival as a species on the planet, and I mean that seriously, not metaphorically, that we are at a crisis point and that if we don't reconnect with nature and find our place in nature, we're in deep trouble, and soon. So, um, yeah, encouraging everyone to do whatever you do!

Marisa T Byrne:

Thank you Larry Hobbs. And to end today's episode, we have a quote by Thomas Berry: "Our relationship with the earth involves something more than pragmatic use, academic understanding, or aesthetic appreciation. A truly human intimacy with the earth and with the entire natural world is needed. Our children should be properly introduced to the world in which they live." So may those introductions and deepening be known. Thank you.

Thank you for joining us on this month's episode of Practicing Community. We're excited to announce you can now find us on iTunes, Stitcher, Soundcloud, and Google Play or wherever you find your podcasts. We'd love to know what you think, if you have the time, feel free to leave us a review or reach out.

You can locate further information about nature connection on our website at www.youthpassageways.org. There you will find programs and YPW partners who are doing this kind of work globally, as well as blogs and a resource list. And following, Larry has more to say about the 4-H Rites of Passage Program that can be adapted and brought to any 4-H agent across North America.

Larry Hobbs:

One of the wonderful things about working within the 4H program is that it's just so America, it is just a part of the heartland of the American way. And our, website for instance, is on the Washington State University server. And so any

time that people have questions to teachers or administrators or parents or community people, uh, we can refer them to the Washington State University website, which gives a lot of credibility to the work that we're doing. And uh, it's also true that every county in the United States has a 4H agent associated with agriculture through Agricultural University in the state. And anyone can start a 4H club out of anything. It can be a church group or a boys and girls club or any group can be made into a 4H club. And then you have access to the forage structure, and that includes insurance, for instance, like wilderness insurance for new guides that's one of the reasons I went to 4H. It also includes insurance for the participants at twenty five cents a shot for kids. We have criteria, you have to have done your own fast, you have to have done a training fast and you have to have done a mirroring workshop and you have to have done a base camp assisting and co guide with a, with a trained guide, which is all stuff that many people have already done. And then you can go to your 4H agent in any county in the United States and start a program. We have all the literature, it's all digitized and we also are working on a mentors guide that will be done by the middle of April, that has a severance exercises for community members to mentor kids as well as incorporation exercises in what to do and incorporation. So that's all available through our 4H program.