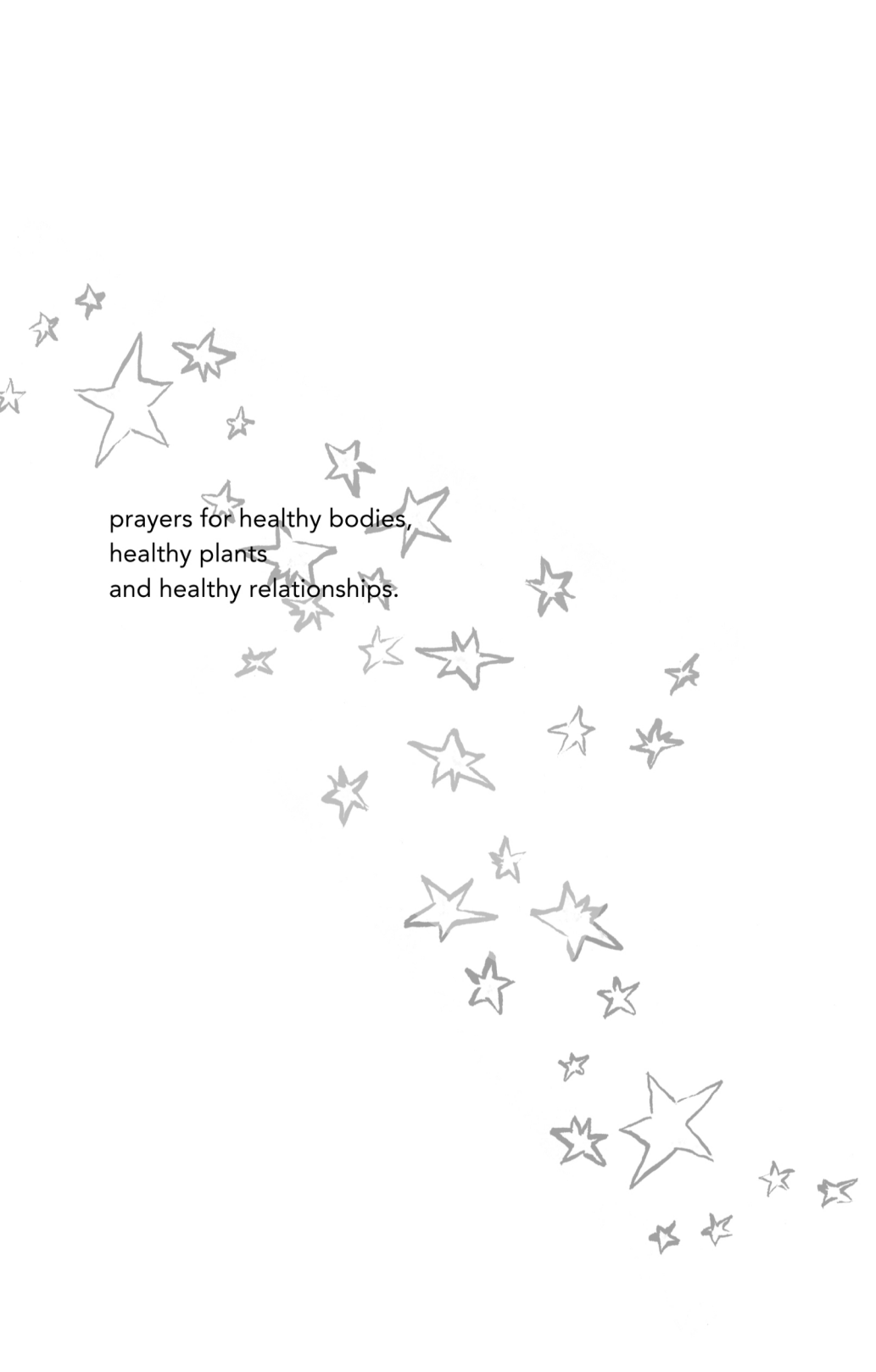


# HPV, NBD.

By Lauren Giambrone  
of Good Fight Herb Co.

Illustrated by Lilah Friedland



prayers for healthy bodies,  
healthy plants  
and healthy relationships.

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## **part one**

my deal with HPV: a story of lived experience  
for info share & support

**don't worry, sweetie, we all have it.**

i don't mean to be insensitive and say *oh HPV is no big deal (NBD)* because i know firsthand that it can be very scary and something to worry about... it's just everywhere, hunny, and there are plenty of tools we can use to clear it, kick it, treat it and prevent things like premature surgery and cervical cancer.

i promise.

so, let's get into it...

hi, i'm lauren. i'm a queer, femme Community Herbalist writing this to offer support in understanding and treating HPV and cervical dysplasia because i've been there. more than once. and i've supported others in their care and treatment of cervical cellular abnormalities and i wanna tell you babe,

**WE GOT THIS.**

the following is my story of lived experience to share in hopes that you feel less alone, less afraid, more informed and confident to work on your care, whether your doctor tells you to do nothing for now and follow up in 6 months, or advises a surgical procedure.

you have choices,  
you have tools,  
you have self determination.

the protocol i offer and discuss is not mine alone. it is a collection of care, support, experience and knowledge that i received from others, and choices i made through assessing my needs and desires based upon the information i had and knowing the body i live in. it worked for me, worked for numerous clients i supported, and now i really wanna give it to you, XO.

## but wait, what is HPV?

the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) is a group of over 200 viruses, many of which are harmless to us. about 40 strains of the virus are transmitted through sexy intimate times via skin to skin contact. there are two strains (6 & 11) that typically cause genital warts (papillomas) and are considered low-risk because they do not cause or develop into cancer. there are other strains (16 & 18 in particular) that can lead to cancer and are considered high-risk.

we can have strain(s) of HPV and not know because we're not symptomatic. however, developing genital warts is a sure way of knowing we have a strain of the HPV virus. if you don't have genital warts and are a person who has a cervix, having a pap smear is the only way we can currently detect whether or not we have a high risk strain of HPV, because when we do, dysplasia can occur on the cervix, and as in my case, on the vaginal wall as well. there are strains that the body will clear, and others that the body will suppress into dormancy, both ensured by a healthy, supported immune system.

### *Pap smear/pap test*

*a method of cervical screening used to detect potentially precancerous and cancerous processes in the cervix. (from wikipedia)*

### *Cervical Intraepithelial Neoplasia (CIN)*

*also known as cervical dysplasia, CIN is the abnormal growth of cells on the surface of the cervix that could potentially lead to cervical cancer. more specifically, CIN refers to the potentially precancerous transformation of cells of the cervix. (from wikipedia) author's note: the word 'potentially' is very important here. having dysplasia does not equal cancer, it just means it can potentially lead to cancer if left untreated.*

if you are a person who has a penis, there is currently no testing for high risk strains of HPV, but the development of genital warts will let you know you got that viral load, sweetie.

dysplasia, all the feels and what i did to clear that shit. in 2008 i was one of three apprentices at herb school and went to Planned Parenthood for a routine gynecological exam. for the first time in my life, i had an abnormal pap smear, was diagnosed with HPV and was told to return for a colposcopy; a procedure where a vinegar solution is applied to the exterior surface of the cervix, making it known where there are cellular abnormalities (dysplasia), so that a biopsy (a nick of cervical cells taken off) can be taken and sent to a lab to decipher what stage the abnormality is at. high risk strains of HPV can cause abnormal cellular changes, and if left untreated, these changes could potentially lead to the development of cervical cancer.

i had no idea what the hell HPV was and what the diagnosis of Moderate Dysplasia/CIN2/ High-grade Squamous Intraepithelial Lesion (HSIL) was that i received from the biopsy results. with all due respect and deep love and support for Planned Parenthood as a whole, i was given absolutely no information about HPV or clarity on this diagnosis and felt really f'ing scared.

*words i remember hearing: abnormal, dysplasia, cervical cancer, surgery*

*things i remember feeling: fear, throat closing up, panic, get me the f outta here*

**something really important that i want to tell you...**

these abnormal cellular changes, or dysplasia, take their sweet ass time to develop towards cancer, and you absolutely have plenty of time to work with herbs and nutrition if you want to, before having a surgical procedure, if at all. and that's not to say that a surgical procedure like the LEEP isn't useful or isn't a tool to consider, that is totally your choice and i support you!, and it's typically conveyed by doctors as routine and not a big deal. i'm here to say it's not necessarily the first and/or only step to take and in my opinion, i feel it can be prescribed prematurely. LEEP is typically the only tool docs have to offer, no matter the stage of dysplasia. so while i had a high risk strain of HPV that caused my cervical dysplasia, i had a moderate case (compared to mild or

severe, or precancerous or cancerous. take a look at the classification system on the next page) and therefore, actually had time to make changes and take action.

#### *colposcopy and biopsy*

*what happens is, you get up on the exam table with the paper cloth robe and your feet on the stirrups and the speculum in for longer than a routine pap. in my experience, it's really uncomfortable and low key painful. a vinegar solution is applied on the surface of your cervix with an extra long q-tip type device, which highlights any dysplasia, and is done after a pap smear has come back with abnormal results. then the doctor will most likely want to take a biopsy of any dysplasia found, which allows us to know what stage the dysplasia is at (see classification system on the next page). the biopsy feels very uncomfortable, but happens fairly quickly. the doctor nicks off, or takes a sampling of the cells in question (as made evident by the vinegar solution) and this is the part that is most uncomfortable in my experience. if you're able to take it easy after the biopsy, please give yourself that. i've had multiple colpos and biopsies and i always feel really heavy in my pelvic region and slightly to pretty crampy afterward, and sometimes spot bleed. just need those sweatpants and soft surfaces under my booty and good shitty movies after this. and, in my experience, all the navigating of the health care system, of what is happening in my body and not knowing yet the stage of the dysplasia, is just emotionally taxing and draining and worth taking a rest from if possible.*

#### *LEEP procedure*

*LEEP stands for Loop Electrosurgical Excision Procedure. a small electrical wire loop used to remove abnormal cells from your cervix. LEEP surgery may be performed after abnormal cells are found during a Pap test, colposcopy, or biopsy. (from Planned Parenthood's website)*



PAPANIC-OLAOU CLASSIFICATION	OLD SYSTEM	BETHESDA SYSTEM	OTHER TERMS	WHAT DOES IT MEAN?
CLASS I	Normal	Within Normal Limits		Phew! Nothing unusual. Continue with your normal schedule of screenings.
CLASS II	Atypical	Benign cellular changes or Atypical Squamous Cells of Undetermined Significance (ASCUS)		Something looks out of the ordinary but the person who read the test couldn't tell what that was. Could be traces of another infection or could be nothing at all. Your practitioner will most likely recommend another PAP test in a few months.
CLASS III	Mild Dysplasia	Low-grade Squamous Intraepithelial Lesion (LSIL)	Cervical Intraepithelial Neoplasia 1 (CIN1)	Mild abnormalities in some cells on the surface of your cervix. The cells look somewhat different from normal cervical cells but are not classified as cancerous.
	Moderate Dysplasia	High Grade Squamous Intraepithelial Lesion (HSIL)	CIN 2	Some cells in the epithelium, or skin, of the cervix look very different in size and shape from normal cells. These are also not classified as cancer, but are more likely to progress to cancer if left untreated.
	Severe Dysplasia	HSIL	CIN 3	Some cells look highly abnormal and may be found deeper in the epithelium, but are still not classified as cancerous and still have not moved outside the epithelium
Class IV	Carcinoma in Situ	HSIL		Cancerous cells in the epithelium, or skin of your cervix that have not spread to other parts of your cervix or other parts of your body.
CLASS V	Invasive Squamous Cell Carcinoma/Adenocarcinoma	Squamous Cell Carcinoma Adenocarcinoma		Cancerous cells that began in the squamous cells but have moved into other cervical tissue or other organs.

this Classification Chart is provided by The Down There Health Collective's HPV Zine, published in 2007. it's been over 10 years since the printing of this zine and chart, yet i find it still incredibly helpful. you can also web search "cervical cytology chart" and find other charts and info available.

ok, so backing up a bit...

i felt bullied and pressured by the nurses at Planned Parenthood into scheduling a LEEP procedure once i was given the Moderate Dysplasia/CIN2/ High-grade Squamous Intraepithelial Lesion (HSIL) diagnosis, which is a surgical procedure i also knew nothing about. there was no sitting me down to explain this all to me, only asks of what days i was available for surgery. extreme fear and worry took me over. i knew that i needed way more information and support, and that i wanted to get the hell outta there. they were scaring the shit out of me. in that moment, i didn't schedule the LEEP procedure and then received a phone call a day for two weeks from Planned Parenthood pressuring me to schedule one.

**read: after being given my diagnosis, i was considered a liability because i denied their treatment plan.**

looking back with the diagnosis i had, even if i chose to get the surgical procedure done, that would not have ensured the overall clearing of the virus. it would've only gotten rid of the cervical cells that were affected by the virus. so i probably blasted through a ton of smokes and cried to Holly and Lacey Jon, my co-apprentices at herb school, and then i called Famous. Famous is an Acupuncturist and Herbalist whom i had met through mutual friends in NYC and by being a member of the Rock Dove Collective, a radical community health exchange i was so blessed to be a part of for many years. Famous really talked me down off the ledges of my panic and helped me understand what i was dealing with, and that the timeline of cellular changes was generous. this was everything for me in this moment. this was the ground rising up to meet my feet, taking them in her hands and bringing me back down to a place of safety and trust. Famous' breakdown on what HPV was and how it worked, was the first step for me in being heard and seen, in gaining real understanding, and stopping my total spiral. she advised me to start taking 800 mcg of Folic Acid daily, and a B12 or B Complex vitamin because Folic Acid in higher doses may mask a B12 deficiency. Folic Acid helps prevent harmful changes to the DNA in our cells, and supports our cervical cells from changes caused by particular HPV strains.

and in a stroke of some amazing kind of luck or synchronicity or gift from the Universe, Holly, my co-apprentice, gave me the HPV Zine she co-created with the Down There Health Collective just the year before (see resources section for this zine). along with my talk with Famous, internet research, book research and trying to find others who also had HPV to share their stories with me, this zine gave me all the information i needed to further understand what i was dealing with, what the hell was happening in my body that i couldn't see, feel or hear, and literally had no idea that i even had (and for how long?!), and how to get a handle on it.

**so then i had to get really real with myself and step up and be more intentional about what i was putting into and giving my body.**

in this section i will talk about the shifts i made and explain a little about why, but please find the complete protocol and deeper explanations on the herbs and supplements included in part two.

for the first couple of weeks i tried everything, and at some point paired it down, because i was gathering all this info and assessing my resources. and remember, at this time i was in an herbal apprenticeship, so was already committing to learning the healing qualities and gifts of plant medicine. i cut down on smoking rolling tobacco and started drinking just one cup of coffee a day, adding in green tea because of it's high antioxidant content and anti-inflammatory nature. while tobacco and coffee are kinds of remedies for me, offering grounding, anxiety relief, company and that little spark that sets my slow, sluggish constitution in motion, i can totally over do it, and they both leech precious minerals from the body and cause inflammatory responses - two things i needed to pay serious attention to while treating my cervical dysplasia. tobacco use is said to potentially increase the risk of developing HPV-related cancers, but dang i needed to take this part slow.

harm reduction principles were key here: **a very important medicine was meeting myself exactly where i was at.** i wasn't ready to fully quit tobacco and coffee, and the thought of doing so felt too dismantling/nerve wracking/distracting from my

overall healing process and commitment, so i made sure to significantly reduce my intake of them, without removing them all together. i added in brassica family veggies (dark leafy greens, cabbage, brussel sprouts, cauliflower and broccoli) to every meal for their antioxidant, detoxifying and anti-cancer qualities, added in mung beans and adzuki beans for similar reasons and for their folate content, and took vitamin C daily for its antioxidant affect. based upon my herb learning at this time, i started on a daily routine of drinking 3 cups of Reishi, Astragalus and Licorice decoction for their adaptogenic, immune building and regulating effects, as i learned that **a healthy, strong immune system is essential in clearing the dysplasia and HPV virus.** for full transparency, how i first came to study Herbalism was through my own burn out and severely depleted immunity. so i ate these foods, took the Folic Acid and drank the decoction for 6 months (protocol tweaks and updates are included in part two). i tried douching with a strong Calendula infusion (anti-inflammatory, immune supportive, has an affinity for the cervix), but found that to be difficult for me and kinda wasteful of the medicine, so i just started drinking it. looking back i realize i could've used it for a sitz or regular bath, but down the hatch it went. and because at the time my herbal apprenticeship included working in an integrative free clinic, i was given a bottle of Carotene supplements because we had them on donation from a supplement company, and i had read that they have anti-cancer benefits and may protect cervical cells and reduce dysplasia. once that bottle was done, i started eating foods that had Carotenes in it like darky leafy greens, carrots, winter squash and broccoli (there's more too!). lastly, i made suppositories using a recipe from the Down There Health Collective's HPV Zine from Herbalist Caty Crabb did those nightly for 3 months, skipping the days i menstruated. these suppositories are IT. yes, the food and herbal medicine shifts and additions were crucial!, and i fully believe these suppositories were essential in reversing the dysplasia, as they put the medicine exactly where it needed to be.

*sitz bath: a bath in which a person sits in water covering their pelvic region and/or up to their hips.*

*decoction : recommended for making tea with hardy plant material like roots, seeds & barks that are either freshly harvested or dried. add 1 tablespoon of plant material to 1 cup of water in a pot (i recommend doing a larger batch that you can store in the fridge and use over the course of a few days). bring to a boil, then lower heat to a simmer and cook with the lid off or half on, until the water volume reduces by half, or for about 30 minutes. strain and sip. you can reuse this plant material for another few rounds of decoction before discarding/composting it and starting a new round.*

*infusion : recommended for making tea with leaves and flowers that are either freshly harvested or dried. add 1 tablespoon of plant material to a tea pot or jar and cover with 1 cup of boiling water. let steep for at least 15 minutes up to overnight. the longer the steep, the more medicinal the brew. strain and sip.*

after 3 months of suppositories and a total of 6 months of dedication to these shifts in nutrition and sticking to a daily herbal and vitamin supplement routine, i went back to the OB/GYN for a follow up pap smear to see where things were at.

*note: make sure to stop the suppositories about 5 days -1 week before having a follow up pap test as we wanna make sure the ingredients fully dissolve into the cervical and vaginal tissues and not interfere with any ability to take an appropriate swab for the test.*

*questions i had: would my pap come back abnormal again? has the dysplasia stayed the same, gotten better or gotten worse?*

one thing to note is that at this time, i had completed my herbal apprenticeship and moved back to NYC, where i sought follow up care at Callen Lorde Community Health Center, and went to a brand new OB/GYN i had never seen or met before. i made sure to have physical copies of all of my paperwork from Planned Parenthood (i still have it) for myself and for the new doctor. i recommend to all my clients and to you, to get copies of all of your lab tests so that you can read them alongside your doctor,

learn to read them yourself, give them to any additional practitioners you choose to work with, have them for your records, etc. for anyone i'm working with who has HPV and/or dysplasia, i want and need to know the exact results of the pap smear and colposcopy and biopsy if done. these let us know exactly what we're working with, and roughly what kind of timeframe we have, and wish to create.

so i told this new doctor everything. even though she had my paperwork, i made sure to explain to her my experience, and what i knew about my initial pap and biopsy results, as well as the nutritional and herbal protocol i did. if this feels heavy for you in any way, or you want support in holding all the information, write it all down!, and/or choose someone you trust to be your advocate who can go to appointments with you and support and/or help be your voice. after i laid it all out for her, we did a follow up pap smear.

pals,

THAT

SHIT

CLEARED.



i ugly cried when the doctor called with these results. i was flooded with relief. my double Scorpio tears poured down and i wanted to run, jump and scream at the tops of my lungs with ecstatic happiness, then go nap in a bed of moss and mushrooms and seaweed and sheepskins and all the plants and people who supported me.

*and  
then  
the  
doc  
told  
me  
she  
didn't  
believe  
the  
test  
results.*

*things i remembered feeling: wtf, she doesn't believe me or my body or the plants. wait, are the latest lab results lying to me?! what the f is happening to my cervix?!*

i believed the test results. i believed in my body and the plants. i trusted the test results. i trusted my body and the plants. i was legit ecstatic.

i wasn't shocked like "omg plants actually work", but i WAS like...

H O L Y

S H I T

T H I S

T O T A L L Y

W O R K E D



the doctor assured me that she wanted to do another colposcopy just to make sure the test results were in fact accurate, and that there was no trace of dysplasia left on my cervix. she needed to see it to believe it, i guess. but she held an air of skepticism, and i didn't like it.

so i made the colposcopy appointment and got undressed from the waist down and got swabbed by the vinegar solution and yes, friends, THAT SHIT WAS IN FACT CLEAR! the doc saw no trace of dysplasia. my efforts and the protocol WORKED. no nicking of my cervix for another biopsy was needed because THERE WAS NO DYSPLASIA TO BIOPSY!, no LEEP procedure was necessary and my dysplasia didn't stay the same or got worse, IT CLEARED THE F UP! literally i'm sighing with relief right now writing this 11 years later. doc and i both celebrated this double confirmed triumph and i laughed and cried in total happiness with that damn paper rag robe thing clinging to my excitedly shaking legs.

then the doc casually whips out as i'm leaving the appointment, *"i'm also an Acupuncturist and hear Turkey Tail mushroom is really good for HPV."*

after this experience which lasted about 6-8 months, i followed up with pap smears every 6 months to keep a close eye on things. i continued taking my internal herb tincture formula, but had stopped the suppositories. continuing to take the herbs kept my immunity supported and strong, and after about 2 years of getting paps every 6 months and them being 'normal' each time, i returned to getting yearly exams. nowadays, i find it common that docs will tell people after a succession of clear paps to not return for a follow up anywhere from 2-5 years once you've hit your 30s. this has been told to me at my own appointments and to others who have come asking for my opinion. personally, i'm not into it, hunny. i still recommend getting a yearly pap smear because it's our only way to detect if we have a high risk strain of HPV and cervical dysplasia. and we may have changing and/or multiple sex partners, and we may have had the same and only sex partner for years, but that is still no guarantee that HPV won't or can't pop up. we may never know if we have one or more strains of the virus

laying dormant within, but if great stress appears in our lives or we experience something like real burnout and deep depletion for example, the virus can express and take over and boom!, a hidden HPV strain can pop up. and how else would people with cervixes know if we don't get routine paps? i'm not trying to scare you, i just strongly recommend getting regular testing to fully ensure you're ok, XO.

i went on to support many people with cervixes in my community deal with their varying HPV diagnoses with the protocol and suppositories i used. over the years i've helped hold a lot of worry, fear and concern from my friends and clients in navigating their diagnoses, and i am truly grateful for their transparency and trust. sharing my experience helped ease their anxiety and put trust in their bodies, the plants and their chosen support systems. they did the work, utilized the tools and committed to their care so fully and because of it, they were successful in staving off unwanted surgical procedures and reversed the risk of cervical cancer. *insert tears welling up in my eyes as i write this out of such love and gratitude for the plants, and for these incredible and resilient people taking care with self-determination and success.*

and all these years later, the virus keeps showing up. i find that many come to me not fully understanding HPV, what it means and what to do about it (no judgment!). so let's keep sharing our stories, our tools and our care with one another, because we really got this.

**flash forward ten-ish years.**

i had discovered these skin tag looking things on my labia minora, or inner vaginal lips one day. it wasn't until i asked my Herbalist and Nurse pal, on her visit to see me, what they could be, and she was basically like, *oh hunny those are probably HPV warts.*

*things i remember thinking: oh no, f'ing shit, damn, here i go again. wait, how long have i had this strain? what does it mean? why didn't i go to the doc sooner? what have i done?*

although i had a successful lived experience and collaborative wisdom in my tool belt, i felt real nervous again. at that point i knew i needed to go back and get a pap smear and see what was up. i remember not going right away, not even calling right away. i didn't have health insurance at the time, but knew that i could get help signing up for it at Greene County Family Planning, the Planned Parenthood-esque health center in Catskill, NY, as i now had moved and been living in the Hudson Valley. honestly, i just froze. i felt defeated and upset that i hadn't taken care of myself enough or safely enough with my sex partners to stave off another HPV infection. and i know writing this now, that was unfair and unnecessary shame to put on myself. i know that no matter what barrier methods i use(d) in sexy time, or no matter how many tinctures i hit daily, there is always the possibility of getting an HPV infection while i'm a person having sex and sharing my body intimately with someone(s) else. i wanted to go for another pap to ensure that i didn't also have a high risk strain of HPV and possible dysplasia, but i just didn't want to go through another experience like i had with Planned Parenthood all those years ago. so despite the success i had proven to myself and with my clients, and the trust that no matter what the pap results would be, i had tools to support myself,

i

did

nothing.

*insert prayers of self love and compassion to release my self-shaming from this time period.*

so about a year or so later, or actually i can't quite remember how long it was (another plug to keeping good track of your health dates!), i scheduled a pap smear. that pap came back abnormal. i obvi had HPV again and the genital warts were still there, but i didn't have cervical dysplasia. this time, i had dysplasia or abnormal cellular changes in the cells on my vaginal canal wall. this was new to me and i wasn't sure what that meant. so i did a

similar protocol as the last time, and made a new round of suppositories knowing i was ready to go back to the rodeo and clear this mf'er.

### **the things i did the same as the first time:**

800 mcg of Folic Acid daily, eating a shit ton of brassicas, taking a daily internal tincture formula of Eleuthero, Reishi, Astragalus and Licorice, and using the suppositories nightly, skipping during menstruation.

### **things i added in after 10 years of learning new tricks:**

Turkey Tail mushroom tincture daily, adding in Irish Moss seaweed to broths and teas i drank regularly, and making strong infusions of Chaparral and Irish Moss seaweed that i added to epsom salt baths 3x a week.

this time around, i was up and down in my care commitment. perhaps since i had proven to myself the first time that it worked, i was more lax. perhaps because at the time of this second infection i was a stressed out, overworked Herbalist doing way too many things and offering more care to others than i was giving to myself. i would go weeks where i was super committed to my protocol and then i'd fall off the wagon, get back on, and so on and so forth. at this time i was also dealing with growing fibroids that were changing my physical body and causing me a shit ton of pain, as well as multiple tick bites and tick borne illnesses, so my stretch of self care felt very thin, and at times i just wasn't sure which issue to focus (most) on. exhausted by what felt like endless doctor visits for all these things and coming up empty with solutions that felt good to me, i recommitted to my HPV protocol because i knew that it would not only help clear the virus and dysplasia, it would refill my well and reinstate my self love. i write this to be transparent about how committing to my own care, no matter what i need, is truly an ongoing, lifelong practice. sometimes i'm gold star status at it, and sometimes i straight up avoid it. and i'm an Herbalist - i have tools i trust at the ready, medicine i make myself and a web of Herbalists and friends i'm blessed to know and can ask for support from, and still!, i sometimes don't know how to take good care of myself. i am only

human, and go through the rollercoaster of life just like everyone else, get overwhelmed by it just like everyone else. i'm a beautifully flawed human. i've learned that i am allowed to get back on the wagon if i fall off, as many times as it takes. my integrity as an Herbalist and care worker isn't compromised or null and void just because i, too, am always practicing how to best take care of myself. so just remember, sweetheart, keep giving yourself permission to start over, reset, begin again

e v e r y .

s i n g l e .

t i m e .

you've earned that.

that too, is medicine.

also, at this time, a friend who was dealing with her first instance of HPV and cervical dysplasia, came to me for support in her care which motivated me to make the suppositories for the both of us, and helped me recommit to myself in community with her. in all our sharing with each other, i told her my previous experience and my current status, and she became wholeheartedly committed to her care and began the supplements, herbs, nutritional shifts and suppositories like a boss. and so did i, again. we checked in on each other and discussed our OB/GYN appointments. in our care for ourselves and our bodies, we cared for one another. and in our care for one another, we cared for ourselves and our bodies. after 3 months of her commitment to her care and the protocol, her HPV cleared!

so

did

mine.

or so i thought. really, it was laying dormant, but more on that in the epilogue...



## **part two**

a protocol and herb nerdery

so let's get into the protocol and herbs more deeply because this is where some magic happens. if you are diagnosed with HPV and/or cervical dysplasia and it's not precancerous or cancerous as told by a biopsy, these are some suggestions of herbs and supplements that i've found significant in supporting me clearing the virus and reversing the dysplasia. i also want to note that you can work with an Herbalist to customize a formula specifically for the whole beautiful being that is you, and that formula may look differently than my suggestions below. some key factors to consider are deep immune support, adaptogenic herbs, antivirals specific to HPV, lifestyle shifts that support detoxification/management of toxins entering your body, and stress management focusing on adrenal glands and nervous system support, as a way to additionally support and uplift immunity.

### **Folic acid - 800 mcg – daily for 6 months**

Folic acid, or the synthetic version of folate which is found in food, is a B vitamin and can be taken in supplement form that you can find at any pharmacy or health food store or place that sells vitamins. it is supportive in cellular health and is often prescribed by OB/GYNs when cervical dysplasia is present, to protect cervical cells from the HPV virus. *thank you for your sustained protection. i wish i knew what you looked liked knocking on the walls of my cells and entering to safeguard them from harm. i like to think you wore a purple velvet tuxedo and gold hi-tops.*

### **Brassica family veggies – daily for 6 months**

for their deeply detoxifying, anticancer and immune supportive nutrients, i recommend including these into your daily eating. dark leafy greens, broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage and brussel sprouts were my regular companions. i ate them lightly roasted, sauteed, raw, and/or fermented. when preparing them, if there were any edges or leaves or stalks i didn't cook with, i saved them in the freezer to later use for broths and stocks. *oh you sweethearts, your rich nourishing and protective capabilities are a collaboration of soil and stone and worm shit and sunshine and rain and pollinators. you are genius.*

## Reishi (*Ganoderma tsugae* or *G. lucidum*)

1 dropperful of tincture 3-5x daily for 3-6 months

Reishi, a polypore mushroom, is incredible medicine. i started using it in dried form by making a decoction, and while the sweetness of the Astragalus and Licorice i added alongside it made it more palatable, i found it to be quite bitter and not the yummiest flavor. so, over the years i've switched to using it in double extracted tincture form (alcohol tincture + water decoction combined together). Reishi is an adaptogen and an immunomodulator. its gifts are plenty, with one of them being its ability to regulate, manage and keep the immune system in balance. it also feeds and restores the adrenal glands and by doing so, uplifts the nervous, endocrine and immune systems and how they interact with one another, therefore building up deep/innate immunity as it's taxed by the wear and tear of daily life. it increases vitality over time, has antitumor and anticancer activity, is antiviral, anti-inflammatory and antioxidant, and is shown to pump the breaks on HPV activity. the species that grows here in the Hudson Valley, *Ganoderma tsugae*, grows off of dead or dying Hemlock trees. often i find it red and radiant, ledging out from the tree trunk, hugging on while also interacting with insects, spiderwebs, mosses and lichens, the wind and sun and rain. its gifts are ancient and trustworthy, and i recommend including this in your daily care routine. *damn Reishi, you really just meet me exactly where i'm at, time and time again, without judgment. it's as if you've always been here with me. you help build me back up just how i need it. i love you so truly.*





## Turkey Tail (*Trametes versicolor*)

1 dropperful 3-5x a day for 3-6 months

so remember my second OB/GYN told me that she was also an Acupuncturist and heard that Turkey Tail was useful in treating HPV? well ever since, i tracked this polypore mushroom down and in my second round of HPV infection, i started using it regularly as a double extracted tincture taken 1 dropperful 3-5 x/day. it is immune stimulating and modulating, anticancer, shows reversal or inhibition of the development of cervical dysplasia, and antioxidant. can you believe that incredible generosity and genius?!! *oh Turkey Tail, i have the hugest crush on you. you're so beautiful and colorful and grow so abundantly. your medicine is essential, and weaves through me gently and significantly. thank you for your company and protection.*



## **Astragalus (Astragalus membranaceus)**

**1 cup 3x day of the root decoction,  
or 1 dropperful of tincture 3-5x a day for 3-6 months**

Astragalus was one of the first plants i turned to in herb school to build me up from burn out and serious immune depletion. it's an adaptogen, meaning it supports the body in adapting to and dealing with all forms of stressors (physical, environmental, emotional, etc.), and is immunomodulating and antiviral. it's super supportive for those who are run down, burning the candle at both ends, and whose immunity is weakened to the point of catching illness easily. this was me before i went to herb school. i was sick with a cold or flu every 3-4 weeks for a considerable stretch of time. taking Astragalus daily helped build my immune strength and vitality over time. when our immunity is weakened, it's prime time for any virus we cohabitate with (HPV, HSV for example) to express and take over because the immune system doesn't have enough juice to suppress or clear the viral load. Astragalus is also sweet, moistening, and possesses anti-tumor, anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties. *dearest Astragalus, you showed me that another life is possible. you gave me such sweet, sustained strength when i was deeply depleted, and renewed my vitality after years of feeling so weak and so sad about it. i can't thank you enough.*

## **Eleuthero (Eleutherococcus senticosus)**

**1 dropperful of root tincture 3-5x a day for 3-6 months**  
as i continued on with my herbal studies, i later incorporated Eleuthero into my daily formula for its unique adaptogenic properties. Eleuthero has this amazing capacity to build up and strengthen the immune and nervous systems, allowing the body to better adapt to stressors and increase natural energy and vitality. it helps refill the well. it supports all body systems as an interconnected and interdependent unit, literally re-enlivening me with its magical root medicine. *Eleuthero! hunny, you refilled my well so generously and gave me gifts of increased stamina i didn't know were possible. because of this, my mental health and spirit lifted in a sustained way as well, and that made all the difference. i believe in and trust you, and thank you with all my heart.*

Licorice (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*, *G. uralensis*)

1 cup of root decoction 3x a day,

or 1 dropperful of root tincture 3-5x a day for 3-6 months

oh sweet, moistening, delicious Licorice, a flavor not everyone loves but one that i have come to appreciate so truly. i learned in herb school that in Traditional Chinese Medicine, not only does Licorice have a number of incredible medicinal gifts to share, it's also considered "the great harmonizer" in formulation, as it enables each herb to do its best work in collaboration with one another. this team player, or coach extraordinaire, is also antiviral, anti-inflammatory and antioxidant, as well as an adrenal and immunomodulator. *Licorice, i will always root for you, no pun intended, lol. thank you for your gifts of bringing me back into balance, and for supporting the other plants in doing their best work for me. i bow to your blessings and deeply appreciate your support.*



**Chaparral (*Larrea tridentata*) in a sitz or regular bath  
3x/week or suppositories for 3 months**

i got to meet this gorgeous plant in the Sonoran Desert and fell immediately in awe with its beauty and intoxicating scent. i was struck by how it branches, growing so gracefully and perfectly in pivoting and angling ways, making me think of how far it's reach could be. it's green leaves, like soft sticky hands, offering its profound resinous medicine wherever it extends to and touches. i collected some, dried it, and brought it back home to make strong infusions for straining into the bath, because i'd learned that for HPV, Chaparral is best used externally as a sitz bath or in suppositories. it is an antiviral specific to HPV and HSV, and is a great anti-inflammatory and antioxidant as well. *you beautiful branching resinous beauty, thank you for your medicine. thank you for reaching so sweetly through my skin and into my cells and up my vaginal canal to help release HPV and protect me from any potential harm it could cause. i honor and respect you so hard.*



## Irish Moss Seaweed (Chondrus crispus)

in a sitz or regular bath 3x a week for 3 months, and in meals regularly

all seaweeds have a deeply rich mineral content and contain iodine which is essential for thyroid health and general well-being. alongside these benefits, Irish Moss in particular is antiviral and contains natural Carrageenan, which inhibits the HPV virus from infecting cells. i was making a hot water infusion of it alongside Chaparral, and straining it into the bath 3x/week for several months during my second round of contracting a high risk strain of HPV. i also used it in my meals regularly, adding it to stocks and broths and tea infusions that i took internally. with the help of knowledge shared by my pal Micah of Atlantic Holdfast Seaweed Company, i'm also interested in using it topically as a lube base and HPV preventive when having sexy times. at the time of printing this zine, i'm experimenting with making different forms of this medicine, including double extraction and vinegar infusions. *you bring the Merperson out in me, tickling me with your silky guidance, holding me in strength in the waters of my bathtub and my emotions. you teach me by your movements, how to be flexible while remembering how anchored i am. your adaptability and movement is astounding.*



## the beloved nightly suppositories

this recipe comes from the Down There Health Collective's HPV zine and is an adaptation of a recipe from Michael Moore by Caty Crabb. i've made this recipe many times over the last 11 years and it's pretty simple to do. you'll find a recommend list of people to source ingredients from in the resources section. i've kept the recipe and preparation directions pretty much the same, although have added my notes in parentheses.

ingredients:

25 ml Echinacea purpurea or Echinacea angustifolia fluid extract\* or 150 ml/5 oz Echinacea tincture  
5 ml Anemopsis/Yerba mansa tincture\*\*  
5 ml Calendula officinalis tincture  
175 ml Glycerin  
25 grams Gelatin pharmaceutical grade  
5 ml Thuja occidentalis essential oil

\*if you cannot find the fluid extract, you can make an equivalent by slowly evaporating 5 ounces of Echinacea tincture down to 25 ml of milk-grey liquid in a double boiler. re-measure the evaporating tincture frequently as it reduces quickly at the end (*this is how i've done it every time*).

\*\*if you cannot find Anemopsis, double the amount of Calendula tincture used to 10ml.

preparation:

heat the glycerin on a double boiler, add the Echinacea, Calendula and Anemopsis and maintain at a low temperature for at least 30 minutes to evaporate off some of the alcohol. add the gelatin (*i've just used gelatin from the grocery store because that's what i could find and access*) and whisk until the gelatin is thoroughly dissolved in the liquids. don't leave any little gelatinous solids (*the gelatin will stick to the whisk and i've found using a fork instead of a whisk helps to deal with the de-clumping while feeling less wasteful, as so much would stick to the whisk and i'd lose a lot of the gelatin. oh!, but i've seen those tiny whisks before so grab or borrow one of those if you prefer*). continue stirring until the liquid is a clear grey-brown syrup. add the highly evaporative Thuja oil to the dissolved syrup just before you begin to pour into the molds. fill a plastic roll of disposable 3 or 5 ml suppository molds up to the top of the form line. a small turkey baster or a baby syringe are the easiest tools for this. the mixture should make 80-100 suppositories. two-piece hard

plastic or metal suppository molds, although reusable, are difficult to work with for gelatin based suppositories. perforated molds can be obtained from a number of pharmaceutical supply houses. every pharmacy has these catalogues, and any reasonable pharmacist should be willing to locate a source and order them for you. if they won't, try another pharmacy. *(i've never acquired or used the kinds of molds described above. what i do every time is loosely wrap tin foil over multiple ice cube trays, lightly pressing indentations down with my finger over each ice cube insert, to make a small well to pour the medicinal gelatin into. i've used a small spoon to pour and they turn into little loosely shaped square circles and i've found them to be a great size and shape for insertion. then i put them immediately into the freezer to cool just like that. when cooled to a gummy consistency, i add a layer of parchment paper on top to cover the suppositories, and then fold the foil over in half and store them in a gallon sized freezer ziploc type baggie. i repeat this process until all the gelatin is used up. many of these 'sheets' will fit into one baggie. i keep them stored in the freezer for best long term keep, and they retain their gummy texture without ever freezing solid, so insertion is easy and painless. while i was on the nightly supps routine but slept at a pal's house or went away for a night or more, i'd take some with me and keep in a cooler for longer drives, tucking them in the freezer soon as i got to where i was going and it didn't mess with their integrity. such perfect little angels).*

usage:

a suppository should be inserted at night into the vagina and as close to the cervix as possible. gelatin-based suppositories dissolve slowly over 8-12 hours; this slow melting keeps the herbs in contact with your cervix for a longer period of time, which increases the amount of the herbs that can be absorbed through the mucous membrane. this can be continued for many days if necessary. in the rare case that it causes inflammation, stop the treatment. examine your cervix with a speculum regularly to check for visual changes. visit the gynecologist after three months or sooner to check your progress. *(i used these suppositories nightly for 3 months, skipping the time i was menstruating. i believe in putting the medicine where it needs to be, and so used them both for my first diagnosis of cervical dysplasia, and the second for vaginal wall dysplasia. i've also made many batches of these for clients who used them with ease and successful results. it's important to follow up with a pap smear to gauge your progress after 3 and no later than 6 months, to see if the dysplasia is staying the same or changing. and if it's changing, we need to know how and fingers crossed it's for the better. some insertion pro*

*tips: tear off one suppository with foil and parchment right before you head to bed, after your last pee. just before you get into bed for the night, take the suppository off the foil and parchment, and use one finger to insert it as far up your vaginal canal to your cervix as possible. then lay down! they are slippery and sometimes they'll slide down and ya gotta start over and i've had them fall on the floor many a time. having to re-insert makes it a little trickier cuz your body heat starts to melt them, but not nearly as fast as coconut oil based suppositories. and that's the whole point - the gelatin melts way more slowly, keeping the medicine closest to the dysplasia for longer periods of time. again, make sure to stop the suppositories about 5 days - 1 week before having a follow up pap test as we want make sure the ingredients fully and not interfere with any ability to take an appropriate swab for the pap test.)*

### **for the love of cloth pads:**

my friend and co-apprentice, Lacey Jon, taught me this quick and easy way to make my own cloth pads to wear nightly while living that suppository life, as they melt and drip a bit and it's nice to have a comfy pad to wear to catch the leakage. but do you, free leak if you want to! i took a store bought pad and traced it on a piece of paper, and cut the tracing out to use as a pattern. i used a sharpie to draw the pattern on clean, recycled fabric i had. i used soft but thick cotton and linen, and flannel or sweatshirt material would work good too. i cut out multiple layers for the pad and pinned them together, sewing them together with a needle and thread because i didn't have and don't know how to use a sewing machine. then i sewed on a snap closure and it was done! i made two. in the morning after i woke, i would take my pad off and steep it in a jar of hot water for the day. later that night i'd hand wash it in the sink with fresh hot water and soap, wring it out real good, and hang to dry for the next day, as i used the second pad i had made for that night. and after a couple cycles of that, i tossed them into the laundry.



## **part three**

other suggestions and encouragements

## **if you have a strain of HPV that causes genital warts:**

take a daily herb formula to build and support your immunity in clearing the virus, and eats lotsa brassicas and foods with carotenes.

topical saint john's wart and/or calendula oil with 25 drops of thuja essential oil (in one ounce of oil) applied 3 x day to the warts. full transparency: this is something i'm still experimenting with. i've also had a few burned off at a health clinic which worked for all except one, which after a few months of intermittent oil application, fell off. the burning off of some warts did burn and was really very uncomfortable, but the burning didn't last for too too long and is a decent option if you want them gone. i most recently got a prescription for Aldara, a topical pharmaceutical used to burn off the warts in the comforts of your own choosing, and, as of two weeks into using it, they've started to shrink. i'll keep you posted!

## **if you are a person who is concerned with HPV and don't have it, but want to be proactive:**

a strong, cared for, resilient immune system is our main tool in clearing the virus when we have it. support your immunity with the tools you like and already use, and/or herbs, foods, good sleep, lotsa water and rituals/care routines that support you. pick them back up over and over again no matter how many times you may have put them down. you can use the herbs and foods i offer here, or make your own custom formula that keeps you vibrant, thriving and protected.

ask your sex partners if they've ever had HPV, get tested regularly, and trust that if it comes into or back into your life, there are tools and supports out there to lean on.

## talk to sex partners like a loving boss.

let's normalize having and talking about HPV. let's remember that if and when we have it, we can still have sex and intimate time, and that there are ways to protect ourselves and our lovers. it's not shameful, a problem, our fault, gross or a deal breaker if we have or have had HPV. with the virus we are still desirable, sugar. without the virus we could potentially get it. nothing is certain except for the ways in which we care for ourselves and those we wish to kiss, lick and sex. if we choose to chill out on sexy time as an option while navigating our health needs and shifts with an acute HPV infection, may we remember that we still are, and will be, desired. what i say to my lover(s) is that i've had recurring HPV, and i have tools for prevention and infection. i'd tell them my story of having it and how i handle it if they wanted to know the details, and i'd ask them if they know their status, and if they've ever had it before. even tho i feel pretty comfortable talking about it, it's always a little nerve-wracking and super vulnerable because not everyone receives, or can handle, this info well. i want to be having hot times with those who feel comfortable talking about bodies, health, sex, STI's, etc. i honestly wish we were all sweet-sexy-non-shaming-informed-consensual-compassionate- clear creatures with one another, and sometimes we're just not. or, who we wanna make out with isn't, and damn that's a boner killer for me. giving them the benefit of the doubt, i'd help ease any discomfort or shame in the moment by holding loving, compassionate space for them because we've been told over and over again that this shit is "hard" to talk about. however, if it became clear to me that they didn't keep tabs on their sexual health or refused to engage or talk about it any real way, i would for sure reconsider my relationship with them, as i need to feel safe and trusting with all of myself with another person. gimme a holler if you wanna practice talking about it with your lovers, i'm here for this, XO.

## **part four**

resources on resources

talking with people who have had HPV is an invaluable resource, so ask around, or gimme a holler!

### **some suggested reading:**

The HPV Zine by The Down There Collective, published in 2007 can be found here:

<http://www.anti-politics.org/distro/2009/hpv-read.pdf>

and here:

[www.yumpu.com/en/document/view/35026707/hpv-final-single-pagepdf-zine-library](http://www.yumpu.com/en/document/view/35026707/hpv-final-single-pagepdf-zine-library)

Planned Parenthood's info on HPV:

<https://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/stds-hiv-safer-sex/hpv>

Adaptogens : Herbs for Strength, Stamina and Stress Relief, by David Winston & Steven Maimes

The Fungal Pharmacy: The Complete Guide to Medicinal Mushrooms and Lichens of North America, by Robert Rogers

Medicinal Uses of Seaweeds, by Ryan Drum:

<http://www.ryandrum.com/seaweeds.htm>

### **a few of my fave sources for mushrooms + seaweeds**

A Fruiting Body : [@a.fruiting.body](https://a.fruiting.body)

Atlantic Holdfast Seaweed Company : [atlanticholdfast.com](http://atlanticholdfast.com) // [@atlanticholdfast](https://atlanticholdfast.com)

Smugtown Mushrooms : [smugtownmushrooms.com](http://smugtownmushrooms.com) // [@smugtownmushrooms](https://smugtownmushrooms.com)

### **cozy cloth pads**

Holy Sponge : [holysponge.net](http://holysponge.net) // [@holysponge](https://holysponge.net)

## a few of my fave herbalists + herb shops:

Attic Apothecary : [atticapothecary.com](http://atticapothecary.com) // [@atticapothecary\\_](https://www.instagram.com/atticapothecary_)

Blossoming Resistance : [blossoming-resistance.com](http://blossoming-resistance.com) //  
[@blossomingresistance](https://www.instagram.com/blossomingresistance)

Good Fight Herb Co. : [goodfigtherbco.com](http://goodfigtherbco.com) //  
[@goodfigtherbco](https://www.instagram.com/goodfigtherbco)

Little Red Bird Botanicals : [littleredbirdbotanicals.com](http://littleredbirdbotanicals.com) //  
[@littleredbirdbotanicals](https://www.instagram.com/littleredbirdbotanicals)

Mandana Boushee : [mandanaboushee.com](http://mandanaboushee.com)

MayPop Community Herb Shop : [maypopherbshop.com](http://maypopherbshop.com) //  
[@maypopherbshop](https://www.instagram.com/maypopherbshop)

Rootwork Herbals : [rootworkherbals.com](http://rootworkherbals.com) // [@rootworkherbals](https://www.instagram.com/rootworkherbals)

Sacred Vibes Apothecary : [sacredvibeshealing.com](http://sacredvibeshealing.com) //  
[@sacredvibesapothecary](https://www.instagram.com/sacredvibesapothecary)

Sister Spinster : [sisterspinsternet.net](http://sisterspinsternet.net) // [@sister\\_spinster](https://www.instagram.com/sister_spinster)

Snakeroot Apothecary : [snakerootapothecary.com](http://snakerootapothecary.com) //  
[@snakerootapothecary](https://www.instagram.com/snakerootapothecary)

Third Root Community Health Center : [thirdroot.org](http://thirdroot.org) //  
[@thirdrootnyc](https://www.instagram.com/thirdrootnyc)

Tucson Herb Store : [tucsonherbstore.com](http://tucsonherbstore.com)

Yerba Nomadica : [yerbanomadica.com](http://yerbanomadica.com) // [@yerba\\_nomadica](https://www.instagram.com/yerba_nomadica)

Wildfire Herbs : [wildfireherbs.com](http://wildfireherbs.com)

Wolfberry Apothecary : [wolfberryapothecary@bigcartel.com](mailto:wolfberryapothecary@bigcartel.com) //  
[@wolfberryapothecary](https://www.instagram.com/wolfberryapothecary)

**part five**  
gratitude

to you, for picking this up and reading my story that i hope supports you and yours so well. keep me posted if you want, and reach out if you have any questions or wanna share your HPV story(s) with me. HPV can be NBD. we got this and i love you.

to the plants and fungi that give so generously, i am forever pouring with love and gratitude for you, and practicing my best ways to love, protect, care for and listen to you.

to The Rock Dove Collective from where i came, and whose existence led me from burnout to creating care systems and chosen family, and later, to studying Herbalism. who always walk with me in this work towards collective care from an anti-oppressive framework and heart. i love you all and am forever indebted to you for your love, wisdom, support and generosity in growing my ass up. we did amazing work <3.

to The Down There Health Collective, whose HPV zine gave me information and protocol support that empowered me in healing my dysplasias, and whose labor in making this happen i am forever grateful for. to Holly Poole-Kavana, a collective member and co-apprentice at herb school with me, for all your support and witness, and passing this zine along to me at such a clutch time.

to Caty Crabb whose suppository recipe changed my life.

to Stacey and Summer Dawn who made and gave me the Yerba Mansa tincture for the suppository recipe, from the gorgeous riparian patch you later took me to on that Valentine's Day back when. returning to the place where my feet touched the very soil whose medicine healed the cells in my body and the resilience of my spirit, was a gift beyond my wildest dreams.

to my beloved clients who believed in my story and trusted my care and protocol offerings, and did the work to heal themselves. i see you, i love you, i am so proud of you. you f'ing nailed it!

to my dear friends and chosen family who read this in draft form and offered me such guidance, feedback and support. i love you.



to Lilah Friedland, of Invisible Hand Press, for your infectious enthusiasm, wild talents and putting these words into a beautiful form to share.

and to coach, Marlee Grace, and Center, where i attended a residency to start writing this and gained the space, support and confidence to do so. i am eternally grateful.

*Lauren Giambrone is a queer, femme Community Herbalist, Medicine Maker and Educator writing this on occupied Mohican Territory in New York's Hudson Valley. Lauren is the founder of Good Fight Herb Co., a small herbal business organically growing and locally sourcing bioregional plants for making and offering plant medicines and magic. she is also a co-founder and educator with her sister from the stars, Mandana Boushee, of Wild Gather: Hudson Valley School of Herbal Studies. she co-teaches a foundations in Herbalism program, and various programming regarding plant medicine from an anti-oppressive framework and values system. with a Saggittarius sun, Scorpio moon and Scorpio rising, she teaches and offers from her lived experience, studies, commitment to social and environmental justice, and ever growing exploration into her ancestry and lineage.*



## EPILOGUE

in high summer of 2019, so close to finishing this zine!, my annual pap exam came back abnormal and positive for HPV, after a year of being clear. i assume the strain that had previously caused dysplasia on my vaginal wall came out of dormancy. i had a colposcopy two weeks later, had three biopsies taken (two on my cervix, one on my vaginal wall), and talked extensively to the nurse and midwife about my history of HPV, as this was a new office i chose to go to for my HPV maintenance and fibroids. the biopsies hurt, afterwards i cried in my car, and i took the rest of the day off from work, life and chores to let my body go through it (deep gratitude for that privilege). i cried because sometimes having these necessary tests done to know exactly what i'm working with, to inform my protocol and treatment plan, bears a certain heaviness despite their importance. the work is invasive, my body feels so bloated and big and tender and achey after, the fluorescent lights of the office are so damn harsh, and advocating for my body's future based on my past with new practitioners can be trying. all my love goes out to all you doing the same <3.

my results came back positive for HPV, with no dysplasia present on my cervix (!), but present on my vaginal wall still, but with no change in the level of dysplasia. it's stayed the same and this is good news! i'll go back in another year to see where it's at then, with an understanding with my doctor that if in 6 months i decide i want to go in to check on it sooner, i will.

i'm taking my daily herbal formula and infusions, and contemplating doing a round of suppositories. i've adjusted my diet to prioritize the beneficial foods laid out in this zine, and have discussed with my sex partners my current status. cohabitating with HPV is part of my daily life, and has been for a long time, as you've seen. staying embodied and prioritizing this care is a daily practice and commitment that has, and will, teach me so much about my self, my self love and capacity for presence. sometimes i nail it, other times, not so much. both are real, and ok.

and i'll keep tryin' my best.

ॐ

ॐ नमो भगवते

वसुदेवाय नमः

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वसुदेवाय नमः