

Speaker 1 ([00:00:12](#)):

You are listening to the Journey on podcast with Warwick Schiller. Warwick is a horseman trainer, international clinician and author who helps empower horse people from all over the world with the skills, knowledge, and mindsets needed to create trusting partnerships with their horses. Warwick offers a free seven day trial to his comprehensive online video library that includes hundreds of full length training videos and several home study courses@videos.warwickschiller.com.

Warwick Schiller ([00:00:47](#)):

Good day everyone. Welcome back to The Journey on podcast. I'm your host Warwick Schiller, and my very special guest on the podcast this week is a lady named Donica Ard. Donga is an author, she's a regenerative rancher and she's a wildlife tracker. And the book that she wrote, which is called Don Again, tracking the Wisdom of the Wild, when I listened to that book, it was like almost everything she said. I'm like, yes, yes, yes. That's the stuff. And you guys had know lately I've been a bit of a dive into why we don't function the way we should function in this world. And a lot of it seems to be coming back to not doing the things that we evolve to do and not living the way we evolve to live. And this book of Dongas really goes into a lot of that stuff. And so I was so excited to have her on the podcast, and I think the conversation that we had was even better than I thought it was going to be, and I had high hopes for this conversation. So I hope you guys enjoy this chat with Donga as much as I did.

([00:01:59](#)):

Donga ard, welcome to the Journey on Podcast.

Doniga Markegard ([00:02:03](#)):

Thank you. Thanks for having me work.

Warwick Schiller ([00:02:05](#)):

Hey, this is going to be exciting. Oh, there's so much stuff I want to talk to you about. And normally with the Journey on podcast, we talk about people's journeys and how they got to where they are today, but you have written a book called Dawn Again Tracking the Wisdom of the Wild, and you sent me a copy. Thank you so much. I actually downloaded it on Audible and to it on Audible, which was great. You got to read it and the book tells your story so well that I don't think we need to rehash the story here because I don't think we could retell it and near as good as you did in the book, but there's quite a bit of stuff in that book that I do want to talk about. But before we get to that, can you tell us what you do these days and then we'll go back to how you got to do and what you're doing these days?

Doniga Markegard ([00:02:56](#)):

Yeah, well, I'm a regenerative rancher on the northern California coast. Our family raises grass fed beef, grass fed lamb pasture raised pork and pasture raised chicken spread out on different ranches from Pescadero down in San Mateo County all the way up to Jenner in Sonoma County on about 13,000 acres. And we do that through mimicking nature to produce nutrient dense food for thousands of families across the Bay Area. So

Warwick Schiller ([00:03:32](#)):

A few listeners around the rest of the world, the Bay Area, she refers to as the San Francisco Bay area. So the places that Donika just talked about extend from south of San Francisco to north of San Francisco. So regenerative farming, it kind of fascinates me a little bit. We talked before we came on the

podcast and you regular podcast listeners would know that I'm really interested in hunter gatherer type stuff, like the way we used to live and why we don't feel terribly happy with ourselves these days because the way we are currently living and our interactions nature and what we do with it are a big part of that. So tell me a bit more about regenerative agriculture. And I'm going to guess it has a lot to do with we are all connected. We are not separate.

Doniga Markegard ([00:04:33](#)):

Yeah, absolutely. And the term regenerative came about many years ago from the agriculture community really seeing that industrial agriculture and the way that food is produced is not healthy for people. It's not healthy for the planet. And overall it's been the cause of so much of our chronic disease and climate change and all of the things that we're seeing today. And so when I was a youth, not going too much into my book, I do talk about food a lot and our connection to

Warwick Schiller ([00:05:13](#)):

Food, we can talk about your book. Okay, don't want to tell the whole story to

Doniga Markegard ([00:05:17](#)):

Story. So a lot of it is about that journey to questioning what are we putting in our bodies and how are we treating the earth as a result of what we're putting in our bodies because it is all connected, the choices that we make and thinking that I didn't choose this way of eating and consuming and this consumerism, but that was what was available to me. So in order to really choose your own path, it takes a lot of work and it takes a journey to find the path to a regenerative life and to find a path to taking care of the earth where we're producing more than what we are taking because that's where we're at right now. We can't just sustain. We need to give back. We're in a crisis of topsoil, loss of chemical overload, basically. It's really difficult to find food, even organic food that's free of chemicals and soil that's free of chemicals and water that's free of chemicals.

([00:06:38](#)):

So we need to do a lot of work to remediate and to regenerate the soil and to really take care of ourselves and the future generations. So regenerative agriculture is about producing more life than every life you take, and animals are key to that. So when we talk about mimicking nature, if you spent a lot of time in an intact hacked ecological wilderness. So I spent seven summers tracking wolves in the Frank Church wilderness in Idaho, which is the largest tract of wilderness in the lower 48. And I've also spent time tracking wolves in Alaska. And when you're in those wilderness areas, something shifts inside of you when you sit and you immerse in your senses and you really pay attention to what is going on, there's incredible interactions and it's all just flowing together in a way like this amazing dance that's bringing more life.

([00:07:57](#)):

And so how do we as humans relate to that? And how is our relationship with the wilderness and how do we sort of tend to that wild, but also every action that we take, how does that action create a ripple of positive impact? And so regenerative agriculture is an incredible solution to many of the major issues that we're facing during this time because when essentially you can describe it as movement, as a regenerative rancher, I move the animals like the wolves would move the herds of elk. And in that movement brings life. So when we're moving the animals through these incredible grasslands and the area that we ranch in northern California is the most biodiverse grassland in all of North America.

There's more life per square meter. And these grasslands, they evolved as grasslands. So all of those species within those grasslands depend on these grazing animals.

[\(00:09:23\)](#):

So we don't have those large herds of elk anymore, but we can mimic that disturbance and that movement by moving our cattle through the landscape. By then the grasses and the plants move, they're trampled the cattle leave their saliva, they leave their fertility, and as a result, carbon is being drawn down from the atmosphere through that constant cycle of the plant, which is birth growth, death, and decay. And all of those cycles are beautiful and we can relate to all of that and in a way where we are bringing more life with every one of those cycles of nature. And so what regenerative agriculture looks like is you don't disturb the soil through tillage. So tillage is what really breaks up that intact soil structure because there's so much life in the soil that's supporting life on earth. And so we use no-till agriculture, we integrate animals, we work to create more diversity.

[\(00:10:50\)](#):

So nature abhors a monoculture. We don't just till it poison it and plant it in corn and soy and hope for the best. There's different models that show that we really at the current rate of agriculture globally, we only have less than 60 harvests left. And so that's our lifetime. It's, it's kind of scary to think about that, and I don't see the kind of shift that's really needed to transition that, but it's possible. And we're seeing incredible results by using these different methods, which really come from indigenous people's wisdom system and connection to nature and really figuring out what it means to be a human being on this planet in with all life.

Warwick Schiller [\(00:11:56\)](#):

I love how passionate you are. That was awesome. There was something you said in the beginning of that, a phrase you used. You said something about living a regenerative life. So it's not just the agriculture that you are regenerative with. It's everything you do. It sounded like,

Doniga Markegard [\(00:12:21\)](#):

Yeah, we have the choice every day as soon as we wake up, we have the choice to live a regenerative life or a degenerative life. And that can go across everything is from the way what we put into our bodies to how we move our bodies. And stagnancy brings death basically, and movement brings life. So sort of the environmentalist approach maybe when I first started ranching was basically take humans off of the land, take cattle off of the land, and humans are destructive to nature, so don't interact with nature and that's the best thing to do. And then what they found was when you took the humans and you took the cattle off of these particular grasslands here that we work in, is that the grasses would become stagnant and they would oxidize, and so they would actually release carbon into the atmosphere when there's not grazing cattle on these ranches.

[\(00:13:39\)](#):

So basically the studies were showing that when you bring cattle on these grasslands, you have more diversity. You're saving these endangered species of birds and grasses. And we started working with a lot of scientists that are showing that it's imperative for cattle to be managed correctly on these grasslands, to save grassland birds and to save certain species of wild flowers that are endemic to this area are only found in this area. And without grazing all of those sort of non-native grasses would shade them out and then they would eventually disappear. So I think it's really important to understand that people aren't bad, cattle aren't bad. It's sort of the how we relate and why we relate and how we can

work together with the scientists and with the ranchers and with the consumers to really save this beautiful life, this beautiful planet that we have.

Warwick Schiller ([00:15:11](#)):

It's interesting you just mentioned that, oh, cattle aren't bad. This is the journey on podcast. And part of your journey was that you were a dreadlocked hippie type. And it sounds like at one point in time when you first maybe met your husband, I'm not sure when it was, but at some point in time you looked upon raising cattle as bad.

Doniga Markegard ([00:15:39](#)):

Yeah,

Warwick Schiller ([00:15:40](#)):

Yeah, about that. Tell us about the mindset journey from one of those to the other one.

Doniga Markegard ([00:15:50](#)):

Yeah. Well, it was during that time where I was in my early twenties and I knew everything.

Warwick Schiller ([00:15:55](#)):

Oh yeah.

Doniga Markegard ([00:15:58](#)):

Pretty much everything there was to know. And I have a 16 year old son and he knows everything. And so I'm seeing myself in my growing teenagers during that phase in my life and just kind of shake my head. But so I viewed cattle as separate from sort of the ecology and not as a solution, but as a problem. And I think a lot of that was very much perpetuated by false information. So for instance, when I spent so much time in the wilderness in Idaho, there was a lot of sheep and there was definitely cattle out there in the national forest, and you would hear about the wolves getting shot if they were preying upon the livestock. And then you'd have these people, these sort of environmentalists coming out from the city. It is kind of funny when I think about it now, but I think they were the defenders of wildlife, I think that was the group.

([00:17:24](#)):

And so they would have all these volunteers come out and set up their camps right next to the sheep camps at night, and they would make all kinds of noise and take different shifts to scare away the wolves from the sheep. And I just thought that was so funny because these people are going through all of this effort and seeing, oh, the sheep branches are bad and we're going to be out here and we're going to save the wolves. And I'm sure they were very well-meaning, and hopefully they did prevent a wolf from getting shot. But I think there was, so nobody was having those conversations. There wasn't people coming to the table and really communicating with each other in a productive solutions-based way. And over my time being a rancher, I've seen that happen, which is really cool. I've seen some really amazing collaborations with different stakeholders that are producing a solutions-based approach to agriculture and wildlife.

([00:18:50](#)):

But back then I didn't see that. I saw that it was like an us versus them kind of thing. And then you hear about, oh, overgrazing and I drive around and places in Wyoming or Montana, and I'd see cattle out where the grass looked like a golf course. So I was like, oh, yeah, that's bad. Overgrazing is bad. But I didn't really understand. I didn't sit across the table from a rancher and really hear about what they were doing and the constraints that they may have had. I'd never talked to a rancher in my life, never knew a rancher. I grew up in a very rural area in Washington, but it was farmland and logging, so primarily logging and vegetable farming. So maybe there was a few small ranches here and there, but I didn't know them personally.

[\(00:19:55\)](#):

But what I didn't realize is that the cattle were playing an important role, and I didn't realize that until I was a high school dropout. But then I went back to college to study permaculture and sustainable living, and that's when I came across Alan Savory and holistic management. And it was like, whoa, he's a tracker. Whoa. He's worked with indigenous hunter gatherer trackers in Africa, and I was immediately just enthralled with everything he had to say. I absorbed all of his books, I took his courses, and I applied that to my own businesses that I was developing when I was in college. And I just resonated so much with that, with his story of being that environmentalist and making these decisions that he would later regret because he didn't sit across the table from the ranchers and he didn't understand that the predator prey relationship was so key in regenerating life. And he came to create this movement and this philosophy that impacted so many of us and has really shifted the landscape of ranching. So it's amazing people like that that create the sparks and everybody has their flaws. But I look at someone like that and the impact that they've had and the ideas they've sparked in other people, I don't look at that person. I look at the impact that they've, and the shift that they've made because of that spark that they created that spark to become alive in me and to question things.

[\(00:22:10\)](#):

So yeah, that was my journey to realizing that cattle were not so bad. And then through synchronicity, I stumbled across a cattle rancher and ended up marrying him.

Warwick Schiller [\(00:22:24\)](#):

I think people like you are the game changers, the people who have had one very staunch view of things, and then you manage to grow through that and you get another view. So you've seen a subject from complete both sides of it. And so I think you have a broader view of the whole thing. So with the regenerative agriculture, the cattle, are they mimicking herds of what used to serve the function of the cattle do now, was it herds of elk?

Doniga Markegard [\(00:23:08\)](#):

Yeah, so there was large herds of elk. Some of the accounts were that there was herds as big as 2000 in this San Francisco Bay area, and there was also large herds of pronghorn. So those animals grazed these grasslands and they were moved by predators. I mean, we had grizzly bears here, so they could never sort of loaf around and be lazy in the riparian areas. They constantly had to be aware and bunch up for protection, and their behavior shifted because they were hunted.

Warwick Schiller [\(00:23:47\)](#):

Is it a bit like the thing about how reintroducing wolves to Yellowstone changed the course of the river?

Doniga Markegard [\(00:24:01\)](#):

Yeah,

Warwick Schiller ([00:24:02](#)):

Absolutely. As far as everything being connected?

Doniga Markegard ([00:24:05](#)):

Yeah. So that phenomenon is called the trophic cascade. So basically when you introduce a predator, which that predator was there at one point, and maybe I would say that it would probably would've naturally reintroduced because that's what we're seeing right now. I mean, we're seeing wolves come back to California without any introductory efforts. So when that animal comes into the landscape, then that prompts those elk to instead of just hanging out where that lush feed is right in the river, beds to be moving up into the mountains more so grazing those meadows, keeping them open. And also, so what happens then is that the songbirds come back, the beavers come back because then you have healthier riparian creek and river beds and there's more biodiversity. And so it's about looking at this ecology as animals are integral, animals are integral to an intact ecological system. And so if we're going to mimic our agriculture to match that ecological system, then animals are integral. You hear stories of how many birds, there were like band tail pigeons here in the west or passenger pigeons in the east, that would fly in such great numbers, they would darken the sky. And what do all of those animals or those imagine a herd heard right outside your front door of 2000 elk, what do they leave behind?

([00:26:06](#)):

They leave a lot of poop. They leave that fertility. And so we all know what happens when you try to grow a tomato plant in non fertile soil and you don't feed it and you don't amend your soil and you don't give it the right nutrition, you get a really crappy tasting tomato or you don't get a tomato at all. So all of that fertility is coming from those animals. And if you don't have it from the animals, then you're extracting it from somewhere that is, or dependent on nitrogen fertilizer, which then pollutes the river. So it's like this consistent cycle of death when you remove the animals, when you bring back the animals, it's a cycle of life.

Warwick Schiller ([00:27:03](#)):

Tell us about reading your book. It was interesting about what you do with your cattle. So you have a flock of free range chickens, and as you move the cattle, then you move the chickens and then they scratch all the poop and put it back in soil. Is that how it goes?

Doniga Markegard ([00:27:21](#)):

Yeah, yeah, absolutely. And wherever we have chickens, I mean the grasses are incredible, the sugar content in them, the bricks levels are just amazingly nutritious. So we graze our areas where we have the chickens. We raise 800 chickens every five weeks. We get a new batch of 800 chickens. So at any one point, we could have several over a thousand chickens out in the pasture. So the chickens then are moved every day. So I think there's a theme here. We're moving, right? We're moving away from stagnation and towards movement, which equals life. And so those chickens are moved every day and they then pick through the cow pies and they spread out that fertility. They sort of debug the landscape and they leave their own fertility. So if you were to leave them in one place, like for instance, a confinement house or with cattle a feedlot, what you create is pollution and an overload of that nitrogen.

([00:28:42](#)):

But if you move them across these grasslands, you're creating fertility and soil building and carbon sequestration and more life in the form of microbes and earthworms. So how do we sort of mimic those passenger pigeons or the band tail pigeons? It's like humans like to eat chicken. It is beef, chicken, and pork pretty much is what at least here in the US consumers are looking for. So we can raise chickens and it can actually be a benefit to the land, and the same with cattle that can actually benefit and be a climate friendly and climate solution.

Warwick Schiller ([00:29:40](#)):

I love that stuff. Let's get away from the regenerative agriculture and get more into the human side of the thing. So in your book, there's a part in your book I want to really dive into because I think you had a start in life that most people don't have and most people should. I'm going to read a little bit from your book here. This is the start of chapter four, awareness Wilderness awareness school, or was as we called it was designed for kids who do not fit in with the average teenager. It was for outcasts of the contemporary school system. By that point, I certainly fit that description. I'd retained my style from the road, my new fat dreadlocks on my head, secondhand clothing and hair in my legs. My classmates at this new school range from high school dropouts to highly motivated unschoolers. They had an intense drive to learn every plant animal and tracking and survival skill, pushing themselves to their limits in extreme conditions of the elements of nature.

([00:30:44](#)):

Sorry. We formed the first cohort of a maverick pack of teenagers, each as individual and strong-willed as the next, but brought together by one common thread nature. The curriculum was a grand experiment to take kids raised with modern amenities and immerse them in the wilderness, mentor them by asking a lot of questions to invoke passions and to teach them self-awareness and leadership as students learn to survive in the wilderness, how to extract medicine and food from wild plants, how to track animals and how to understand the language of nature. We were allowed to be free from authority and commands, and the reason most of us stayed for years, we worked things out as they came up for most days. We wanted in the forest with no destination or agenda. When we arrived at a spot that felt right in the forest, we gathered wood even on the wettest days, most days in Western Washington, we all knew where to find the fine dried twigs hanging dead under the bows of a hemlock, cedar or a fur tree. We peeled the soft bark with a red cedar and broke it apart to form a nest just like the squirrels do to line their nests. We worked together to spin a hand drill on a flat board to form a coal, and then we moved the coal into our nest, which would go up in flames as we softly blew on the ember. Wow.

([00:32:07](#)):

So tell us all about wilderness awareness School. Sorry, before I, I'm going to tell you to tell us about then I'm going to interrupt you. These days people spend a lot of time and a lot of money and a lot of effort doing things to try to reconnect with themselves, whether it's retreats or meditation or all sorts of things. And it sounds like this wilderness awareness school was just an immersion into that. So I'd love to hear all about it.

Doniga Markegard ([00:32:47](#)):

Yeah, I mean, just you reading that, I brought up so many, I was right there. I was right there with that group struggling with all of the wet dripping moss covered wood, and oh my gosh, we had so much fun. It was what an experience, and we were having so much fun that sometimes I just didn't want to go home. We just stayed out and we built forts and huddled around the fire to stay warm at night, and then

we'd jump in the freezing cold water in the morning challenging each other and pushing each other in. And we were just allowed to be fully alive and fully immersed. And so many of us had never been allowed that before, with the exception of when it was acceptable when you were a five-year-old running around and getting dirty. And so I think that that experience right there, it just galvanized everything in my life of what's truly important and how do we live this life of that connection and that awareness.

[\(00:34:26\)](#):

And it's a challenge. It's a challenge to go back to that, especially when there is so much pressure of raising a family and paying bills and sort of achieving something in life. And there's so much busyness that it's like you said, people seek out these retreats and these meditations because there's just so much pressure for what is that? What is really important in life to have some heading or just to be in the treadmill of work harder, get more money to get more things. And I just remember there's things as a parent, and I know you're a parent, and there's things in your childhood that stick with you that are like, okay, that's something that really impacted my life and shaped who I am. And for me, it was that nature connection and horses. So I would be happy living in a tent as long as I could provide that for my kids of that nature connection and that connection with a horse. And I was able to do that. And now as my kids are getting older and they're starting to leave the nest, I know that they'll have that to go back to. They'll have that.

[\(00:36:16\)](#):

They were immersed in nature from a very young age, and they've learned the skills. They know how to survive in the wilderness. They can walk out and have the confidence that they could start a fire, gather wood, boil water, and build a shelter. And I think for kids, especially girls, I think it's really, really important for them to have that confidence. And I'm seeing it with my daughter. She's 14, almost 15, and last year she went through a wilderness passage where they go out alone and they need to start a fire and sit by the fire all night. And the idea is that you don't let the fire go out, so you have to be alone tending that fire all night. And she had an incredible experience, but also didn't quite feel complete. She ended up falling asleep and rolling into the fire and stinging a lot of her hair off, which I was like, oh, I can relate.

[\(00:37:38\)](#):

That's happened to me plenty of times when I was your age, somebody built up the fire too big and then it burnt your cattail sleeping mat or put your shelter on fire, which back then things weren't as dry as they are now and in Washington, so we didn't have as big of a risk of starting a forest fire. But now she wants to, it's something that she's thinking about all year, like, okay, I've got to do that again. I've got to go back because she doesn't feel complete. And so I've been working to support her and she's going to be going out again in a couple of weeks to do another wilderness passage because it's something that she really wants to accomplish in life. And I've seen her transition to being a more strong, confident independent, being really in herself and in her body, which for teenage girls, it's difficult.

[\(00:38:46\)](#):

There's a lot of emotions and a lot of pressures from media and from the outside. And it's really neat for me to see that in my daughters now and remember my journey to having that sort of inner strength. And I think there's one thing that stays with us our entire lives, and that's that connection to ourselves and really having that inner peace and that knowing of who we are, who we are in this world. And that's always shifting. That's okay, it's evolving and shifting, but being able to work through those difficult times and having the tools to reconnect with the source, and that's not another person that's connecting to, you can't get that from somebody else that just creates codependency or bad

relationships. And how do you connect to that source? And everybody has their own way of connecting to the source, but that's so important to be able to know that you can go directly to nature or directly to a horse, and that's going to be a direct reflection of where you're at right now in this present moment.

[\(00:40:26\)](#):

I mean, horses are so amazing with that feedback. And the way I look at it is that we all have intuition. We were all, at one point, our ancestors were hunter gatherers, and they were able to go out and follow an animal and hunt and not just survive, but thrive and have this intuition of how to tend to the wild. The California Indians in this area, like the Rame or the Kashaya Pomo, they tended, I mean, there's some amazing accounts and stories of how every action was so intentional, the way that they burnt the grasslands to produce more food for the elk, their food source, they were tending to the wild because their survival depended it. And that came through both oral traditions and also intuition.

[\(00:41:44\)](#):

We've all had experiences where we've had a gut feeling. So imagine living in that intuition all the time. And that's where a horse is living, right? They're living in that intuition. And we get so busy in our head that we're not living at full capacity. And if you study neuroscience or brain development, you understand that there's so much more that we could be experiencing and that the hunter gatherer experienced on a daily basis, and we're missing out. Basically. It's like here we think we're so modern and we've got technology and we're so advanced and evolved, but really I see it's gone the opposite way because we're using less of our brain and we're connected to, we're disconnected from that source and from that intuition. So I feel like that's really what that passage of being out there with that group being alone in the wilderness, being alone with my horse, it developed that intuition and that knowledge and that knowing, not really knowledge, but just knowing that at any point I can connect to that source

Warwick Schiller [\(00:43:20\)](#):

In the book. I think very early on, there was a mention that you had a visit from a Maori elder.

[\(00:43:35\)](#):

Is he the one that suggested you go to the Wilderness Awareness School? What was the story there? Because we were talking before we got on the podcast here about a podcast guest I had a little while ago named Emily k from Sweden. So you regular listeners would've heard that one and how mind blowing that was. And she had come to her in her dreams and said that she had to go to New Zealand and had all sorts of crazy adventures there. But I thought it was interesting there as a Maori that you met in Washington State. What was he doing there and what did he tell you?

Doniga Markegard [\(00:44:10\)](#):

Yeah. Well, the Wilderness Awareness School was sort of like a, I don't know, maybe one of those power spots on the planet. There was this, a lake and the ground, just when you go to certain areas in the wilderness or there's certain places on these grasslands where you find out later that those were really, they were sacred spots or village sites, and you feel like this tingling through the bottom of your feet or you kind of almost back away out of respect that maybe you shouldn't be here. So wilderness awareness school drew people in, and a lot of it was just a lot of synchronicity and because basically it was a great experiment of how to take outcasts and mentor them in the way indigenous kids were mentored. So by the time an indigenous youth was a kindergartner, they knew everything that they could eat, everything that could kill them, all of the plants, all of the animals, all of the tracks, all of the trees, how to survive.

[\(00:45:36\)](#):

So it's like we've been robbed of that in our conventional schooling. And so this was sort of the great experiment of what do you do when you take kids that were raised in a modern way and immerse them in the wilderness and mentored them the way indigenous youth were mentored? And so it also drew in holy men, holy women, we would engage in with the different local tribes and through learning basket making. And it was like they were like, wow, kids that actually want to learn this stuff and it can actually go and help me harvest some of these plant materials that I need for my craft. And Mackey Ruca, the Maori elder, I believe he, and then there was also indigenous people that would come and they were told by the Great Spirit that they needed to share something with the world. So Wilderness Awareness School was a prime audience for that message.

[\(00:47:05\)](#):

And so they would come and they would do workshops, they would leave retreats, sweat lodge ceremonies. And so Mac Ruca was one of them, and I think he was doing some workshops during the time, and my mom had invited the people that were hosting him over for, and he came and it was like as soon as I saw him, all the hair on the back of my neck stood up and he looked me straight in the eye. I'd never met this guy. I mean, he walked, he kind of got out of the car with his Jade Kane. He had a little difficulty walking at that point, and he looked at me and said, you are headed for danger, right to the point, no small talk. That's what I love about, it's like in California, people aren't very direct. Come on, just be direct. Just tell me.

[\(00:48:11\)](#):

Right? Don't beat around the bush. So yeah, he said, you're headed for danger. And I was like, what? And that was when I was in my very much, I know everything and I am on my path and I'm a teenage rebel and this is what I'm doing and nobody can tell me what to do, but I just froze in my tracks. And he said that you need to connect with your heart and find that path back to your heart, back to yourself. And the way you're going to do this is through connecting directly with nature. And only then will you be able to make that head heart connection so it doesn't start in the head and then move to the heart. It starts in the heart with that intuition and that connection. And only from there is when you apply that purpose or that vision, and which when you've been around indigenous healers, they're just living that all the time.

[\(00:49:40\)](#):

And I just admire that so much. And there's very few people that are actually doing that. And so that's what led me to the Wilderness Awareness School and completely shifted my life. And I'm so thankful for him. He's passed away now, but he would tell stories about how his grandmother would send him out blindfolded swimming, and he would have these incredible interactions with Life in the Sea, and he would have these talked about just these full sensory immersion experiences. And so did a lot of blindfolded stuff like taking site away to develop those other senses.

Warwick Schiller [\(00:50:33\)](#):

Tell us about some of the things at the, well, let me back up. There's a book I read a number of years. I've read a lot of books, but this one was about, well, lots of books I've read about shamanism and that sort of thing. But one of the books I read was it gave you some exercises to do, and it sounds like you've done a lot of this stuff, but it was go out and sit in wilderness for 20 minutes and don't move your head, just keep your eyes still and just be aware of what comes in your peripheral vision for 20 minutes. And then another one of the exercises was do the same thing, but go and sit and close your eyes and listen to all the things you can hear for about 20 minutes. And another one, and this is the intuition one was go and sit with your eyes closed and see what you can feel with your body. And these are just exercises,

but reading your book, you lived these things. And I just want to, I think people, you were talking about your head and your heart and our society puts us all in our head. And that wilderness awareness school really gets you into your body. Tell us more about some of the things they had you guys do there.

Doniga Markegard ([00:51:55](#)):

Yeah, yeah. So that sitting out in Nature Alone was sort of the foundation of what we did, and it was called a secret spot. So we each had our secret spot that we would go to and we'd go to the same spot every day. And we would sit there, most of the sits were probably about an hour or maybe even longer. So it would sort of be the first thing you did. Maybe you'd get a fire going and then you'd go and do your sit spot. And so getting to know one place very well is really important because yeah, we all love nature. The feeling of going hiking or going to visit Yosemite or Yellowstone, and we all love the feeling that we get, but do we really know one place well and know the patterns of that one place and the birds that live there and nest there, and the animals that pass by there and the tree that you lean against and the changes through every season.

([00:53:13](#)):

And then usually when you first go and sit in that spot, your head might still be running from what you're going to do or what you did or any thoughts. And then you go into this sensory meditation where the goal is to have no thought and just be fully immersed in your senses, which it's difficult to not have a thought sometimes. We only experience little seconds here and there of no thought. And so it takes a lot of practice to get there. But basically when you first start this practice, all of the life, the birds, everything just flees from you. You're this giant T-Rex coming through the forest threatening to kill everything, and you don't even know that you're having that impact. And after doing this practice for days, weeks, months, you get to the point where, oh, I understand that my presence is causing this reaction.

([00:54:33](#)):

And sometimes people never get that. They'll go to their grave never realizing that how much their presence is causing this sort of flee, this fight or flight response. So understanding that is the first step. Like, whoa, these birds are fleeing for their life because of me. And then you slow down and you might go into that space even before you get out of your car, before you walk down to your secret spot. And then there's that transition of you're causing less of a ripple. So you're actually seeing that the animals are fleeing from you. Before it was, it was happening so far in front of you that you never even saw it. So then you're actually realizing, whoa, I'm causing this reaction. I see these birds fleeing from me. And then you look at, okay, how can I move without causing that massive disturbance? And the goal is essentially to, you see a robin singing on a branch, and you are able to walk under that branch without the Robin breaking in its song. And that's not easy to do.

Warwick Schiller ([00:56:15](#)):

I imagine there's parts of that. One of them might be how you move, but I imagine the other more subtle part of it is what's going on inside of you, not the exterior, but the interior part.

Doniga Markegard ([00:56:43](#)):

Yeah, it really is. And that's where a lot of people have the meltdown and my time in wilderness awareness school, I saw that a lot. People coming and realizing they've been a certain way their whole lives, and they're finally seeing that they've got these internal struggles and the life that they're living is not the one that's coming from their heart. And literally we saw people come and throw their day

planners in the river, quit their job, divorce their husband. It is like slow down a little bit. You don't quite have to make so many changes at once.

Warwick Schiller ([00:57:30](#)):

It's like an ayahuasca ceremony where left ayahuasca.

Doniga Markegard ([00:57:34](#)):

Yeah, I mean, I think that any of those drugs are a crutch that people, maybe they feel like they need it, but you can get that same experience by direct connection with nature without the risk of not coming back.

Warwick Schiller ([00:57:58](#)):

So you got this so good. There's a couple of stories in the book I want you to relate if you can. One was about having a deer walk so close by you, your fingers brushed her flank or something. What were you doing then? And tell us about that.

Doniga Markegard ([00:58:22](#)):

Yeah. Well, I had my sit spot by where I lived in Fall City, Washington along the Snoqualmie River. And I would go out there and it was a meadow next to a pond, and there was a small group of deer that would graze in that meadow. And I watched those deer. I watched the bucks deer in the rutt. I watched when the Fawns first came out and to the point where I wanted to be part of their group, I wanted to be accepted. So I started to move like a deer. I started to eat grass, and I started to bed down where they would bed down, and then I would leave my there right next to their daybeds so that they were used to my smell. I did this for a long time. I mean, this was years of going to that school and doing that immersion. It was my whole high school.

([00:59:42](#)):

And so it finally got to the point where those deer just accepted me as one of them, or I'm not quite sure, but they didn't see me as a threat. They didn't see me as a predator. And so I remember one morning I woke up really early and it was still dark, and I just had this drive in me to go down and be with the deer. And so I found this spot and I was ahead of them. I beat 'em to it and to their early morning grazing, I just stepped off of their trail and I watched them as they came down the hill. It was that moment where they came so close, it was like we shared a breath.

([01:00:44](#)):

I was able to reach out and just brush the side of that deer that moment. It was sort of that pure connection. I didn't feel any separation between me and the deer and the earth and the air. It was just this pure feeling of, there's no words, love being cherishing every moment being in the moment. And there's probably words in indigenous languages for this. There's probably many, many words. There's many words for love, but there isn't a direct translation to our word for love. There's those who you hold in your heart. So I think our language falls short of describing so many of these experiences.

Warwick Schiller ([01:01:45](#)):

I think English is a very limited language. I, I think it's in Japanese, there is one word that describes the sound of rain falling on a certain type of leaf on the first rain of spring or fall or something or other. And even with the horses, if you're riding a horse and they get to where they're really relaxed while moving,

and they really stretch over the top line, they'll stretch down while they're going. There's, there's a Dutch and a German word for that.

Doniga Markegard ([01:02:22](#)):

Wow.

Warwick Schiller ([01:02:24](#)):

The word is Breen. And the word Breen means when you're riding your horse and they get really relaxed, but they're nice and forward, but they're relaxed and they stretch over the top line. Their head goes down and they kind, that's one word. But yeah, so English is quite, it's not a very descriptive language when it comes to things like that. Sorry to interrupt. I just wanted to talk about No, no,

Doniga Markegard ([01:02:50](#)):

It's a word. Fine. Yeah, so many of those, it is just, you have to feel it, right? You have to experience it yourself. And I think that that was my hope with writing this book is that others would see themselves in my journey. And that's sort of the feedback I've gotten, like, wow, yeah, I felt the same way. And I really felt like I was there and not sort of like, oh, she did this. I wasn't able to do that. I can never do that. But really seeing that anyone can have access to that, all Judy,

Warwick Schiller ([01:03:30](#)):

My border colleagues come to say hi.

Doniga Markegard ([01:03:32](#)):

Yeah.

Warwick Schiller ([01:03:34](#)):

And then there was another part of the book where your wilderness awareness school had a competition with others, and it was like a stalking tracking. Tell us about that. I thought that was a great story.

Doniga Markegard ([01:03:53](#)):

So it was a scout camp and northeastern Washington sort of in a really large wilderness area. And it was something that we would do every year to test our skills. And it was put on by a different wilderness school, and they would draw people in from all walks of life and who were there to really challenge themselves in survival and awareness and camouflage. And so there was navy seals and martial artists that really were priding themselves and having that sort of inner peace and quiet mind an all adult. So it was an adult thing, and we were the only kind of teenagers that would show up. And so we would go, and it was a challenge where we would go out. I think they gave us a sack of potatoes with a whole group. So we were teams, so our group was a team, and we would head out on us and go in full survival.

([01:05:14](#)):

And it was also, we had to stay hidden the whole time. We couldn't let anyone else see us. And it was a big game of capture the flag. So every team maybe say there was four teams had a flag, and so you were trying to be invisible the whole time and go into the team's camp and steal their flag, which of course you're guarding the flag. You had shifts of who was guarding the flag. And so you were also given a bag

of marbles, and every time someone saw you, the person that was seen had to give up one of their marbles. And so if you didn't have any marbles, then basically you were dead. And the person that had the most marbles was the individual winner of that part of the game. Of course, there was also stealing the flags and other things going on.

[\(01:06:18\)](#):

So what I did the whole game was listen to the language of nature. And that was one thing that we had an advantage of everyone else because we had been immersing in bird language and understanding the different alarm calls of birds. And the same thing that I described as you have this ring, people have this ring of disturbance that they don't even realize because they don't see it, and it literally goes out in front of you two minutes, you can time it on your clock. When you hear this particular sort of fleeing alarm from the birds of this massive disturbance, you're like, oh, that's got to be a human. And then you can sit on the trail and it takes quite a long time for that human to actually show up. You have to have some patience. It'll take a couple minutes. And so we would hear that, and it would be the toes that would sort of pop up and sound their alarm, and you could see it sort of coming down the hill. So even though the person was in full camouflage, completely hidden from sight, maybe even belly crawling through the brush and completely silent, you could hear the birds alarming at that person.

[\(01:08:01\)](#):

For us, it was obvious, oh, that person's intense and they're stalking and they've got this like, oh, I'm invisible. I'm not going to be seen. And that's not how we moved around. We knew that to be around birds, you never face them direct. You always kind of turn your body so that you're not threatening. You move in arcs and you're not sort intent on one thing or another. You're just kind of being relaxed. And there's not a care in the world. There's no destination. And so that's how I won the game was I listened to the language of nature and I could see the trajectory of that person that thought they were invisible by what the birds were saying. And I would go to that area where the birds were alarming, and I would wait, and then they would come, I might be hiding behind a tree or something, and they would come close to me and I would just say, I see you. And they'd be like, free. I have no idea how they would be seen. And just the look on their face, some punk teenager is right there behind a tree waiting for them, and they'd have to give up on their marbles.

Warwick Schiller [\(01:09:33\)](#):

I recall from the book, this guy's like a Navy Seal or something.

Doniga Markegard [\(01:09:36\)](#):

Oh, yeah. Very much full of themselves. Yeah.

Warwick Schiller [\(01:09:41\)](#):

Really. And so yeah, it's that energy that you bring that I wrote it down the ring of disturbance. I love that. It's your, yeah, I love that term. Is that something you guys used in Wass Ring of Disturbance?

Doniga Markegard [\(01:10:03\)](#):

I think so. Something along those lines. Yeah.

Warwick Schiller [\(01:10:07\)](#):

So a few years ago, maybe last year, I forget when it was, I was reading something, I got into one of them, ping, ping, ping things. I read this and then went to Wikipedia, and then there was this and something else. And it had to do with, must have to do with Hunter gathers, but it must have to do with tracking. And there was a guy in America who was the guy to go to, and maybe his name was Thomas. I can't remember.

Doniga Markegard ([01:10:32](#)):

Tom Brown, probably

Warwick Schiller ([01:10:34](#)):

Tom Brown. That's the guy. Well, I couldn't find anything on YouTube by him, but there was a young guy that was talking about this stuff, that beginning tracking, stalking type stuff. And there were two exercises that he talked about that I think you talked about in the book. And one of them is Fox walking. Can you tell us about Fox walking?

Doniga Markegard ([01:10:57](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. So probably Fox Walking and Owl Lies allies. That was, yeah. Yeah. So basically it's like a walking meditation. And it's cool because I work with a mechanic, Katie Bowman, who is all about how we move our bodies and how we interact with everything else with movement. And so the fox walking is very much a natural movement pattern that is really a healthy way to move because so much of our movement is a falling forward or stomping our feet. And with Fox walking, you're kind of reaching your foot out in front of you and being pulled forward and you're not committing your weight. And there's some practical reasons for that because if you are actually hunting, you don't want to step on a stick and make a lot of noise, so you're feeling with your foot and then pulling yourself forward. And so with Fox walking, you are really slowing down enough to connect with the ground and connect with your body and how your body is aligned and how your body is in relationship with everything else around you.

([01:12:36](#)):

And then you're even imagining that a red fox, they actually have hair growing in between their toes to silence their movement. That's why they can move so quietly, that sort of sound absorption. And then you go into this owl eyes. So if you've ever watched an owl, their eyes are sort of fixed in their heads and they're able to see from their perch the slight movement of a vole in the grass. And so when you're in owl eyes and you're fox walking, you're able to detect the slightest movement. And it also sort of sets you into that heart center place inside of you where you immediately go into that meditation state. So that's a great practice. So using the sit spot, a full sensory immersion, and then also the fox walking and owl eyes.

Warwick Schiller ([01:13:51](#)):

So the video that I watched with the Fox walking, there was a certain order that your foot landed in the ground. It was like heel outside your little toe and then it rolled over your big toe. Is that,

Doniga Markegard ([01:14:07](#)):

Yeah, I mean, I think people try to complicate things and it's really pretty simple. I think it's more just you're feeling the ground and maybe you're rolling your foot towards the inside and then pulling yourself forward. But no, mostly I set the ball of my foot down first and then commit my weight.

Warwick Schiller ([01:14:33](#)):

Well, I'll take it from you, the winner of the marble game. And then the other exercise that I think you're referring to as allies, what this guy said to do was put your arms out beside you at shoulders height and raise your index finger and look straight ahead and adjust your vision until you can see both of your fingers at the same time. Is that a good way to learn how to do allies?

Doniga Markegard ([01:15:00](#)):

Yeah. So you sort of look in front of you and pick a spot like I am looking at the window and I'm seeing a blade of grass. And don't move your eyes from that spot and then put your hands next to your head and without moving your eyes from that spot in front of you, you want to see both hands at the same time. And then it's the same with up above and below, you want to see, so you have this sphere up and down of vision. Yeah, essentially you're just without moving your eyes or moving your head, you're expanding that sphere of vision.

Warwick Schiller ([01:15:43](#)):

Yeah. These things, it's interesting when you were talking about your daughter going off and doing the thing and whatever, and you were saying that your kids could survive in the wild. I don't think this stuff's about having to survive in the wild unless we have the zombie apocalypse. But I think these doing these things are ways that we can reconnect with ourselves and live better lives in the current lives we are living.

Doniga Markegard ([01:16:20](#)):

Yeah, I agree. I mean, it's like we are not going to go and live out and try to survive in the wilderness right now. I mean, first of all, it would be a constant sort of starvation march because our resources and our life on earth has been so depleted that there isn't the abundance of food that there was when this land was tended by indigenous people. You hear, and this is what makes me sad just thinking about this, is I would always hear the stories of in the Pacific Northwest from the indigenous people where the salmon ran thick, you could literally walk on their backs across the rivers, or the rivers would turn red when they would be coming up river. And so you're lucky now to see one steelhead or one salmon coming up the rivers and the creeks, and it's sort of like the same all boards.

([01:17:34](#)):

And so that's what really back to this regenerative agriculture, and we're sort of back to where we started where it's, I understood through trying to go out and survive and struggle and be starving. My son went on this longer survival trek, and I was talking to parents afterwards and like, oh yeah, you mean the starvation march? They were sort of dropped off way up in the mountains and they had to walk probably 30 miles or something to get back to base camp, just navigating their own way, and they didn't bring any food. And it was like maybe they caught a squirrel here and there, or I think somebody brought some fish hooks. And so one night they had some tiny little fish and it was like the person in the front, I think this was like 10 kids, and the person in the front, if there was five berries on the bush, I was like, oh, the person in the back didn't get any. And that's just a result of our disconnected relationships to tending to this wild. We haven't been tending to our food source. And so how would we expect ourselves to be able to go out and survive when everything has been so degenerated and depleted? How do we bring that back? How do we create healthy living farms and ranches and ecosystems and draw those salmon back in because they're still there and they're just waiting for the right conditions to multiply and to come back in abundance. Similar to the wolves,

Speaker 1 ([01:19:35](#)):

Happy to announce his first book, the Principles of Training, understanding the Relationship between you and Your Horse, and Why Effective Training Works is now available after a lifetime of working with horses. Warwick has categorized every horse training method into 12 foundational principles. Understanding the intricacies of these principles will allow you to make the most educated horse training decisions on your horsemanship journey and is a must read for any horse owner. Get your copy today on Amazon or get a personalized copy signed by Warwick on his website, warwick schiller.com.

Warwick Schiller ([01:20:12](#)):

Yeah, so it's kind of like, you know how certain animals, if there's a drought, they don't populate, but then when the weather patterns change, then they do that. I think the animals are probably just waiting for us to bugger off on a spaceship to somewhere.

Doniga Markegard ([01:20:34](#)):

There's a whole thing about that going to Mars. It's like, well, I really love this planet. I don't have any desire to go to another one.

Warwick Schiller ([01:20:48](#)):

Yeah, I don't need to. So you just mentioned wolves a second ago. Got me thinking. Tell us about tracking wolves in Idaho for seven

Doniga Markegard ([01:20:55](#)):

Sites. Yeah, I mean, that was incredible. I love the Intermountain West and I love the area that I live now, but I've been able to spend a bit of time in Idaho and Montana and Wyoming, and being in Idaho and following the wolves, I think really taught me how to be a regenerative rancher. So the wolves, I followed them for days and days, and so we'd go and we'd set up camp next to one pack. And so one summer there was a pack of 11 wolves and we were doing both ecotourism, so bringing people out and teaching them how to track, and also providing research for data for some of their research efforts that were going on at the time. It was right in the beginning of the introductory efforts. And so just sort of providing that on the ground observations and data of what the wolves were doing, where they were going, what they were eating.

([01:22:12](#)):

And so that required us to spend the long, long hours out with these packs and following the wolves. And so one particular experience was when I was, and we would go out at first light and look, they travel long distances. And so we would go out just when we would be able to see, and we'd be on the running boards of a pickup truck, driving the wilderness roads out there, leaning off to the side of the truck, looking for the tracks, looking and looking out in front and waiting for them to sort of cross these roads. It was like finding a needle in a haystack, literally. I mean, just the expanse is so huge. And so one time I was leaning off, holding on to the inside bar of the truck and I was, oh, saw a track stop and so stop. And the trackers would get out and circle around and figure out where the wolf was going, the size of the track, and kind of look around the general area. And so I was dropped off on this fresh track and I had a radio and the water bottle, and that's whatever, maybe a knife in my pocket and a little tape measure to sort of measure the tracks and the scat as I came across them in a little notebook. So I set off on the trail and it was a journey. It was incredible. And luckily the wolves, they'll follow the path of least resistance. So they were following the sheep trails and the sheep trails were there.

[\(01:24:20\)](#):

So I would see the tracks and they would kind of border the edge of these meadows and I would see these incredible mountain meadows and come across elk and sandhill cranes and just felt just so immersed and so alive just out there on the trail of the wolf. And that I was like, I am, this is what I want to do for the rest of my life. Basically just be out here with the wolves, following them, experiencing what they experience, seeing what they see. So it was hours of me following this alpha wolf because they'll go out and they'll mark their territory and they have very large territories. And so when they go out and they mark their territory because they have this territory and they don't want another pack kind of intruding, and so then they'll eventually head back towards where the pack is.

[\(01:25:35\)](#):

And so that's what I was hoping is that I would be led to where they were. And so sure enough, I went up over this rise and it got to the point where I was so close behind this wolf, I must've just gotten the track when I got dropped off. And I was kind of jogging a lot of the time following the track of this wolf. And I didn't stop and take breaks, and I got so close that there was a light rain that came. And then a few minutes later I saw the track and the track was on top of the light rain. So the wolf had come after the rain. So I knew I was really close. I was tracking, when you're tracking, you're also tracking all these weather patterns to age that track, and you're journaling the weather. When did it rain, when was it sunny, when was it windy?

[\(01:26:40\)](#):

And so I was following, and that was that point where I just got that energy coming up through my legs and feeling like, wow, I am so close to this wolf. And I kind of paused there for a minute and just I had this fear come up, which was really interesting because I was very fearless. I was very much a fearless teenager. I was the first one to jump off the bridge into the water and do the crazy stunt on my horse, and I paid for it. I got a number of concussions in my youth, but that didn't stop me from being completely fearless. And so this was an interesting feeling for me being afraid. And I'd never been afraid of predators. I was in Washington and in Alaska in bear country, and I always felt like I had the tools to know how to be around predators and know how to protect myself.

[\(01:27:55\)](#):

And so that was really interesting for me. And it was a point in my life where I was like, oh, do I run from that or do I go into that feeling? And so I chose to go that feeling. And I think it was more looking back, I think it was more respect. I was entering into their sort of family sanctuary, and I should not do that without being very thoughtful and very respectful and giving reverence to their home. And so many people, they don't even get to be able to see something like that. And so I got to the edge of where the forest met this incredibly beautiful meadow with this meandering stream running through it. And I saw the wolf and it was just the shadow on the edge of the tree line. And that moment was, it was like the gift that wolf was giving me the gift of the time that I spent all of that dirt time leading up to that the years of looking at tracks and following footprints and immersing in nature, it was like that was the moment that I'd been waiting for.

[\(01:29:37\)](#):

And so at that point I was like, okay, this day cannot get any more amazing. I was exhausted and hadn't eaten anything all day, and it was well into the afternoon. I went and I took my shoes off and I soaked my feet in the cold water and had a drink of water. And then I heard howling erupting all around me, like 360 degrees. I was in the middle of the meadow and I didn't see anything, but I heard all of this howling and little pups barking and chiming in, and I was just looking around at this meadow and it was just full of life. And there wasn't any elk in the meadow, of course, but there was sign that the elk had

been there. There was still some saliva on the grasses, and I could still see their fresh tracks and their poop and their wallow and their smell.

[\(01:30:43\)](#):

You can kind of smell the elk when they've moved through an area. And so I was like, oh, I can't get any better than this. So hearing all of the wolves, seeing the wolf, and then hearing all of the howling around me, and then I heard a raven calling and ravens have this relationship with wolves, and often they'll follow the PACS to take advantage of the kills. And so I got up and I was just sort of at that point, there's no thinking, I wasn't thinking of what I was doing. It was like my body was just moving where my body was going to move. And so I got up and I walked towards the raven, and in a place where the creek had slowed down and oxbow, I stopped in my tracks. And right there in front of me was this massive bull elk that was laying in this stream.

[\(01:31:54\)](#):

And it was just so visceral, it was so fresh, and the guts were coming out right there. And I was like, I just froze. And I slowly backed away. And it was that moment that because I had gone through becoming vegan and really protesting animal cruelty and all of these things, and then I saw death, so such a large death. You see also in that meadow, there was voles and moles that the pups had used as chew toys. And so you see a lot of small deaths, but this was a big death. And it really hit me to the point where I was like, I was weak and I couldn't, couldn't really function. I knew that I needed to, this was a big transition in my life, and I was raised vegetarian, and I think at that point I still wasn't eating any meat.

[\(01:33:11\)](#):

And right there I just realized, wow, that one death, that one bull elk that sort of sacrificed its life that the wolves had pulled out of that herd that is sustaining so much life is sustaining this pack. And that will then sustain the ecosystem and sustain thousands and millions and actually billions of life forms if you count all of the life that's in the soil. So it's like one death is producing so much life. And so I think that's sort of the metaphor that I bring into cattle ranching because it's hard. I mean, it's been hard on me actually lately more so than before. I think, again, experiencing a shift in my life, I'm getting into my forties, which is different for me than my thirties. And this is the season now that we're bringing groups of slaughter in on a weekly basis. So these are animals that we saw being born and raised them with so much love and so much care, and they have the most beautiful life.

[\(01:34:36\)](#):

They have an incredible view, an incredible place to live. They're raised with their family group and then we gather them and they willingly come into the corrals and we use these low stock livestock, low stress, livestock handling, and we're gentle with them. They're gentle with us, and then we load them into a cattle trailer. And it's like that moment where you step up on the railing and you peek inside the holes and they look at you. It's hard. And it's been a challenge for me these last couple months as we've started again, because take a break during the winter and then we start back up again. And so I say a prayer and I think back to that elk, and I think about how much life and how that elk sacrificed its life, and it doesn't make it easier. I don't want to downplay that part of living is killing, and I want to give reverence and pray that that life was very meaningful.

[\(01:36:03\)](#):

And it reminds me of that our going back to our roots as hunter gatherers, I don't think it ever gets easy. I don't think it ever should get easy, that death. And I think that people have been so disconnected from that cycle of death that it's sort of like we create these false perceptions of what should die and what should live. And without really knowing it, without really being, I don't know if I'm explaining this right

because sort of really fresh for me right now, but it definitely brings a tear to my eye every time. And I think it should be difficult. I think it's meant to be difficult. And I also remember there's a group of son Bushman in the Kalahari that a friend of mine, a tracker that I spent a lot of time with actually was the one that would bring the B b C camera crews out when they would document this phenomenon of that.

[\(01:37:20\)](#):

There's only a couple of them, and I'm not sure if they're still alive now, a couple of San Bushmen that were able to do the hunt by running. And it's like that is the pure instinctual meaning of hunter gatherer human being is to barefoot in the Kalahari desert pickup on the track of a kudu and with a spear run after that kudu until the blood boils and that kudu collapses and our blood doesn't boil. So that bushman will go up to that kudu, and after it has collapse from exhaustion, will spear that kudu and then sprinkle sand on top of the kudu and say words say a blessing. And you can just see it when you watch these documentaries that even for them, it's not easy. It's difficult. And even after they've ran for miles and miles and miles all day in the hot beating sun, it never gets easy.

Warwick Schiller [\(01:38:51\)](#):

No. So one of my podcast guests, I just did a podcast again with him recently named Rupert Isaacson. So Rupert spent a lot of time with the coy sand bushman in the Kalahari, but he was telling me a story about how they took him out hunting one day to show them how they used to hunt with the little bow and arrow, the tiny little bow and arrow they had. They can't hunt like that anymore, but they're not allowed to hunt like that anymore. But they took him out to show him how they were doing, and they were going to hunt a gems box, hems would say SBA in South Africa. And he said, when you hunt a sba, you got to be careful because they will know they're being hunted and they'll circle around behind you. But they track this hems Bach for quite a long time, but never actually laid eyes on him. They didn't get close enough to see him, and they're tracking and tracking and tracking. And then they get to a spot to where he's pooped, and there's the two bushmen. And they said to Rupert, they call him Ru, they said, ah, ru. And they took the poop of the, so he's thinking they got these tiny little bows that don't go very far. How are they going to hunt this hams sbo haven't seen him all day.

[\(01:40:18\)](#):

He goes, ah, Ru takes the poop of the SBA and puts it in the left hind footprint of the heba. Then he says to Ru, close your eyes. And so Rubik close his eyes and he said that, I dunno if it was 30 seconds or a minute or whatever, and then there's a tap on his shoulder and the guy says, open your eyes. And Rupert opens his eyes and they're standing in front of them side on with his shoulder presented to them exactly one little Bose length away, one little arrow shootings length away was the Hems bch. And the Bushman goes, and they didn't have a bow with him, but he just made the sound of the bow and the hems bch ran off. But it was kind of like whatever that thing is, they did that the Hems Bch presents itself and goes, okay, I will sacrifice myself for the, and it's like things like that just amaze me. We don't know anything about

Doniga Markegard [\(01:41:25\)](#):

Anything. Yeah, it's so true. There's all of these realms that we'll never know, and there's so much beauty in that. There's so much beauty, there's so much beauty in the unknown,

Warwick Schiller [\(01:41:40\)](#):

Kind of on the track of what we're talking about. Then tell me about your, what is your son's middle name?

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Doniga Markegard ([01:41:46](#)):

NDA Loie. So

Warwick Schiller ([01:41:49](#)):

Have you been du Bo Vadis place?

Doniga Markegard ([01:41:52](#)):

We've been to the Ose Lodge in Kruger, and we've tracked with the sang there, and that's where my son's name came from. Yeah,

Warwick Schiller ([01:42:08](#)):

Right. So you Boyd Vati

Doniga Markegard ([01:42:10](#)):

Is, no, I don't think so.

Warwick Schiller ([01:42:12](#)):

You don't know who Boyd Vati is?

Doniga Markegard ([01:42:13](#)):

I mean, maybe I've heard his name remind me.

Warwick Schiller ([01:42:18](#)):

He wrote a book called The Line Trackers Guide to Life.

Doniga Markegard ([01:42:20](#)):

Oh, yes. Okay. Yep.

Warwick Schiller ([01:42:24](#)):

His lodge, his place is called Lonnda Lo.

Doniga Markegard ([01:42:27](#)):

Oh, okay. He's the owner of osi. See, I just worked with the trackers there. I didn't ever meet the owner.

Warwick Schiller ([01:42:35](#)):

Okay.

Doniga Markegard ([01:42:35](#)):

Yeah, that's the oldest game lodge. It's the most incredible place. I mean, that's the top of my list. If I were to able to go back to anywhere on the planet, it would be osi. See,

Warwick Schiller ([01:42:49](#)):

He did a podcast with Tim Ferriss, the absolute best podcast I've ever listened to in my entire life.

Doniga Markegard ([01:42:58](#)):

Wow. Okay. I'll have to listen to that.

Warwick Schiller ([01:43:01](#)):

Yeah. Boyd Bardy with Tim with on Tim Ferriss's podcast. And yeah, so he wrote a book called The Line Trackers Guide to Life, and another book that I, and it's funny, your book, Don, again, tracking the Wisdom of the Wild, it's kind of very similar to what nature can teach us about us,

Doniga Markegard ([01:43:26](#)):

And

Warwick Schiller ([01:43:27](#)):

Especially indigenous wisdom can teach us about

([01:43:31](#)):

Us. So I've got to get to your questions. And it's funny, as you regular podcast listeners would know, I give my guests a choice of 20 questions to choose from, and the one that people always choose, you didn't choose, which is what is your relationship like with fear? But you answered it anyway because you told me the story about the wolf and you're like, okay, do I back off or do I go forward? So yeah, the question is what is your relationship like with fear? Do you move towards it or away from it? And you've already answered that one. So that was,

Doniga Markegard ([01:44:06](#)):

I forgot that was a question.

Warwick Schiller ([01:44:08](#)):

So your first question you chose was if you could spread a message throughout the world, one that people would listen to, what would it be? Or your favorite quote or both?

Doniga Markegard ([01:44:19](#)):

Yeah. So I would say that to really connect with nature, to find your true purpose and live that purpose and understand that the reality around us is not the one that we've necessarily chosen, and we can create our own beautiful reality. And that goes back to connecting to your heart and connecting with nature.

Warwick Schiller ([01:44:47](#)):

Boom, right there. That's all you guys need to know right there. Next question. What's the most worthwhile thing, and you quite possibly answered this one, but what's the most worthwhile thing you've put your time into something that changed the course of your life?

Doniga Markegard ([01:45:02](#)):

I would say getting dirty. That dirt time, just, I spent a lot of time covered in a lot of dirt and horse hair and really immersing myself in the smells of the decomposing fungal duff of the Pacific Northwest Forest. And I think that is the most important thing that I've done is had that connection to dirt. And I didn't realize at the time that it's so healthy for you too, because when you connect to the soil, it's

improving your gut microbiome when you're around animals, there's all these cool studies about the Amish that were raised with animals. They don't have allergies. They have a healthier immune system. So I think get dirty and be healthy and happier as a result.

Warwick Schiller ([01:46:04](#)):

Play with the mycelium. I read something recently that there is something in, and you said it's good for your gut biome, but there's something in soil that is actually good for our mental health.

Doniga Markegard ([01:46:16](#)):

Yeah, absolutely. There's a microbe, there's an

Warwick Schiller ([01:46:18](#)):

Exchange of Yes,

Doniga Markegard ([01:46:20](#)):

Yes. Yeah. That increases serotonin in your brain. Yes,

Warwick Schiller ([01:46:23](#)):

Yes. Increases serotonin, getting your hand in the dirt.

Doniga Markegard ([01:46:26](#)):

Yeah, absolutely. I've

Warwick Schiller ([01:46:28](#)):

Read that recently. The next question was what advice would you give to people about who want to get into your profession? But first you've got to tell me, what is your profession? Are you a wolf tracker? Are you farmer? Are you an author? Which profession

Doniga Markegard ([01:46:44](#)):

Are talking about? Yeah. I gained my income from both agriculture and building regenerative farms for other people. Right now I'm doing some global land regeneration for a blockchain entertainment company. So it's like you just never know what's going to fall in your lap and which direction it's going to take. And this new direction is so exciting. I'm working with a women's agroforestry collective in Costa Rica that's working with indigenous women and children, and it's just amazing and it's fun and yeah, I love it. So I would say the advice would be don't judge the present from the past and be resilient to what nature brings. And I had a very humbling experience this past winter with that and got kind of knocked back a bit of like, wow, we really do not know what is going to be coming our way in the next few years, next several years with the amount of massive wildfires to floods, to drought, to everything we're experiencing. We really cannot base our actions on what we've done in the past. We really need to be present in the moment and resilient and act accordingly and be adaptive.

Warwick Schiller ([01:48:26](#)):

I think things are changing, so we need to be quite adaptive. Where do you go to recharge or to find motivation?

Doniga Markegard ([01:48:33](#)):

For me, it's movement. So I'm right here on the coast and I walk from my house first thing in the morning. I usually carry my cup of tea and I'm down on the beach and walking the private stretch of beach all by myself in the mornings. And that's where I gain my creativity and my ideas. And I'm not someone that's like quick to respond or quick to act. I like to think things through and connect to the source and feel the energy before I take an action. I need to feel it first. And that's how I do it, is I go and I spend time alone and I move and I walk on the beach

Warwick Schiller ([01:49:21](#)):

In private beach. That's pretty cool. What is one common myth about your profession that you'd like to debunk?

Doniga Markegard ([01:49:30](#)):

I think it was understanding those cycles of life and death, and so we can all be in relationship with it, and we are in relationship with death whether we like it or not, and whether we know it or not and how we relate to that is important. So being connected and in relationship and aware of that is very key. And not just passing judgment of the evil meat eaters or cattle rancher, really understanding it and sitting across the table from the farmer or the rancher, which is what I, looking back, I should have done right from the beginning.

Warwick Schiller ([01:50:19](#)):

Well, no, you shouldn't have done, because that wasn't your journey, was it?

Doniga Markegard ([01:50:23](#)):

True? That's right. You have

Warwick Schiller ([01:50:24](#)):

No regrets. You have a deeper understanding of the whole thing now because you went down one path for quite a long time and then you changed paths, whereas if you hadn't have gone down that path for that long, you might not have as broad a view as you do.

Doniga Markegard ([01:50:40](#)):

Absolutely. Yeah.

Warwick Schiller ([01:50:43](#)):

And the last question you chose, what does it mean to be a leader? What does leadership followership look like to you?

Doniga Markegard ([01:50:50](#)):

Yeah, I thought about this one for a while, and I think really what it means to me is to inspire that spark in others, for them to feel motivated to fulfill their purpose. So I've done a lot of public speaking, and there was one time in particular, there's a place up in San Francisco in the Presidio that is a beautiful place to speak. And I was presenting at a regenerative business conference and just showing a lot of beautiful pictures of kids on horses and cattle grazing lush grass and interactions with nature and our

food. And there was a woman in the audience, and she recently came up to me, this was probably eight years ago, and I just saw her a couple weeks ago at this Google Food lab that I'm a part of with all of these sort of global food brands that come together and try to hash things out.

[\(01:52:00\)](#):

And so she was presenting on a company that she started because she heard me speak eight years ago, and it was so successful. Her company, it was a snack company, and she was working to transition farms to regenerative and provide better livelihoods for farmers by paying a premium, helping them to do climate friendly practices. And she produced this incredibly successful snack brand, which she then sold to Patagonia Provisions. And she came up to me after her presentation and realized I was in the audience on the other side, and she was in tears, and she said, Donika, I just want you to know that this was all because of you. I changed the course of my life because I heard you speak at that conference in San Francisco.

Warwick Schiller [\(01:53:05\)](#):

That's pretty special, isn't it? Yeah.

Doniga Markegard [\(01:53:07\)](#):

Yeah. It was really special.

Warwick Schiller [\(01:53:12\)](#):

Yeah. Wow. It's almost, yeah, I could say a lot about that. I could talk to you all day, I'll find you up.

Doniga Markegard [\(01:53:21\)](#):

Well, you got to come up and visit sometime, or I'll come down and visit you. It's like your old stomping grounds.

Warwick Schiller [\(01:53:28\)](#):

Yes, yes. My old stomping grounds up there. Yeah, we lived up right up there right when I got married 29 years ago.

Doniga Markegard [\(01:53:35\)](#):

Okay. Yeah. I moved here about 20 years ago. 22 maybe.

Warwick Schiller [\(01:53:41\)](#):

Yeah. Well, so how can people find out more about you and your, where can they find your book?

Doniga Markegard [\(01:53:49\)](#):

Yeah, so you can find my book anywhere books are sold. Dawn, again, tracking the Wisdom of the Wild or Wolf Girl, which is the young adult version. And I wrote that sort of because it's tough being a young adult or a kid in these times, and it's tough being a parent of kids during this time. I mean, with technology and the draw of smartphones, it's a challenge. So Wolf Girl is kind of gives the steps of those youth that are looking for something or maybe angry because they see that our generation didn't do enough for them in terms of the climate crisis. And so we saw a lot of those activists going to the streets and standing up and protesting. But this is a book that shows them that they can really look to nature to

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find those solutions, and we put a lot of faith into those next generations and want to give them as many tools as possible. Yeah, and I'm on Instagram, so that's probably a good way. If you want to message me through Instagram or my company website, which is marky guard family.com or just Google Marky Guard family Grass Fed, we do sell meat, grass fed meat in the San Francisco Bay area, and you can join our membership if you're a local listener and come out to a ranch day. We have a ranch day coming up pretty soon, so give us a shout out. Yeah.

Warwick Schiller ([01:55:29](#)):

Awesome. Well, thank you so much for joining me. It's been such a pleasure and an honor having you on the podcast.

Doniga Markegard ([01:55:35](#)):

Yeah, yeah, it's been incredible. And the timing is perfect. I have 1% battery life. It was totally meant to be.

Warwick Schiller ([01:55:42](#)):

It meant to be a few listeners at home. Thanks so much for joining us, and we'll catch you on the next episode of The Journey on podcast.

Speaker 1 ([01:55:51](#)):

Thanks for being a part of the Journey on podcast with Warwick Schiller. Warwick has over 850 full length training videos on his online video library@videos.warwickschiller.com. Be sure to follow Warwick on YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram to see his latest training advice and insights.