



Episode 414: Ancestral Parenting, Biological Norms, Wild Food and Foraging With Arthur Haines

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This episode is brought to you by Wellnesse. That's Wellnesse with an E on the end, my new company. We make personal care products that go above and beyond just non-toxic to actually be beneficial for you from the outside in. I realized years ago that even some of my most naturally minded friends and family members who made an effort to eat organic food and be really cognizant of what they brought into their homes were still using certain personal care products, mainly hair care and oral care. And the reason was, they weren't willing to sacrifice how they looked and felt just to use natural products. And none of the natural products they were finding really lived up to the conventional products as far as how effective they were. So, I resolved to change this and realized I had things that I've been making in my kitchen for years that worked just as well and that I could share with other families, and thus Wellnesse was born. You've probably heard that what goes on our body gets into our body and that many of the chemicals we encounter end up in our bloodstream. To me, this means non-toxic and safe should be the absolute bare minimum baseline for any products that are in our lives. But I wanted to take it a step further. I wanted it to use this to our advantage to actually put beneficial ingredients in our hair care, toothpaste, personal care products so that we could benefit our body from the outside in. Why not use that wonderful skin barrier to our advantage? Our hair care is packed with ingredients like nettle, which helps hair get thicker over time. Our dry shampoo has scalp promoting products that really help follicles stay strong. And our toothpaste, for instance, has a naturally occurring mineral called hydroxyapatite, which is the exact mineral that's on our teeth that's present in strong enamel. So they're all designed to work with the body, not against it to help you have stronger, healthier hair and teeth. We now have a hand sanitizer that doesn't dry out your hands like many hand sanitizers do. I would be honored if you would check it out and I would love to hear your feedback. You can find all of our products at wellnesse.com.

Katie: Hello, and welcome to "The Wellness Mama Podcast." I'm Katie from wellnessmama.com and wellnesse.com. That's wellness with an E on the end. Make sure to check out. It's my new line of good for you from the outside in personal care products like shampoo, conditioner, dry shampoo, and toothpaste.

This episode goes into a really fun topic I had not talked much about. I'm here with Arthur Haines, who is a forager and ancestral skills educator, an author, and a botanical researcher. And he lives in Maine and he's well-known for his knowledge about things like tracking, foraging, wild plants, and ancestral practices. And the reason I was really curious to have him on was to talk about basically what we can learn from different tribes around the world, from our ancestors, what commonalities they have, and how to apply these to modern life, even without... Obviously, most of us are not going to go back to a hunter-gatherer type existence and live in the woods, although he mimics many of these things in his modern life. But we go deep on how we can kind of 80/20 this idea and apply some of these benefits that are built into our biology and our biological norms into the modern life to get the benefit. We also go pretty deep on the idea of ancestral parenting, and how these tribes interacted with their children in a way that's so different from how we interact with ours, and what we can learn from this. Overall, a very, very fascinating episode. I took a lot of notes and have some things that I will implement in my own life now moving forward. I think you'll really get a lot out of this one as well. So, let's jump in. Arthur, welcome. Thanks so much for being here.

Arthur: Thanks, Katie, for inviting me onto your podcast.

Katie: I'm so excited to chat with you. This is definitely a topic I haven't talked much about yet. And I think it's one that's becoming increasingly important. And this is kind of the idea of a return to nature, but in a different way than a lot of people, I think, often think of it. And we have so many directions I wanna go today. But first, since this is a new topic, and people may not be familiar with your work already, I'd love to hear a little bit of your background and how you basically got into this world and became a world-renowned expert.

Arthur: Well, it's a long story. So I'll try to make it really short. I was really fortunate, Katie, to grow up in a rural and wilderness part of Western Maine. It's a mountainous area where the Appalachian Trail passes through, just to give some setting. And I've been fortunate to always have kind of, you know, exposure to nature and a connection to the forest and the rivers here since early childhood. But as I went through my, you know, college study, wildlife biologist and, you know, a plant taxonomist, which is somebody who studies the identification and classification of plants, I found that I could use those skills for some really cool things, which includes foraging, you know, for edible plants and also for herbalism. And that's probably what many people know me as, as a forager and to some degree, as someone who promotes natural remedies, rather than potentially harmful and really strong Western medicines that sometimes aren't necessary for some of the elements that we might be dealing with in the home.

And yeah, I became kind of known as that, and then went on to try to help people to understand basically, that humans do have biological norms. You know, we could get into discussing nutrition, or sleep patterns, movement, communal experiences, I mean, even childcare patterns are different with what we see around the world with our hunter-gatherer ancestors, than often what we observe here in, say, an industrialized society. And so, that's probably one of my favorite topics to help people understand is that anytime we try to transcend what it means to be human, that sometimes there are consequences or pitfalls that we have to be aware of and try to navigate.

Katie: That's so fascinating. And definitely, I wanna loop back to those biological norms. But I love that you mentioned foraging and kind of the idea of wildcrafting because I have a lot of natural remedies on "Wellness Mama" that had been there for years. And a lot of people listening are very much knowledgeable about natural remedies. And that's gonna be their first line of defense in most situations. But I think the idea of foraging wildcrafting takes it to such a new level. And it's so fascinating. And it admittedly is an area I don't even know that much about. Is there a good starting place, whether it's on your website or resources that you could mention for us to start learning about how to forage in our own individual areas?

Arthur: Yeah, I think there are some really nice places to start. And I think for most people, you know, especially given that a lot of the United States population do live in urban and suburban areas, we didn't get a chance to necessarily interact with these things on a daily basis throughout our life. And so we have some concerns about making sure that we're gathering, you know, the correct things so that we're not potentially bringing something toxic into the house. And I understand those concerns. And so, the identification of the plants becomes really important. Anything that you're going to ingest, you have to know what it is. And so you wanna make sure that you're dealing with people, whether you're dealing with a forager or an herbalist who promotes wild gathering, somebody who does have high competency in identification, so they can just make sure that you know exactly which species you're gathering for your home.

Of course, I don't wanna just self-promote entirely here. I do have a set of books called "Ancestral Plants" that do focus on the identification and then how these plants can be used for food, for medicine, and utility. There's a lot of foragers that I really love and respect around the country. Sam Fair is another one who has a series of books. And he does a very good job as well with the identification so that you're able to, again, just have confidence that you know what species you're looking at because that's really critical. If you're nervous about gathering these potentially, you know, these plants that you wanna use as food or as medicine, it's gonna be a major obstacle for you. And I'm really a big proponent of getting rid of those kind of psychological obstacles so that people are free to really dive into these very deeply nutritious foods.

Katie: I love that. I think people often don't even think of that in today's world, that there are still places and ways to do this in our own areas. And like a lot of people listening have gardens or have found some ways to have local food. But I feel like there's a whole different element of this when it comes to wild food. So for people who are, this is a new concept to, how can we start incorporating more of that into our daily lives, especially those of us who come from a totally different paradigm and have to return to that?

Arthur: Well, there's a couple of things there for me, Katie, that I feel are really important. One is people have to know where they can go to access these. And sometimes the very weeds that grow in our garden are a source of wild plants that we sometimes are removing when, in fact, they're a great contribution to the kitchen table. But I also think of the inspiration as being really important. If people simply consider wild plants and cultivated plants as one and the same, there's not always the impetus, if you will, to say, "Well, why should I bother going and getting those plants, you know, from the field, from the forest, from the lakeshore, from the parks that allow gathering because I can simply get them at the farmers market, you know, or the

supermarket?" But the really interesting thing that I think your listeners will be, you know, quite keen on is the fact that wild plants, now there's a huge body of literature demonstrating that they are in fact more nutritious than most of the cultivated fruits that we, you know, commonly have on the table.

Now, this is not to claim that conscientiously raised produce isn't healthy. It's just that the wild plants often have even greater mineral content, a much greater amount of beneficial phytochemicals that can function as, you know, immune modulators, anti-inflammatories, antioxidants, and so on. They often have a more beneficial fatty acid ratio, speaking about, you know, Omega-6 to Omega-3 ratios. And we also have things that have more fiber and less simple sugars frequently. And so, you end up with these foods that are, again, deeply nutritious and also what our bodies are evolved to eating. So for me, a starting point is often getting people to have a greater level of inspiration for why these foods should be on the table, especially when it comes to developing humans in our home. Anytime that we have gatherings or meetings and things of that nature, where we have a group of people over in here, it's always the children and the moms who are breastfeeding that get to go first. They're the ones who get the big portions because they're the ones who are most in need of that nutrition for their developing bodies.

Katie: That's so fascinating. And you mentioned biological norms that come from all of these years and years and years of history. And I'd love to kind of delve into those point by point because I think there's so much confusion and so many different ideas and options about how we should be eating in the modern world. And a lot of it tends to get extremely dogmatic in one direction or another. And so I'd love to really explore, you know, what is nature? What do our bodies tell us about these biological norms about being human and what can we learn from that? So you mentioned the different areas, nutrition, sleep, movement, community, and child care. Let's kind of take them one by one. So, like, what does nature teach us about the biological norms of nutrition and what can we learn from that?

Arthur: Sure. There's a long list if we wanted to get into it. Maybe it'd be good for me just to share a few examples. When we look at hunter-gatherers around the world, I think often people focus on the differences in, say, how the far northern peoples like the Inuits eat, versus, you know, say people who are closer to the equator. And, you know, you might see just very different individual foods, individual plants, and animal species that are being eaten. But when we collect all of this information from around the world, there's actually remarkable similarities amongst all of these groups. You know, for example, one of the really pertinent ones is that every group that has ever been observed of, you know, indigenous peoples, again, what we all hail from, what we all have an evolutionary history as being, we're all omnivorous, consuming both plant and animal foods.

And this is not to be a judgment against people that wanna practice, you know, an all carnivorous or an all plant-based diet, but that we come from people that ate and received the benefits from both plants and animals. So it's important to know that going forward, so, again, you can recognize the pitfalls that may be coming with a specialized type of diet that's completely new to us. Another example, you look at indigenous people around the world, and they ate a mix of both cooked and uncooked foods. Nowhere in the world did they consume exclusively raw food, and likewise, nowhere in the world did they consume exclusively cooked foods. And we know that, you know, from more modern-day nutritional studies, that there are certain

vitamins that are simply unharmed by heat. There are certain vitamins that are harmed by heat and are best to get through raw foods. Vitamin C could be an example.

And we know that there are some nutrients that are really beneficial to us, that are actually made more bioavailable by cooking, like the lycopene that we can get in tomatoes, watermelons, rose hips, and autumn olives, and things like that. So, you know, another similarity might be the diversity of food. You know, even in the High Arctic, the Iñupiat people who were studied in a really wonderful work called *Plants That We Eat*, were shown to consume a greater diversity of plants from their landscape, even though they have fewer species to select from than most Americans consume in a year. And so that food diversity was really important because all of these different plants, for example, from all of these different plant families offer differing amounts of various things.

So, this one's offering more of this macronutrient. This one's more of that micronutrient, more minerals here, more of this type of plant compound there. And so, in the end, their bodies were able to get all of the things that they required for healthy living, especially for passing on health through the generations because of that food diversity. And that's something that's often lacking in the American diet. But these are just some of the examples of where we come from as a species and how we need to try to mimic those in today's world, to make sure that we, again, have healthy living.

Katie: That makes sense. That's so interesting, too. And I think there's so much to be learned in a lot of areas when we focus on the similarities and not the difference. But it seems so much human nature to focus on that, like, 3% to 7% that we disagree on often versus the things we agree on.

Arthur: Yes.

Katie: Another area you mentioned was sleep. And I think... I'm sure there's so much to learn here because I've talked about blue light, for instance, and avoiding artificial light in the evenings, as well as things like the really dramatic research on morning light exposure and getting outside, and even if it's a cloudy day, but just that morning light exposure and just how profoundly that affects hormones. So my guess is if those types of little changes can have such a measurable hormone difference, that there's more that we can learn from nature when it comes to sleep patterns. So, based on your research and your work, what can we learn from indigenous tribes and from history when it comes to improving sleep?

Arthur: Well, I think, Katie, you've hit some of the really important things there, the recognition... You know, there was a time when people thought blue light was bad because it's what stimulates alertness in the evening, but like you talked about those early morning exposures to, you know, natural lighting, where that stimulates alertness, which is what you want. Your body needs those benchmarks to understand, "This is when I'm awake and this is when I go to sleep," you know, understanding that if you need to be active, you know, in the dark hours, that going for those wavelengths of light that are closer to the firelight, you know, those reds, and oranges, and yellows, they stimulate alertness much less so that you can get back to sleep.

I'm somebody who tries to follow a lot of these different ancestral patterns. And boy, when I visit someone else's home now, where there's all kinds of electronics and gadgets, they're up late, they're looking at screens that haven't been adjusted, you know, toward those red and orange wavelengths, I'd literally never get back to sleep that night. I'm really disrupted by it now. I don't have much, you know, ability to tolerate it. I think there's more than just light that goes on with these sleep patterns. There's even the positions that were used by indigenous people that promoted a flexibility while they slept. And, you know, one of the areas that I like to share with people is the temperature because if you look at essentially, you know, around the world, through a lot of the season, if not the entire season, the temperature goes down in the evening. And that turns out to be another one of those things that our bodies can clue into, to help promote good sleep. So, I've had mothers who were having a really difficult time with their infants and getting them to go to sleep.

And part of the problem was both not getting enough outdoor time so that their infants were getting exposed to that full spectrum of light, that was saying, "Oh, I'm supposed to be awake right now." But then, even though they were trying to create a dark environment at night, the house may have been too warm. And by getting them to just turn that temperature down a bit, to start stimulating those kind of evening preparation for the body, they were able to promote a little bit better sleep in their infant, which obviously helped them sleep a lot better. So the study of the indigenous give us all a whole spectrum of things to focus on that goes beyond, you know, some of the really important things that, like you mentioned, the light that we're exposed to, but even like when we eat at night and the temperature, and so on.

Katie: That's fascinating. I know it's not the same as being outdoors but I've become a big fan of chiliPAD for that reason of being able to cool the sleep environment.

Arthur: Oh, yes. Yes.

Katie: Yeah. And I think that's the beauty of this is... And from what I know of your approach, it's like, it's not that we are all gonna be able to go back to a time of living entirely in nature, but it's to as much degree possible that we can do that and benefit from it, and then also be able to use some of the benefits of the modern world as well to get the same benefit or at least some of the same benefit. That's really fascinating, too. Okay. So you mentioned position. Can you go a little bit deeper on that? Like, what can we learn on the best way about sleep posture?

Arthur: Well, there's an article that I have that perhaps I could forward to you but it shows some various positions that I really don't see people sleeping in very frequently, that help with the spine, essentially, and making sure that it's not just tightening over the night, that it's getting a bit of traction if you will. It's really interesting. It's a fairly short article. But again, it looks at essentially not even just wild humans, but other wild beings and the positions that they sleep in and how they can promote healthy spines. And I can try to forward this along to you that might be useful to kind of thing, Katie, that's really, very visual and difficult for me to describe in words alone.

Katie: Yeah, that would be great. And I can include that in the show notes for everybody listening at wellnessmama.fm. It's so fascinating. I know I saw a study a while back about how even just one week of camping away from artificial light and being in nature, it had the ability to totally reset someone's circadian biology, which I think, like, it's so fascinating that even just such a short amount of time can have such a drastic impact. And I think that's really telling of how we can use some of these things to our advantage, even if we can't do all of them every day, kind of being able to 80/20 and get the benefit even in modern life. And you mentioned sleep position. But also in your biological norms list, you mentioned movement. And we know this is an area that's a fall down point for a lot of the modern world and a lot of us are just not moving enough or we're doing the same movement patterns repetitively. So, what does history and biology teach us about movement patterns?

Arthur: That's a really good question. And it's pretty clear. Anywhere you go in the world, people got more movement than we did. And I don't want that movement to always be seen as rigorous exercise because it wasn't always. And, you know, there are lots of forms of movement. There can be really enjoyable and beneficial to us that include dancing. But the really big part about the movement that I like to stress is the diversity of movement. Today, you know, when we're, say, walking down a city street that may be pavement or concrete, we can just do the exact same motion over and over and over again, which lacks the value of, say, getting off-trail for those that have access to some areas or even on trails that might have a little bit of terrain that, you know, go down into this valley or up over this hill so that you're having to do different kinds of steps. You're having to balance yourself. Your hands move in a different way. Sometimes your hands are reaching out for balance and those kinds of things because it's very different.

It's kind of like the difference perhaps between free weights and machine weights, where the machine weight is making you do the same motion every single time but you don't necessarily get the full benefit of the movement when you're not having to do the balance and use all of those smaller muscle groups that are contributing to the whole. I think of, too, is other ways of getting that diversity is to get rid of gadgets in the home. And what I mean by that is, you know, we grind flour, for example. So we have a grain mill. And we do that by hand. It's just a hand-cranked grain mill. We eat a lot of acorns. So when we're grinding those, we're doing that by hand. When we're pounding up medicines, for example, we're using the mortar and pestle, and just literally trying to get back some of those movements, that kind of modern machines have taken away from us. It's hard to do in all homes, I recognize that. But essentially, everywhere that I can get back movement, it increases my movement diversity during the day, which is beneficial for a host of things, not just for my cardiovascular conditioning, but for limb movement and a host of things that we could discuss, Katie.

Katie: That is fascinating. And I think you're right. I think, in a sense, that's one of the, I hope, silver linings that comes about of this year is with a lot of gyms closing and the things people would have typically used for exercise not being available for a while, we're seeing so many more people get outside and workout from home or try more normal human movement patterns. But I think one of the biggest shifts I've had in this past year has been to stop thinking of those things as exercise and to lean into movement, and also to learn from my kids the idea of play and how many beautiful movements come from that, versus this idea that we need to go through a repetitive system in a gym. And it's more of the things like just picking up heavy things, and

moving through space, and climbing things, and the beauty of those kind of movements. But how can we start incorporating more of those movement patterns? I hadn't even thought about the kitchen tools making that part of daily life as well. I love that idea. But what are some other ways we can start building on the movements?

Arthur: Well, if we just go back to the idea of, you know, starting to learn about foraging, and foraging can be obviously this overwhelming topic, but just take each plant one by one, you don't have to learn 150, you know, different species that you can eat in the first year. Just learn one or two. Take it slow and build your confidence. But as soon as you were leaving the paved surface to go after some of those plants, they could be berry plants like raspberries and blackberries that many people might be familiar with. They could be wild greens of different species, some of which may be in your garden. The thing is, as soon as you leave that what I call the constructed environment and you enter a more natural landscape, you have to duck under things, step over things, squat down to reach things. And that instantly gives you all of that movement diversity that you're lacking in an indoor life. And you're also bringing that nutrient-dense food in so that you can sort of stack those two things on top of each other and kill two birds with one stone.

Katie: I love that. It's been fun in our house this year, all being home more, and the kids having more time to just be outside, which I've loved. Like, so many of their activities are canceled, and they're just... We joke that they're kind of feral, but I love it. They're outside all the time. And they've brought in all kinds of plants. And I've had to check and make sure we could actually eat them before we did or one of my sons found ant eggs and decided to cook them and some duck fat so they ate ant eggs, and there have been worms that they've eaten. And most recently, they've now taken to hunting squirrel in the woods by our house.

So we've had wild squirrel and it's been really fun to watch the kids lean into that kind of on their own and explore. I think kids maybe are just naturally more in tune with that than a lot of us are as adults. Another area you mentioned when it came to biological norms, and actually, these last two I think are the ones I'm most excited to really delve into you with, the first being community. This is something anybody listening who's listened to before has heard me talk about the importance of community. And one of my theories is that that is actually the biggest factor in these Blue Zones when we start studying them that it is related to longevity, the quality of relationships and the strength of their community. But I'm really curious to hear from your research and everything you've learned, what we can learn about community in these indigenous tribes and throughout history and benefit from today.

Arthur: Katie, community will be one of the hardest things for people to be able to acquire in this, you know, contemporary world that we find ourselves living in. And when we look at our ancestral patterns of community, they're just starkly different than how we live now. And again, there are a number of these and I can mention a few, you know, just to help people understand how different we're living. Let me give you just a few. I wrote about these in "New Path," and so that people can find a list of these if they choose. One of those was place and comments. And what I mean by that is people, they lived in a very specific place, and they were adapted to that place. You couldn't take somebody living in the far North and put them in a desert, and vice versa because they lacked not just the physical adaptations, but the cultural adaptations that allowed them to be in those places.

So much like, say, the animal species that we might know, we would never expect to find, you know, a certain species of bird that may be a waterfowl, like a kind of duck. We'd never expect to find this in a high mountain forest. It's just not the place that it lived. And that was the same. That was true of the people that historically lived here. They lived within a very particular region and they were defined by that region. They consumed only foods from that region. They drank water from that region. They only were exposed to the soils of that region. They were defined by that place. And of course, today, that's just not the case. Homosapiens isn't defined by their place. We move all over the country, all the time. And in a sense, we lose out on those place-based adaptations that we build into our bodies. We lived in small group sizes, which today, you know, isn't a possibility for many people.

You know, we limited out around 30 to 50 people in most of the groups. And in fact, the population density, believe it or not, was about one person per square kilometer for many indigenous groups. Today, you know, we're living much higher than that, sometimes hundreds of people per square kilometer when we look at it on a state level.

We had a very different political structure. You know, obviously, we come from communities that lacked political bureaucracies. There was not a hierarchical structure. In other words, everybody in the group was sovereign, and that includes the children. So, it wasn't that men ruled the women or the older people ruled anybody, we often think that these groups had leaders and chiefs. But in many cases, what indigenous cultures had were elders. And elders did not define what people did. They simply adjusted consensus by providing information on which the group could make a decision.

Equal wealth distribution was something that we also saw, something that would never occur today. And a tremendous amount of sharing that comes kind of with that equal wealth distribution is particularly harvest sharing those foods that were brought back from the field, where they were distributed, in some cases, via different patterns, depending on the group that we might examine, were distributed amongst the members so that everybody was provisioned for. Any time there was success in the field at securing food, most members of the community would experience that success. You know, we live in a highly competitive society now. And we experienced some really serious hierarchies that can be frustrating at times.

You know, they had a cohesion, a strong cohesion for a variety of reasons that we simply don't have today. And I have a definition of community that I'll read to you, and then I'll compare what happens today. So, our ancestral pattern of a community is a small group of people who reside sometimes loosely on a given landscape. They share common resources, experience equality and similar affluence between the genders, even though they may each do different tasks and can operate by consensual decisions, due to similarities and beliefs for the benefit of the group to accomplish living in their place. And I think if anybody was to examine the living that we experienced today that we may have friends and family that are very giving and sharing with us, our society as a whole, would maybe be described better as a large group of people who often compete against one another. And we do experience some pretty significant inequalities and wealth disparities, which

creates a lot of trouble operating, you know, in a consensual manner for us to enact things, whether that be legislation or guiding policies, that would be really beneficial for all the people.

Katie: That's so fascinating. I've often said, "I don't think it takes a village, I think it takes a tribe." And I've definitely felt the pull toward wanting more of that type of a tribe in my own life in the last few years, and especially this year, as well. And I think some of the things that really struck me in what you just talked about is that we are wired for that more small, like you said, 30 to 50 person community that we have the ability to help, and to impact, and to create positive change in. And I talked about this before. We're not really wired to have knowledge of every problem going on in every society around the world and all the global things going on. And our biology, still I feel like responds with stress to all of those things, whereas we're meant to know the things going on in our immediate group and have the ability to help those people. And I think we've gotten so far away from that. You mentioned a lot of these tribes that there was a sovereignty even among the children. Can you elaborate on that and what that means?

Arthur: Yeah, it's something that a lot of people today would have a very difficult time with. And I'm not going to suggest that, you know, parents are supposed to go to this extreme all the time today with things but I'm gonna give a couple of examples. Anthropologists who may have been living with relatively intact hunter-gatherers or herder-gatherers, forager, agriculturalists, you know, a variety of kinds of indigenous people around the world have noticed some really peculiar things if we were to compare it to today's parenting, which sometimes is that helicopter parenting, where we're kind of hovering over our children, just really, right there to be sort of involved and then sometimes interfering with everything they're doing, every decision they're making. I know it's sometimes can feel very good to be heavily involved in our children's lives, but they need that experience sometimes to be able to understand how to make quality decisions that don't harm themselves and don't harm others.

So, here's some examples. One particular group that was examined, they noticed that a lot of the children had small scars on them from burns, like maybe on their hands or on their arm. And when they question the parents, they found that many of the children had actually stumbled into the fire when they were very young. Now, they hadn't been burned very seriously but they had been burned enough to leave a small mark on their skin. And that's because the children, the very, very young toddlers, even when they were around the fires, nobody was pushing them back. No one was saying, "You can't do that." It's the child's decision to explore that particular environment, which included the hearth. And parents didn't feel that it was up to them to sort of dictate what the child could do.

Another anthropologist and sort of a famous example was interviewing a mom and the infant who I don't think could even walk but could hold objects was playing with a machete. And the infant dropped the machete out of their reach and started crying. And while the mom was speaking with the anthropologist without even breaking eye contact, the mom reached behind her, picked up the machete, and just sort of handed it back to the infant so they could continue playing with it. And today, we'd simply never allow those things to happen. Now, again, I'm not claiming that we're supposed to live in the exact same way, but to understand, again, that this is what we all originate from and that our children are expecting to have some degree of autonomy over their life and to not be essentially dictated at every single second of their life what they can and can't do. I

think there's a lot of ramifications for them later in their life that come from that kind of parenting, even though I think that's a person who's trying to do best by their child, but it breaks strongly from our ancestral patterns.

So, we recognize them, and we often try to do is to set up ways that we can still respect the child's autonomy, but without putting their lives at risk. You know, for example, a couple of examples that I try to share with people, and the famous one that my wife will roll her eyes with, because I use this one so much, you know, we have a wood stove here, and children can fall and put their hands against the wood stove, and could seriously burn them. So we just create a situation where we let that wood stove cool down to the point that it's very hot, but it can't harm them. And then we let them explore the wood stove with our warnings about, you know, "Oh, that's very hot. Don't touch it." And then when they touch it, they obviously pull back.

They might be frightened by what they experienced so that we comfort them but there's no long-term harm done. But the child had the chance to learn that experientially. I don't believe lecturing of, you know, infants and toddlers works because I think they need to learn experientially. And so that's an example of a way that we created a safe situation for them to learn, rather than hovering over them. And then we can sort of relax because we know that they know the woodstove is hot, where sometimes as a second example, we're hiking, and we may be in places where there are cliffs and rock outcrops, where a child could fall from them. And so, I give them free range to go toward that edge. But the closer they get to the edge, the closer I get to them, but not in front of them, from behind them where they can't necessarily even notice that I'm there, and my hand is ready.

And of course, I'm not talking, I'm going to let them dangle their feet over the edge of this high precipice. That's not what I'm describing. But I'm just trying to say that I'm attempting to figure out a way that I can let that child explore, I can satisfy my own needs for their safety, without necessarily interfering with their sovereignty on too much of the day. And so I think those are a couple of examples where I'm trying to understand what our evolutionary biology says about how infants would like to operate and respect that as much as I can.

Katie: That's so fascinating. And from what we know, what did that look like in their independence and autonomy at different ages? Because I know we hear a lot now about even children post-college who are not able to do kind of basic life skills or who are struggling with integrating into the modern world in that way. In these tribes, what were things that may be examples of what children were able to do at different ages and what did that autonomy look like, as they may be hit like 10, or 12 or these different ages?

Arthur: Yeah, that's a great question. And it's a nice way of looking at the effectiveness of hunter-gatherer childbearing. You know, of course, one of the ancestral patterns of childcare, which we've just broached is that there's this high self-responsibility of children. So, if there were not, say, large predators near camp, because many of these groups lived on intact landscapes, where there were large animals that could harm people, which would include children, they were considered free to explore. And in this exploration, they're having to

make judgment decisions all the time about their safety, and the safety of, you know, the children that are accompanying with them.

So they were not just learning about judgment, but they were learning navigation skills. They were having contact with nature. And in the end, we see... I mean, could you imagine seeing teenage parents who are highly effective parents, who have had so much exposure to not just making decisions on their own, but obviously, contact with other children of various ages, so that you could have 14 and 15-year-old moms, who were highly skilled at being a competent and responsible adult, which is one of the ways that I look at the success of their giving autonomy to their children is, how good was their child-rearing practices in the younger parents? And it was, again, highly skilled.

Katie: That's really fascinating. And I've talked to a few other people on this podcast, including the author of the book, "How to Raise an Adult," who brought up some of these similar points in that our overprotectiveness, while well-intentioned, is actually harming our kids for the long-term. And we kind of know this. And I feel like that's still a very tough jump for a lot of parents because, of course, we all do wanna keep our children safe. And I think it's a hard realization sometimes to realize that, while you're keeping them maybe physically safe, that there can also be long-term harm or at least the lack of a benefit from them not being able to learn from these natural consequences, and not to have that autonomy early on. And I definitely don't think I've done a good enough job of this at the level you're talking about with ancestral tribes. But it has been interesting to watch and my kids, we've prioritized autonomy and self-sufficiency with them from a very young age.

And my husband and I have a motto that we don't do anything for them that they're capable of doing themselves because we want them to be able to learn through the experience. And now our oldest at 14, I have no doubt he could easily emancipate and be just fine in the adult world if he needed to. And I feel like this is a whole different even degree above and beyond that, and such a contrast to what we're seeing in so many young adults in today's society.

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This episode is brought to you by Wellnesse. That's Wellnesse with an E on the end, my new company. We make personal care products that go above and beyond just non-toxic to actually be beneficial for you from the outside in. I realized years ago that even some of my most naturally minded friends and family members who made an effort to eat organic food and be really cognizant of what they brought into their homes were still using certain personal care products, mainly hair care and oral care. And the reason was, they weren't willing to sacrifice how they looked and felt just to use natural products. And none of the natural products they were finding really lived up to the conventional products as far as how effective they were. So, I resolved to change this and realized I had things that I've been making in my kitchen for years that worked just as well and that I could share with other families, and thus Wellnesse was born. You've probably heard that what goes on our body gets into our body and that many of the chemicals we encounter end up in our bloodstream. To me, this means non-toxic and safe should be the absolute bare minimum baseline for any products that are in our lives. But I wanted to take it a step further. I wanted it to use this to our advantage to actually put beneficial ingredients in our hair care, toothpaste, personal care products so that we could benefit our body from the outside in. Why not use that wonderful skin barrier to our advantage? Our hair care is packed with ingredients like nettle, which helps hair get thicker over time. Our dry shampoo has scalp promoting products that really help follicles stay strong. And our toothpaste, for instance, has a naturally occurring mineral called hydroxyapatite, which is the exact mineral that's on our teeth that's present in strong enamel. So they're all designed to work with the body, not against it to help you have stronger, healthier hair and teeth. We now have a hand sanitizer that doesn't dry out your hands like many hand sanitizers do. I would be honored if you would check it out and I would love to hear your feedback. You can find all of our products at wellnesse.com.

What else can we learn from these ancestral patterns of childcare? Because I think the other beauty of this is, as a mom, I'm listening to this going, "Well, there's such freedom in not having to entertain my kids all the time," or you know, if that was something I was used to doing, not feeling like I'm entirely responsible for their entertainment, letting them have the room to explore and be curious on their own. But what else can we learn from these tribes? Because I think you're right, we've had such a deviation from the things you're talking about that it seems completely foreign, probably to a lot of people listening.

Arthur: Yeah. Yeah. And there's several more, and I find them all really, super interesting and super pertinent to kind of maybe some of the things that we witness in young adults today, and how that could have been mitigated. Maybe if we weren't focused quite so much on longevity and we focused a little bit more on, you know, the quality of life, which does sometimes mean that people need to learn experientially, which means that they sometimes fail and need us to pick them back up again. Here's another difference. And I'll group these two together.

We know that hunter-gatherer tribes around the world did not have formal education. We didn't send our children off to school. Now, I'm not claiming that school is bad. But this links with the next one really well, in that, there was little or no direct instruction. In other words, children learned by watching people who were older than them and replicating those behaviors. They were aware, and they were keenly aware of what was going on around them because they had to be. They had to have an awareness of what was happening by the

other members of their group so that they could learn, where were the predators? Where were potentially the plants that could cause dermatitis like poison ivy? What was the weather doing and so on. So there was just a much greater awareness of this.

And our children all start out like this. My daughter, Farah, who's a year old, she watches, in particular, what her mom does, but she will also watch me, and then she tries to replicate it. We were recently butchering a whitetail deer, and she wants a knife, and she wants to try to cut the meat, which she's physically incapable of doing but she still wants to try to match what we were doing. Her mom was just making medicine in a mortar and pestle, a small stone one from black walnut holes. And sure enough, as soon as she set the pestle down, my young daughter, Farah, picks that up, and is striking the walnut halves trying to grind them up into a medicine, just like she saw her mom doing. So, we know that infants and toddlers are wired to watch what's happening and try to replicate it.

The problem is we kind of beat this out of them by sending them to school. And there, it's all formal instruction and it's almost all exclusively lecture. And what happens is people become trained to learn only when they're being lectured at. So, I see this a lot teaching primitive living skills. If I'm doing something, and everyone's watching me, but I fail to talk about a particular step, even though I demonstrate it, many of the students won't replicate that crucial step in some item that we might be constructing, they'll only do the steps that I spoke about. Or for example, I also teach Brazilian jiu-jitsu. People have a hard time watching a particular movement and replicating it. Again, we've been lectured at our whole lives. So, this is not me providing a message saying, "Don't send your children to school," but maybe to continue to create those opportunities to learn by watching and a lot less speaking, so that they remain trained to do what they were doing as toddlers, watching the world around them, trying to make sense of it, and then replicating those behaviors that they saw older children and adults doing.

Katie: That's such a good point. I'm so glad that you brought that up. I've noticed that with toddlers as well, just from the motherhood perspective is they have that natural curiosity at such a young age, even, like you said, at one year old, they want to do the things that we're doing, including unload the dishwasher or whatever it may be. And I think often we discourage that when really it's the golden time, like you said, to let them not be able to do stuff and let them feel it things as well and learn from them in a safe way. That's really, I think, an important concept. And I would actually echo what you're saying about education as well. That's I think one of the big silver linings of all the transitions of this year is now there's a much more widely accepted variation in what education can look like.

And so many people are, by default, whether wanting to or not, homeschooling. I think there's a lot of freedom in that, especially your point that experiential learning versus just book learning or lecture and actually working on a curriculum because we discovered the same idea when our oldest was about to start school. And we asked the question, what best prepares him for adult life? Is it homeschooling? Is it traditional school? And we realized, actually, none of them, none of those approaches seem to effectively necessarily prepare kids directly for adult life in a modern world. And so, asking them, well, what would? And what we realized was it was prioritizing those innate toddler skills of creativity and critical thinking, and being able to ask questions and find answers. If we could keep those things, kids are so naturally geared towards a lot of the

things they need later on. And I hadn't thought of it directly to the degree of, we train them to just learn by being lectured. But it makes complete sense when you say it like that.

It reminds me of, in my research, for our homeschool, coming across all of these people that were labeled as outliers, people like Ben Franklin and Leonardo da Vinci, and even Einstein, who they look at and say, "Wow, it's amazing what they were able to accomplish despite their limited formal education." And I turn it around, then I say, "No, look at what they were probably able to accomplish because of their lack of formal education." So I love it right now, it seems like there is a lot more acceptance of alternative educational approaches. And I think this is a perfect time to start being able to take some of these kind of lessons, like you just mentioned, and incorporate those with our kids. I'd love to hear more about how you guys do this with your own kids and in ways that we can prioritize that in parenting and learn from it. Because I think a lot of families have an opportunity, a really unique opportunity to do that right now. And it takes such a burden off the parent side as well to not feel like we need to have them sitting at a desk, entertain them for eight hours a day or be teaching them through lecture. There's so much more freedom that comes with that experiential watching. So what are some ways we can springboard into that?

Arthur: I think you've even mentioned some of them of just making sure that you don't feel that you're obligated to entertain your children throughout the entire day. I have two daughters, and one of them is seven. And there are times where we are securing or processing these wild foods that we've brought into the home to get ready for the winter. And, you know, we're polite about it. We're just sort of but not necessarily apologetic and simply saying, "Hey Samara," that's my seven-year-old daughter, "We need to get this done because this is our food that we'll be eating and I'm sorry, I can't play right now."

And she will go off and just start being creative. She literally built an entire village, if you will, out of cardboard boxes, making windows in them, attaching things that, you know, were, you know, meant to be chimneys and doors, and built this entire, like, playground that she can barely fit in but her younger sister Farah who's a year old and crawling all over the place, loves to go inside and play around with. She even built a kitchen sink that has running water through a tube inside the home for all of this stuff. And children don't get the freedom to be able to do that at school because let's face it, we're learning about reading, and writing, and mathematics. You know, those are important things but our school... I mean, I went through the entire public school curriculum, a great deal of it was learning about people in places that were either in the past or very distant to me that don't necessarily have a bearing on how I live today. So, that freedom I think is really important. But just including your children, bring them along as much as you can.

When we go foraging, my children are along with me. And they'd learn these plants, not through the same way that I would teach an adult, they're learning them because, you know, with my daughter, Samara this is the seventh year in her life that she has foraged for, say, ostrich Fern fiddleheads, or wild leeks, or, you know, various species of blueberry, all of which she knows very well and competently now, not because she got a lecture on the differences between these plants and their look-alikes, but because she's simply interacted with them so much. So some of it is just expanding our ideas about what we can include our children on if we bring them along on these important things that they need to learn, whether it be foraging or something that

relates to the suburban world, that's actually really important for people to learn there as well, they'll learn it just through participating and not necessarily being lectured at.

Katie: Yeah, I fully agree with that. Similar idea, I often bring one of my kids with me on when I've traveled for business not so much this year, but in the past or to business meetings, just because I feel like that's... They've learned so much about entrepreneurship and business through participating in those conversations, much more than they could have learned had I just given them a book or tried to tell them about it. And your daughter's village reminds me of, we used to have this group of families, we got together with who all the parents were involved in similar business type things online. And we would meet up a couple of times a year and bring all of our kids, and so I think collectively, we had maybe 26 kids. There were quite a few kids running around. And we were all in meetings working on each other's businesses, and we tried to choose areas where the kids had just room to play outside.

And the first time we really did this, it was fascinating. All the kids kind of disappeared into the woods for a while and came back later that night having not really eaten much all day. And we found they had built this entire village in the woods from trees that had fallen down. Like, they had collectively moved huge tree trunks and built these teepees and they had named their little village Terabithia. And they had enacted their whole almost like system of government and they had figured out a currency, and they had bartering, and they were all helping each other. It was just fascinating to see how even in such a short amount of time, their creativity ran wild. And they had that natural inclination to do that. It's just so neat to see. And I feel like that's very much in line with what you're talking about, which we didn't feel guilty at all that we hadn't been paying attention to them because they were having this incredible experience that they still now talk about all the time.

Arthur: That sounds wonderful.

Katie: So, I think as we get closer to the end of our interview, I think, like, there's so much, I mean, you've mentioned and I feel like it's just the tip of the iceberg of all the information you have on your site. So I'll make sure we link to those resources so people can find them. I feel like the best approach, at least for me, is gonna be figuring out ways to balance the best of what we know from history and from our ancestors with the things that are still very much a part of modern life since we can't fully get away from that. So, I would love to hear from you, kind of if you had to apply the 80/20 principle to this, or for people who all this is so new, and they wanna kind of dip their toe in a little bit at a time, what are some of the top lessons and changes that we can all start to make based on this knowledge of these biological norms and what we can learn from history?

Arthur: I feel like if people will simply accept, Katie, again, that humans have biological norms, we're just like every other species on the planet, that we have situations, and foods, and sleep patterns and movement, and so on that we are adapted to that... In fact, our genes are literally expecting to experience. And then if they can understand how severely mismatched we are right now, with a lot of our contemporary living, it's not to claim that everything's bad and, you know that the cities are all supposed to go away. I don't want that to be the message that I'm trying to display here but that we can do a better job of understanding that we're wild

people inside who are being kind of given a domesticated experience. And we need a little bit more of that wildness in our lives.

And there's a way to do that no matter where you live. Even if you're living in an apartment building in the middle of a, you know, highly urbanized area, you can still within your home, provide diversity of movement. You can still provide autonomy to a greater to agree to your children. You can learn to find produce that's available in the market that more closely matches its wild progenitors. So you get more of that beneficial phytochemistry, those plant compounds into your diet that protect you from cancer and other chronic diseases. In other words, there's a way to do this, no matter where you live, where you can take steps in recognizing that your body wants you to be a wild human.

Katie: I love that. Just that mental shift is so much fun in like your quote to reframe that about we're wild beings being given a domesticated experience. I love that idea. And especially for our kids, I think that's such an important point. I'm really glad we got to delve into that today. And I hope that it'll be an encouragement for a lot of families. I think there's so much benefit. And kids just naturally still have that desire more than a lot of us do as adults. And we can learn so much from them, like I mentioned, from play and movement, but also from their natural curiosity and their desire to do these things and their love of nature, which I feel like is so ingrained in kids. And I think for the parents listening, that's maybe a perfect place to start on all of this is as a learning tool for your kids and as a great bonding motivational activity to do together. And to get to learn from them as much as they learn from us.

Where would you recommend people keep learning. I feel like we'll probably need to do round 2 one day because there's so much more that I know you can touch on. But for people who are new to this idea and wanna keep learning from your work, where would you send them to keep learning?

Arthur: Well, what I did, Katie, is I wrote a book, and it's called "A New Path." And I literally go through topics like nutrition, and water, and sleep, and nature, connection, and community. And I describe, "This is our ancestral pattern. This is the pattern that we're experiencing now. And here are the health consequences to our mismatch. And here's how we can get some of that back." Unfortunately, the book just sold out. And so, I'll be working on getting another printing going or an audiobook. But if people are interested, I've tried to put together essentially a large compendium of historical observations of intact indigenous communities and what they did, what the research suggests now with, you know, brief citations so that people can go find this evidence-based research if they're very interested in reading more about it. And again, how do we get back some of that wildness that our health truly thrives on?

And it's one of the best sources because I wrote it for all those people who wanted to help their parents or their friends understand, "This is why I'm living this way. If you wanna know why I'm walking barefoot or in minimalist shoes, it's in here. If you wanna know why I'm drinking spring water out of a glass, and not the, you know, chlorinated water, this is why," and so on, and so forth. And I try to give people some solutions, that will work, at least some of them no matter what their living situation is. So, look for that. I'll have some form of it

available again, and maybe ebook or audiobook, something like that in the near term, so that people can get access to that information.

Katie: Wonderful. I'll make sure I link up with you and get those links in the show notes. And I know you have so many resources on your website, arthurbaines.com as well. I'll put that link in there as well as your TED Talk is one we came across. We have a tradition in our family of every morning before we get into any kind of schoolwork, which is different than most education, we'll watch several different TED talks on unrelated topics with the idea that kids are natural pattern recognizers. And so when you give them things that are unrelated, they're actually gonna try to draw patterns and conclusions. And I feel that is great for forming neural pathways and also getting them to think outside the box. And yours is one that we really enjoy. So, it was an honor to get to talk to you today. Another question I'd love to ask at the end of interviews is other than your own, if there is a book or a number of books that have had a dramatic impact on your life, and if so, what they are and why?

Arthur: I thought about this for long because I've had to read so many books to sort of compile all of this information into the practice that we do here at Wilder Waters Community. It was hard for me to narrow this down, but I've chosen one, and it's called "The Tracker." And this is a book that was written by Tom Brown Jr., who is an ancestral skills instructor. And it's a story about his life when he was a child, his friend Reg and an indigenous mentor, who went by the name of Stocking Wolf and I would say the book was written for kind of late junior high, early high school level. I remember reading it and understanding it very well when I was a young teenager. And I'm just letting people know, you know, if they're a highly literate person looking for deep works, this one has stories that are more geared toward maybe, you know, the teenager and young adult, but they were inspirational stories.

And they helped me realize that I didn't have to follow the pattern of industry, that it was okay to swim out of that current if I wanted to or to swim partly out of that current, and be my own person, and be someone who would remain connected to nature their entire lives. And it did change my life. In fact, this whole series of books made a profound influence on what I am today. They were inspirational, I think of them as almost Bible stories. In fact, it doesn't even matter whether they were real or not because they serve their purpose to keep me connected to the wild.

Katie: I love it. That's a new recommendation. And I'll make sure I link to that in the show notes, as well. But like I said at the beginning, I think this is such a timely topic right now and so many important lessons we can learn. I'm a big fan of your work and excited to keep learning from you. But really, just honored that you spent time here today, teaching all of us and sharing your wisdom. So, thank you so much.

Arthur: Yeah. And Katie, may I leave with a quote from one of my heroines?

Katie: Absolutely.

Arthur: Okay. This is from Ina May Gaskin, who's one of the most important people in my life who's also influenced me. And I think it's very fitting right now with what's going on in the world, particularly here in the United States. And the quote of hers that I'd like to give is this, "Horrible birth stories can now be sent around the world at lightning speed via satellite television and movies with the result that uninformed attitudes, many of which rose originally in the United States that promote even more routine medical intervention and birth for healthy women are threatening to make the ancient way of birth viewed as selfish or an irresponsible act on the part of women who wishes to make this choice." And I wanted to end with that quote because I think that if you take that the idea presented in that a little bit more liberally, it really fits for a lot of things that we see today. So, thank you very much for inviting me.

Katie: I love that. She's someone I really admire as well. And her work was influential to me in my own birth experiences and how we chose to bring our kids into the world. I love that you brought her up and I think that's a perfect place to wrap up. Thank you again, and thanks as always, of course, to all of you for listening for sharing your most valuable resource, your time, with us today. And we're both so grateful that you did, and I hope that you will join me again on the next episode of the "Wellness Mama Podcast."

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