

Dear Task Force.

Thank you so much for your service!

In 2012, I was diagnosed with melanoma. At that time, I felt strongly—though it was difficult to articulate—that I needed to approach healing in a different way. I chose not to pursue the recommended surgery or lymph node removal, but to work with the cancer through other means.

My approach focused on high-nutrient, plant-based foods and eliminating animal products. I also worked with lifestyle practices I already knew from my own psychotherapy work—rest, emotional awareness, and time in nature. I stepped back from my clinical practice to reduce stress and support my body's resilience.

Thirteen years later, I am well, and time has affirmed my choice. What began as a personal path of survival has become the foundation of what I share with others: a system of healing that recognizes the land itself as a living partner in human health.

I was raised to think of dirt as something to scrub out of clothes—a stain that proved you hadn't been careful enough. Mud was a mess to avoid. Trees were lumber waiting to be used. Water was for washing or getting across, not for listening to. Plants were either weeds to be pulled or something forced into obedience—a lawn trimmed to uniformity, a flowerpot fed with chemicals, a field sprayed so it would stay in line.

Now I know better. Dirt is alive—a community that keeps the roots fed and, through them, keeps *us* well. Mud is soil and rain in conversation. Trees are sacred beings, rooted in the dark yet crowned in light. Water moves through everything, holding unseen gardens. Plants are my kin and my healers.

I once thought connection was something I had to earn or hold on to. Now I see—I was never separate from it.

When I explain to my friends and family members that rethinking their relationship with food might heal them, their eyes glaze over. I reacted the same way in my earlier life. I vaguely knew I should do better, but unless I really understood what *better* meant, I was a hopeless case. I had to get sick, to learn from others who healed with the help of the most alive and nutritious foods. I had to understand that foods in the wild are at the top of that hierarchy.

What nature knew to do in the beginning—the intricate, reciprocal precision of how plants grow, nourish, and return—is what we now try to approximate. It's humbling to realize how far we've drifted from that wisdom. If I didn't feel as sad and hopeless about the state of our understanding as I do, it might almost be funny.

Foraging, to me, is a way back. It's how we listen again to what the land has always been saying. The sustainable harvesting of wild plants isn't just about managing resources; it's about remembering relationship. When we harvest with reverence, the land gives back.

If this Task Force can help more Minnesotans rediscover that truth—not only through policy but through lived relationship—you will be restoring something far deeper than food access. You will be restoring belonging.

With gratitude,

Judith Driscoll