



**Ancestors of Place**

Community, Land and Connection  
in Sonoma County

Dani Burlison

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*Special thanks, too, to my weirdo ancestors who made it possible for me to be here, and who constantly teach me about resistance and accountability and care.*

*-Dani Burlison, 2023*

## **Introduction**

*An excerpt from a longer essay entitled  
"Ancestors of Place"*

*by Dani Burlison*

I've always felt at home in Northern California. The landscape with its redwoods and oak woodlands feels like a part of my DNA. I love the trails I've walked for decades, and that I have full on relationships with the same patches of nettles and mugwort, and the elderberry trees that I visit year after year. There's such a comfort when red tailed hawks screech overhead and California quail scramble under wild rosebushes. I've also built a human community for myself and my kids, a network of wonderful friends who are changing the world through community organizing and teaching and offering various types of physical, emotional and spiritual care; they create art and music and books and safe spaces and protect land and vulnerable people in Sonoma County, where I've lived for thirty years. But in 2022, upon my return home from ancestral exploration in Scotland, I'm served a notice to move from the home I had rented—and raised my two kids on my own—after nearly twenty years. It is a crushing experience, thinking about how close I am to being pushed out of the place I love.

Sonoma County has become too expensive for many of us to live a comfortable life (by comfortable I mean: NOT paycheck to paycheck). The cost of housing is completely bonkers and the lack of housing is dire. We've been in a housing crisis for years, and after the devastating 2017 fires that engulfed over 5,000 homes, our housing shortage obviously got worse. A friend that works in the real estate world recently told me there are around 5,000 second homes—vacation homes—owned here, too. Just sitting there, completely empty, most of the year. Two reports came out recently; one saying that \$20/hour or \$41k a year is a livable wage, and another stated that an income of \$70,000 for a single individual living alone is now considered low-income. This is wild. It doesn't add up. Who gets to live here? Who gets to own here? And how much do they get to own? One house? Two houses? More? I know that no one is obligated to care for me specifically, but aren't we collectively responsible for keeping those with less from falling through the cracks?

A friend offers me her rental cottage deep in the redwoods, not far from the Pacific Ocean, about thirty minutes from where I had lived. It is the only affordable place I can find over the course of two months of seeking. I snatch it up, knowing that if I pass it over, I'll be locked out of a place

to live in Sonoma County, and will need to move away, after three decades, to... I have no idea where. The cottage is small and cozy, with a redwood ring circling one corner, and acres of forest and creeks—and even a waterfall—stretching out behind it. A fox sometimes visits my back porch, peering through the door at me and my cats. Ravens and deer are the neighbors I'll see the most. I hear owls at night, racoons sneak into my house and eat whatever they can find if I leave the door open while I'm out. The first fall and winter in the cottage, my health plunges. I struggle with hauling small loads of firewood in my car, keeping my house warm, keeping my spirits up, keeping up on work deadlines and the classes I teach. To make it through, I tell myself I am now an official woodland witch, and romanticize the atmospheric river storms and trees falling and power outages that first winter. I read books with light from my headlamp. The forest is beautiful but living alone there is incredibly isolating. I feel cut off from my network, my community, my sense of belonging. I try to sink deeper into my connection and the history here, to the tales that were spoken under the tress while my people were still across the Atlantic. I think about the generations of people before me who got displaced, were forced to flee or had the chance to start over in lands they believed would bring more opportunities.

I half-joke with my kids that now that my ancestors are all healed up from the training and work I've been doing, maybe they're trying to pull me back to Scotland and Wales, that I should, indeed, try to move abroad now that I'm an empty nester with the ability to work mostly remotely. I drive to visit a friend on the farm and cultural center where he lives. I talk to him about my move, about my (only slightly kidding) existential/ midlife crisis. I tell him all about my trip, about my mind being repeatedly blown by my experiences there. We laugh about ghosts lurking in museums, haunting the curators. This friend is Pomo, one of the indigenous people in this part of California, and he listens to me as I describe some of my more surreal experiences in Scotland and Wales, the history of Imperialism there against the Scottish, the resistance against the British through the Welsh speaking their own language. How I felt a deep sense of belonging knowing my ancestors were buried all over that island for thousands of years. He reminds me that this is how Native American people feel, every day. They have the living connection to the land I feel a hunger for. He comments that maybe if more people visited their ancestral homes—or at least learned about them—they'd understand how indigenous people feel and have some empathy about colonization.

Navigating the feelings of deserving access to affordable housing as a low-income person, as someone who gives what she can to the community, as a lifelong Californian, AND... the questions of "do I even belong here... Maybe I should repatriate to a country where I've never actually lived" is complicated. The longing for connection in and to both places feels urgent. But I'm not culturally Scottish or Welsh (or Irish) so I wouldn't quite fit in there, either. But I love those places. Not because I feel that the land or the culture are better than others (even though the national animal of Scotland is a unicorn), but because for better or worse, they are a part of my history. The same as living in America—for better and worse—is a part of who I am.

It's easy to romanticize moving to a country I've only visited. Yes, there's better healthcare, less mass shootings, free access to museums, but they have their problems, too: Brexit, anyone? And of course there's the whole global imperialism situation. And on a more personal level, I also know what terrible things many of the men in my Scottish ancestry in particular did, I know the suffering they caused. I know that most of the women in this line were married off by those men. They were like gold pieces used to secure land, to

build alliances with other clans, to offer peace, to gain power and security. I know who exploited, I know who the victims were. I know who came to America as indentured servants, who were fleeing or exiled, and who came with money in their pockets. I don't know their individual feelings, if any of them were content with their lives, but scrolling through the family records I've found and studying the history of feuds and battles and territories brings it all to light; the further I venture into my own ancestral history, the more clouded and complicated and wild it is.

Connecting with my ancestors and the deep history and traditions of my people can certainly appear to be yet another form of spiritual bypassing, but I don't experience it that way. For me, it's a form of spiritual accountability, of spiritual responsibility. I can't undo what they've done or what was done to them, but I can certainly live my life in a way that both honors the best parts of them, with their hopes and dreams for better lives for their descendants, and in a way that does better than the worst in them. Maybe a sense of belonging comes from just that, understanding our past and the past of our people, and doing better. I'm still sifting through my ideas about it all as I continue



living on stolen land, perpetually renting in a place that my ancestors took for their own, and where I'll never have the resources to buy a piece of it for myself.

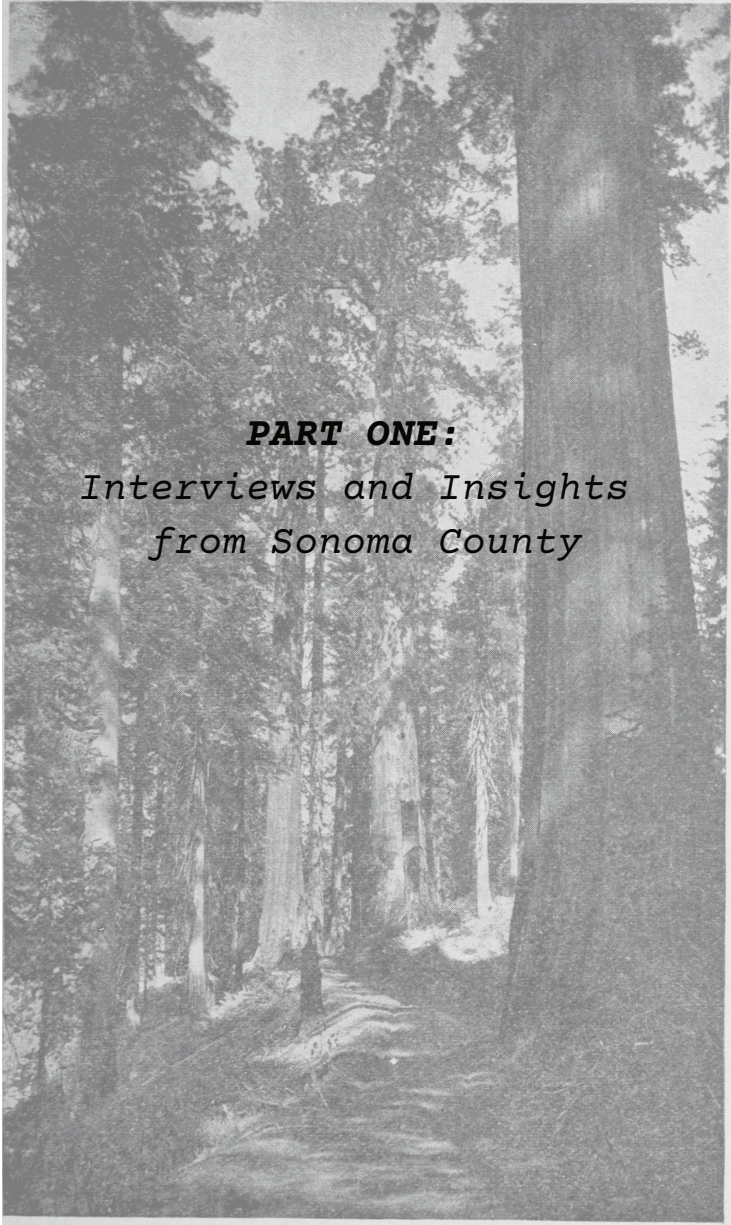
I do deeply love Northern California but my mind constantly wanders back to the old country, to another time when that connection to place was mostly unbroken; There is something about taking step after step on the ground where my ancestors had lived and died for thousands of years that really rattled me. Breathing in the scent of the Scots pines and crisp air pushing in from the North Sea, seeing the same stones standing out on the land for generations to speak into their community's mythology, hearing the old languages, it left me with more questions than answers. I felt the same after leaving Ireland on another trip; I cried and cried from a sense of nostalgia for a place I had never lived.

As I pondered my sense of belonging, what community should look and feel like, how to best live on stolen land, I decided to ask other locals about their connections to place and people and those who came before them. These ten interviews represent just the tiniest sliver of a fraction of who lives here in Sonoma County but I do hope their insights and this chapbook offers insight

and sparks questions and dialogue about these topics... and helps build stronger bonds of collective care and insights for you, dear readers.

*Dani Burlison, Sonoma County, California*  
2023



A black and white photograph of a forest path. The path is narrow and appears to be made of dirt or small stones, winding through a dense forest. Large, mature trees with thick trunks line the path, their branches reaching overhead. The lighting is soft, suggesting a shaded forest environment. The overall mood is serene and natural.

**PART ONE:**  
*Interviews and Insights  
from Sonoma County*





**Adrian Chang 张贵尊- He/Him**

**City/town of residence:** Occidental

**How long have you lived in Sonoma County?**  
7 years

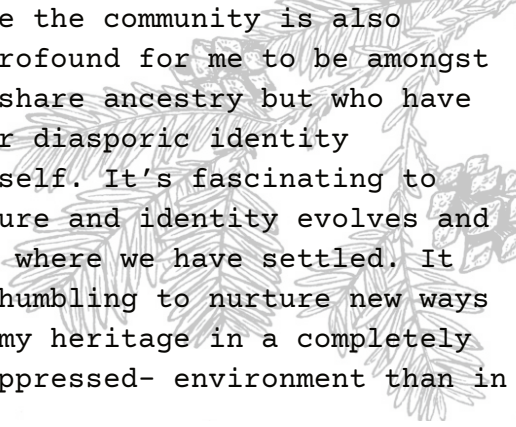
**Where are your ancestors from?** Guangdong  
Province, Southern China

**Do you have others you consider ancestors (ancestors of spirit, i.e. folks who are a big influence on you, like queer trailblazers, spiritual leaders, social justice activists, musicians, etc)? If so, who are they?**

Kami (spirits that reside in all things), My queer ancestors and guardians

**If you are not indigenous to Sonoma County (or have additional ancestry from a different part of the world), have you visited or lived in the place or places where your ancestors lived? If so, what impact, if any, did that experience have on you and your sense of belonging where you currently live?**

I have never lived in Southern China but I did live in Singapore where a large majority of Chinese diaspora are Teochew, descended from Eastern Guangdong where my maternal-grandmother is from. As a Teochew-descended person born in



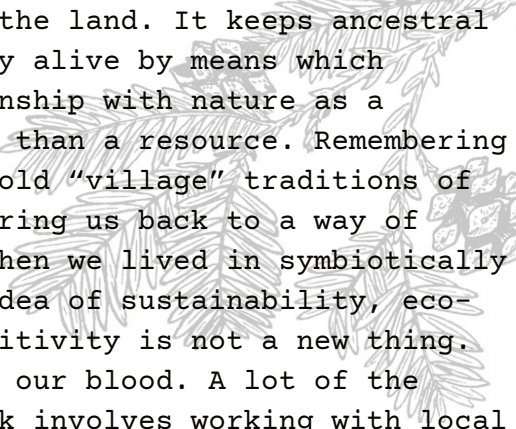
San Francisco (where the community is also prolific), it was profound for me to be amongst others with whom I share ancestry but who have existed within their diasporic identity differently from myself. It's fascinating to experience how culture and identity evolves and adapts depending on where we have settled. It was empowering and humbling to nurture new ways of connecting with my heritage in a completely different- and unsuppressed- environment than in the US.

### **What does community mean to you?**

Community are groups of people with whom you share deep commonality which includes but is not limited to genetic ancestry. In fact, community transcends that. It is rooted in shared experiences, beliefs, traumas, longings, survival, stories, food, music, art and culture- all the things that make us who we are outside the biological sense. It's a spiritually connecting thread between beings. This is why I love connecting with my Asian community through food storytelling, particularly the Queer Asian community. It's very empowering and affirming to commune with each other over these memories because our dishes are mini portals to the past and our origins. They can serve as powerful healing tools to reconcile and unfold our multi-layered identities.

### **How do you engage with the land and community here in Sonoma County?**

The sharing of cultural foodways is a very powerful and natural way of connecting with

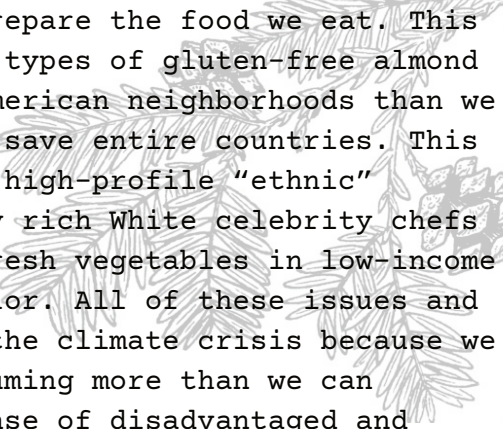


both community and the land. It keeps ancestral spirit and community alive by means which observe our relationship with nature as a partnership, rather than a resource. Remembering and practicing the old "village" traditions of our ancestors can bring us back to a way of thinking and time when we lived in symbiotically with Nature. This idea of sustainability, eco-friendly, earth-positivity is not a new thing. It's ancient and in our blood. A lot of the heritage food I cook involves working with local produce rather than imported goods, and making everything entirely from scratch. I even make my own soy sauce, tofu and rice wine. It reminds me a lot of when my Great-Grandparents first came to the U.S. My Grandmother Jean was born in Seattle and grew up in a very poor neighborhood with little access to familiar ingredients. So they had to grow their own, make do with what was grown locally, or make everything by hand. This ability to adapt is not only earth-positive and sustainable, but also wonderful way to honor the past while looking towards the future.

**As a resident of Sonoma County, what do you think are the biggest threats to the land and community here?**

Climate change without a doubt. Our increasing fire threat and drought is evidence of that. But even more so, capitalism is a core threat, propped up by consumerism, materialism and scarcity mindset. Industries encourage us to look at food as a commodity. We're taught to either eat gluttonously, purely for the sake of our enjoyment, or to prioritize our own bodies, vanities, and desires over the resources it

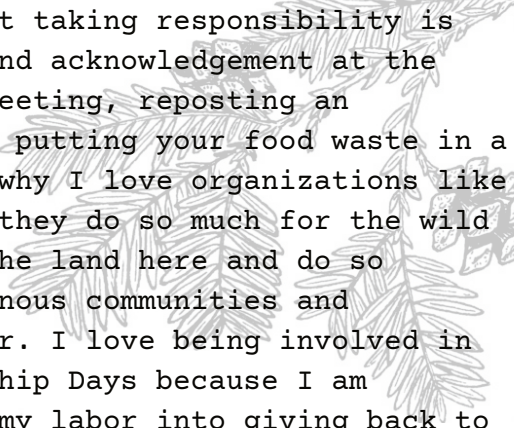




btakes to grow or prepare the food we eat. This is why we have more types of gluten-free almond milk to feed rich American neighborhoods than we have clean water to save entire countries. This is why we have more high-profile "ethnic" restaurants owned by rich White celebrity chefs than markets with fresh vegetables in low-income neighborhoods of color. All of these issues and more contribute to the climate crisis because we are mindlessly consuming more than we can digest, at the expense of disadvantaged and marginalized communities, and the demand for more is rising at an alarming speed. Sonoma County is in a unique position as a pioneering advocate of earth-positive agriculture and food industry practices, but if the number of vineyards, Michelin-star restaurants, and exploitative food trends continue to go up, I worry we'll not only lose the planet, but also our personal and cultural connections to the food we eat. We will prioritize our animal appetites over our stories, our connection to the land and our love for it.

**How do you feel about land and/or homeownership here in Sonoma County?**

I struggle with it because we all benefit from the colonization of this country, whether it be through purchasing the land we live on, or by paying the person who owns it. I agree all settlers have a responsibility to do more for the earth and the Indigenous people who were here first, especially those privileged with the monetary means to make a strong impact.



bI also believe that taking responsibility is more than just a land acknowledgement at the beginning of Zoom meeting, reposting an Instagram story, or putting your food waste in a green bin. This is why I love organizations like Landpaths, because they do so much for the wild natural health of the land here and do so prioritizing indigenous communities and communities of color. I love being involved in their Land Stewardship Days because I am physically pouring my labor into giving back to this land; and each time I am reminded of its beauty as well as its fragility.

**If you have colonizer ancestry, what steps do you take to engage with or support local indigenous communities or Sonoma County in general?**

N/A

**What do we owe to the places we live and the communities we live among?**

Our respect, our love and our commitment to working towards a healthier planet and to uplift those who are marginalized, oppressed and exploited. How we do that can be unique to each individual, but it takes action, not just talking or hash-tagging. There is a dangerous culture of performativity growing on the periphery of environmental and social activism and that can be just as harmful in the long run. Let's practice what we preach.



*Optional:*

**Do you have a spiritual practice? If so, how does it influence the ways you relate to your community, and Sonoma County in general?**

I grew up drawn to and immersed in Celtic Paganism and Wicca, and throughout my journey I have since incorporated my Chinese ancestral spiritual practices into that. I also greatly resonate with Shintoism. I can't say that I officially aligned with any one religion or practice, but I believe in the magic of Nature, our kinship with it, and our power to influence the Universe and how it plays out.

# **Davin Cardenas - He/Him**



**City/town of residence:** Petaluma, Ca

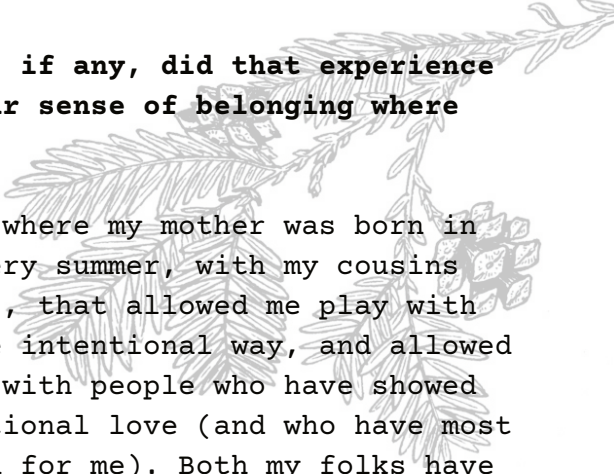
**How long have you lived in Sonoma County?** Since 1999, 24 years

**Where are your ancestors from?** Northern Mexico, and other nooks and crannies of this planet.

**Do you have others you consider ancestors (ancestors of spirit, i.e. folks who are a big influence on you, like queer trailblazers, spiritual leaders, social justice activists, musicians, etc)? If so, who are they?**

I have people that I consider mentors, people who have left their mark on how I view the world, how I interact with the world, how I see myself in the world. I'd name singers like Silvio Rodriguez, Violeta Parra, and Peter Tosh. I'd name Paulo Freire and Saul Alinsky as theoreticians who practice. I'd name wordsmiths like Arundhati Roy, Eduardo Galeano, and Boots Riley. I'd name Mary Gonzalez and Alfredo Sanchez as community organizing elders who asked me to be my best self at critical moments in my life.

**If you are not indigenous to Sonoma County (or have additional ancestry from a different part of the world), have you visited or lived in the place or places where your ancestors lived?**



**If so, what impact, if any, did that experience have on you and your sense of belonging where you currently live?**

I grew up visiting where my mother was born in northern Mexico every summer, with my cousins and tio's and tia's, that allowed me play with the earth in a more intentional way, and allowed me to be enveloped with people who have showed me so much unconditional love (and who have most consistently prayed for me). Both my folks have northern Mexican roots, so I have lots of nostalgia for this region.

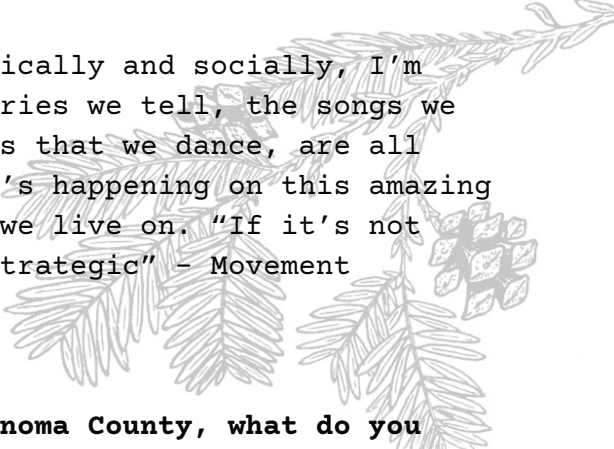
**What does community mean to you?**

Community is where you can let your guard down more easily, where you can play more easily, and do politics with more militancy, and sing songs with greater confidence, and feel emotion with greater depth. It's where I find other humans who are working on their contradictions like I do, and who's commitments to the greater good mirror my own.

**How do you engage with the land and community here in Sonoma County?**

As an organizer, I'm trying to make sure that campaigns, strategies, and direct actions, all mirror what the land is telling us, and what workers are saying. I'm in a privileged position to build political power with farmworkers as a direct response to climate induced wildfires, as well as exploitation of workers and the land

they work on. Politically and socially, I'm hoping that the stories we tell, the songs we sing, and the dances that we dance, are all reflections of what's happening on this amazing piece of land that we live on. "If it's not soulful, it's not strategic" - Movement Generation



**As a resident of Sonoma County, what do you think are the biggest threats to the land and community here?**

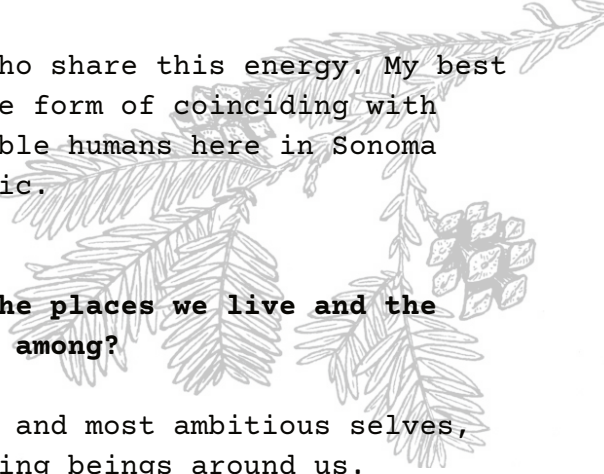
Our climate will change, and this should be the impetus and opportunity that we utilize to assure that we have clean water, fair wages, and dignified housing for all.

**How do you feel about land and/or homeownership here in Sonoma County?**

I feel incredibly fortunate to live here, rent here, and don't want this to become a playground for the rich. The land is worth fighting for.

**If you have colonizer ancestry, what steps do you take to engage with or support local indigenous communities or Sonoma County in general?**

I'm trying to live with as much ferocity, gentleness, curiosity and wonder as humanly possible. I have incredible privilege, and gratitude, which translates to responsibility and commitment to shape the world around me, and



find other humans who share this energy. My best support comes in the form of coinciding with these other incredible humans here in Sonoma County, to make magic.

**What do we owe to the places we live and the communities we live among?**

To be our brightest and most ambitious selves, and lift up the living beings around us.

## **Erik Ohlsen - He/Him**



**City/town of residence:** Sebastopol

**How long have you lived in Sonoma County?**

I moved here in 1984, I was 5 years old. Lived here ever since— 39 years

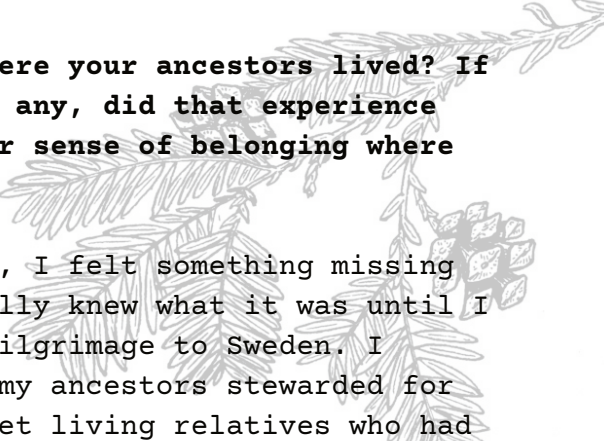
**Where are your ancestors from?** I'm 96% euro descendant. My mom side is from Argentina, however. My ancestors are mostly from Sweden/Norway and France/Italy.

**Do you have others you consider ancestors (ancestors of spirit, i.e. folks who are a big influence on you, like queer trailblazers, spiritual leaders, social justice activists, musicians, etc)? If so, who are they?**

Yes, a number of mentors who took me under their wings throughout my life have passed. Jeanie Kerrigan, the most powerful healer I ever met, she changed my life, and the work she did with me is still affecting me today. Toby Hemingway, author of Gaia's Garden, a foundational book for my career. Later in life, Toby became a close friend and mentor. And when he passed, his personal library was donated to us.

**If you are not indigenous to Sonoma County (or have additional ancestry from a different part of the world), have you visited or lived in the**





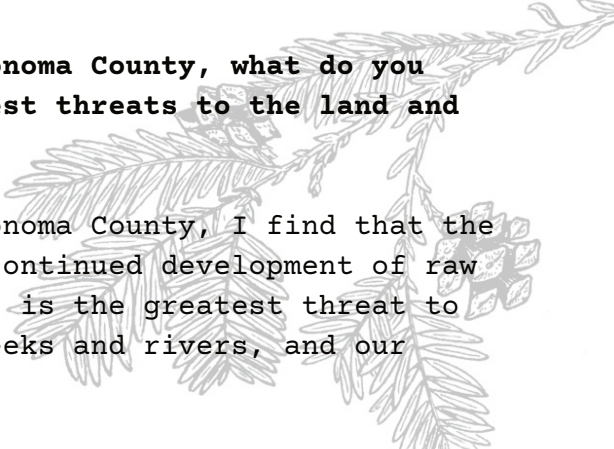
**place or places where your ancestors lived? If so, what impact, if any, did that experience have on you and your sense of belonging where you currently live?**

For much of my life, I felt something missing inside. I never really knew what it was until I took an ancestral pilgrimage to Sweden. I stepped onto farms my ancestors stewarded for over 500 years. I met living relatives who had lost track of my branch of the family. I sat at the gravestones of my ancient ancestors and at their burial mounds. This experience was life-changing. I felt a sense of home, of peace, of roots and heritage I had never known before. I stood in a place that felt like my bones had been formed from those soil's, and this whole experience helped me feel whole.

**What does community mean to you? How do you engage with the land and community here in Sonoma County?**

For me, community takes many different forms. It's the Wesco soccer team I coach for my son and his friends. It's my staff and coworkers at my landscape design company. It's the folks that gather around the fire when we sing old songs, tell stories, And share food.

Community is like soil. It provides nourishment for individuals but all together it's what makes up the whole garden, the forest, and the watershed.



**As a resident of Sonoma County, what do you think are the biggest threats to the land and community here?**

Specifically, in Sonoma County, I find that the wine industry and continued development of raw land into vineyards is the greatest threat to our soil's, our creeks and rivers, and our ecosystems.

The rent and housing prices in Sonoma County are a disaster for the working people of this community. This is one of the greatest threats to our community. The fact that we live in an agricultural empire, and yet the folks that do that work, can't afford to live here with access to safe and healthy homes, and safe communities—these are the greatest issues I see facing our community right now.

The housing market is one thing, but the rental market in Sonoma County makes living here untenable for many of the people our economy relies upon.

**How do you feel about land and/or homeownership here in Sonoma County?**

The housing market in Sonoma county is literally insane. In order to buy a house one essentially has to be rich and purchase new homes with cash. Otherwise, someone richer than you will beat you to it. Many wealthy folks from Bay Area tech industries buy second homes and properties in Sonoma county, and this has driven prices up even more.

Homeownership in Sonoma County is being further gentrified at an alarming rate, and the health of the community is paying the price.

**If you have colonizer ancestry, what steps do you take to engage with or support local indigenous communities or Sonoma County in general?**

When I am invited, I dedicate my skills and time to indigenous friends and communities. This is work that feeds my heart and soul, but more importantly is of service to the land. I don't talk about the work I do with indigenous folks because it's not about me. But it brings me great joy to serve the descendants of these landscapes.

Understanding colonizer, history is complex. For much of my life, I lumped many of my ancestors into the colonizer bucket. But, as I took the time to actually learn the stories of my ancestors, those who came here, in every case, it was an instance of a refugees fleeing War, famine, and dictatorship. Eventually, in the mid to late 1900's these ancestors gained the privileges offered by the white supremacist economic system of the United States.

**What do we owe to the places we live and the communities we live among?**

We owe our breath, our nourishment, our shelter, and our gratitude. These lands and communities sustain our life, and it is our responsibility to sustain theirs. To regenerate watersheds,

forests, wetlands, and the community is to grow our food, build healthy homes, and teach our children. To live in a place is to become a person of place, and that requires reciprocity. Reciprocity is the fuel that sustains life.

**Optional:**

**Do you have a spiritual practice? If so, how does it influence the ways you relate to your community, and Sonoma County in general?**

If I was to give a name to my spiritual practice, I would say animism. My entire life has been one deeply rooted in relating with natural ecosystems, and I see life in all things. I have been lucky enough to work with spiritual elders from Nordic countries, where my ancestors came from including being trained in old forms of Nordic spirituality, which is an animistic type of belief system. Though many there would have more local names for it.

This spiritual path has led me to a strong sense of gratitude for life and the places that sustain me. I have also been able to understand better just how much was taken away in the genocide of indigenous people of the Americas.

Going back to Scandinavia and walking on the old ancestral farms— there is a sense of an intact yet evolving culture. One that is synced with landscape and has been so for thousands of years.

Indigenous people on Turtle Island are still here, nourishing, and reclaiming their life ways, and working to heal both culture, land,

and community. But, I also feel more grief at the widespread loss of these culture and people; the languages and landscapes, that was once managed by First Nation communities across the Americas that has now disappeared .

**Anything else you'd like to add about ancestors, land/earth reverence, community, etc?**

Many euro descendants living in the United States, never got to learn the rich folklore, spiritual beliefs, and animistic relations to earth, that their ancestors maintained for (and still practice) for millennia. I think this disconnection with ancient values and taboos that emerge from the landscape has been detrimental to a healthy culture. We would be less likely to destroy our ecosystems, our communities, and ourselves, if we felt held and at home and recognized the elements of nature as relatives instead of commodities.



# **Erin Masako Wilkins - She/Her**

**City/town of residence:** Petaluma

**How long have you lived in Sonoma County?**

27 years

**Where are your ancestors from?** Japan and Ireland

**Do you have others you consider ancestors (ancestors of spirit, i.e. folks who are a big influence on you, like queer trailblazers, spiritual leaders, social justice activists, musicians, etc)? If so, who are they?**

No

**If you are not indigenous to Sonoma County (or have additional ancestry from a different part of the world), have you visited or lived in the place or places where your ancestors lived? If so, what impact, if any, did that experience have on you and your sense of belonging where you currently live?**

I traveled to Japan with my husband this Spring. Moving across the country and taking in diverse landscapes, cultures, and people was a joy. We visited family near Tokyo, friends in Kyoto, and business connections in Kagoshima.

I experienced a deep sense of belonging in Japan.

Traveling through crowds of bodies and faces that resembled my own had a profound impact on me. It was a feeling of being seen by the fact that I blended in.

In these travels, I found threads of culture, lineage, custom, and ways of existing in the world passed down to me through generations and across oceans. It is a distinct and wonderful feeling, the sense of returning to a place I haven't been before.

### **What does community mean to you?**

Community is the energy of the collective woven into our daily lives. Community is healing. Community is a sense of belonging that can be cultivated and nurtured. It is the ways that we relate to humans, animals, and the earth.

I believe that finding a sense of belonging within a community is vital to happiness.

### **How do you engage with the land and community here in Sonoma County?**

Engaging with the land and community in Sonoma County evolves as I do.

As a business owner and acupuncturist (service provider) I'm involved with the small business community. I am involved in various school and extracurricular communities as a mom. Most recently, I've been claiming more time to be in

the wild of suburbia, including regional parks, greenways, beaches, and open spaces. Exploring Sonoma County with the elders, my kids, and our dogs motivates me to find new and exciting ways to engage with the land and community

**As a resident of Sonoma County, what do you think are the biggest threats to the land and community here?**

Many conversations I have with friends turn to the untenable economic situation. The burdensome cost of living in Sonoma County threatens not only individuals and families but the culture and energy of our small business community. I want to meet friends at Petaluma Coffee and Tea, browse books at Copperfield's, and shop for gifts at Goblin Brothers and the Spice Queen. These and many other businesses make our towns cool, interesting, and full of culture.

And we face the horrific reality of climate collapse daily. In Sonoma County, we have come to expect fires, drought, and natural disasters that reflect the mounting threats to the land and to each of us.

**How do you feel about land and/or homeownership here in Sonoma County?**

Many people born and raised in Sonoma County cannot afford to live here. The high cost of living is out of hand for most of us. Land and homeownership have always been a



tvehicle for white privilege and inherited wealth, but we seem to be at a point where homeownership is solidifying class and economic stratification.

**If you have colonizer/European ancestry, what steps do you take to engage with or support local indigenous communities or Sonoma County in general?**

As a non-native engaging with the local indigenous communities, my intention is to tune in to the causes and words of the members of the local tribes. Rose Hammock is an Indigenous community activist, the co-leader of the Pomo Project, and an important voice in Sonoma County. Her advocacy with various organizations and schools is all about improving public health and education for native people. I've had the opportunity to learn from her as she generously teaches both indigenous and non-native students about the Pomo tradition.

**What do you think we owe to the places we live and the communities we live among?**

Respect. Awareness. Reciprocity.



## **Francisca Santibanez - She/They**

**City/town of residence:** Unceded Southern Pomo  
Territory aka Sebastopol

**How long have you lived in Sonoma County?**  
Since 2017

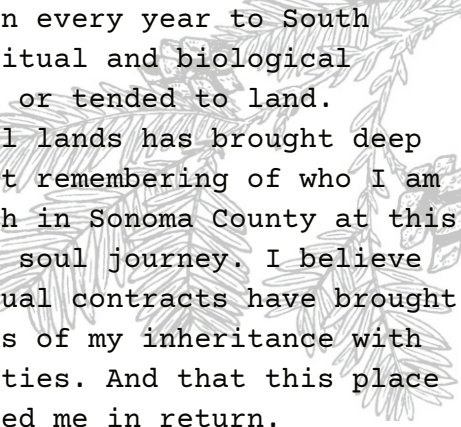
**Where are your ancestors from?** Brazil  
(Indigenous Brazilian, Sub Saharan African,  
Portuguese)

**Do you have others you consider ancestors  
(ancestors of spirit, i.e. folks who are a big  
influence on you, like queer trailblazers,  
spiritual leaders, social justice activists,  
musicians, etc)? If so, who are they?**

Plantcestors, land spirits, the ancestors of my  
teacher's lineages

**If you are not indigenous to Sonoma County (or  
have additional ancestry from a different part  
of the world), have you visited or lived in the  
place or places where your ancestors lived? If  
so, what impact, if any, did that experience  
have on you and your sense of belonging where  
you currently live?**

Yes. I was born in Brazil and lived there and in  
Chile for my first 10 years, and then moved to  
California with my family. For the past 10



years, I try to return every year to South America where my spiritual and biological ancestors were rooted or tended to land. Returning to ancestral lands has brought deep memories and important remembering of who I am and why I'm here, both in Sonoma County at this time as well as in my soul journey. I believe that ancestral spiritual contracts have brought me here to share parts of my inheritance with this land and communities. And that this place has grown me and healed me in return.

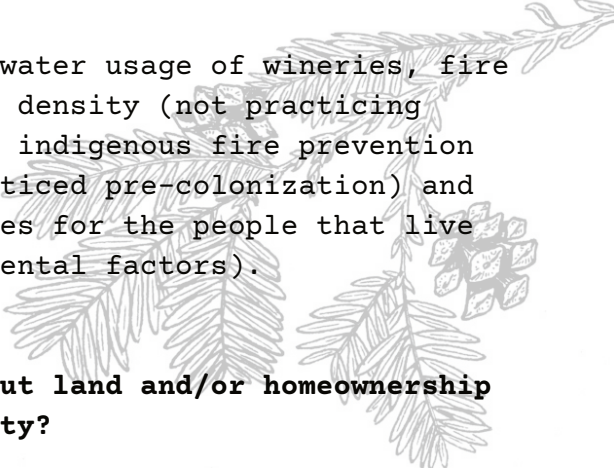
**What does community mean to you?**

To me community is why we're here. Our interdependence is both our gift to one another and our challenge. It's where our lessons, growth and opportunities to evolve are present.

**How do you engage with the land and community here in Sonoma County?**

I'm blessed to share 15 acres of space and live in community with 19 other humans here in Sonoma County. Tending to the land, plants and the animal spirits is at the center of my experience here. I engage with the land through tending, ceremony, and deeply communing with spirit of the land itself.

**As a resident of Sonoma County, what do you think are the biggest threats to the land and community here?**



The toxic load and water usage of wineries, fire risks due to forest density (not practicing cultural burns- the indigenous fire prevention ways that were practiced pre-colonization) and the high cancer rates for the people that live here (from environmental factors).

**How do you feel about land and/or homeownership here in Sonoma County?**

I feel a lot of conflict with land/home ownership on stolen land.

**If you have colonizer/European ancestry, what steps do you take to engage with or support local indigenous communities or Sonoma County in general?**

I try my best to tread the land humbly, asking permission often and seeking opportunities to honor and support the local indigenous communities. As an herbalist, I've had the opportunity to support clinics and special events centered around Indigenous and Latinx care- it's always a joy.

**What do you think we owe to the places we live and the communities we live among?**

I believe that we have commitments to fulfill with each place we receive shelter from. Tending to the life that surrounds us that tend and nourish our existence.

**Optional:**

**Do you have a spiritual practice? If so, how does it influence the ways you relate to your community, and Sonoma County in general?**

I practice Vegetalismo, an ancestral spiritual path of plant spirit medicine. This path informs my lifestyle, work, and all relations, honoring the medicine and sentience in plants and all beings.

**Anything else you'd like to add about ancestors, land/earth reverence, community, etc?**

I have been led by working with plants to ancestral healing work and discovering my own contracts with my biological, adopted, spiritual and earth lineages. I believe that there are many unspoken agreements with the spirit world that allow us and instruct us to be at a certain place and be sustained by the life of that place. It's been one of the most healing and empowering realizations and it has kept me deeply engaged with tending to my earth/land relations and my role of guardianship.

# **Goli Mohammadi - She/Her**



**City/town of residence:** Forestville

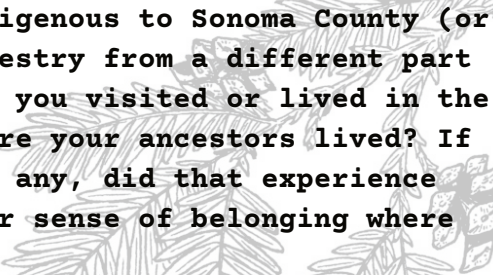
**How long have you lived in Sonoma County?**  
20 years

**Where are your ancestors from?** Iran

**Do you have others you consider ancestors (ancestors of spirit, i.e. folks who are a big influence on you, like queer trailblazers, spiritual leaders, social justice activists, musicians, etc)? If so, who are they?**

At the intersection of art and spirituality is one of my greatest influences, Persian poet Rumi. The truths he shares through his beautiful words, rooted in sufism, have helped to shape who I am. I was raised with his poetry, as well as that of Hafiz, so they've always felt like ancestors to me.

I also deeply resonate with nature as ancestor. There's so much ancient wisdom in nature. Just ask the redwoods at Armstrong or the peaks and alpine lakes of the Sierra. Nature is my teacher. In particular, I find that visiting the same natural places over the years has helped me build an intimate relationship with them and see them as mentors and friends.



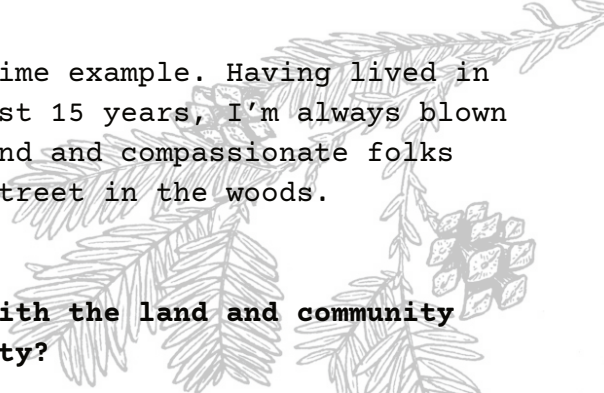
**OIf you are not indigenous to Sonoma County (or have additional ancestry from a different part of the world), have you visited or lived in the place or places where your ancestors lived? If so, what impact, if any, did that experience have on you and your sense of belonging where you currently live?**

I was born in Iran and have traveled there regularly to see my extended family all my life. Persian culture is a huge part of who I am, but having been in the States since I was five, so much of me is also American. Growing up as a first-generation immigrant, I felt like I was always straddling two very different cultures, both of which I could relate to. Traveling to Iran is amazing for me because I feel intrinsically akin. It helps that I'm fluent in Farsi, thanks to my mother, who refused to let me forget my mother language.

I grew up in Chicago, spent time living in the mountains of Colorado and Southern California, and have visited at least 40 of the 50 states. But of all the places I've been, Northern California is where I feel like I can be my most authentic self.

**What does community mean to you?**

Community means caring. It means looking out for each other and having mutual respect. Sonoma County is home to so many wonderful, genuinely good people. I'm blessed to be a member of a few different communities here. My street in



Forestville is a prime example. Having lived in my house for the past 15 years, I'm always blown away by how many kind and compassionate folks live on my little street in the woods.

**How do you engage with the land and community here in Sonoma County?**

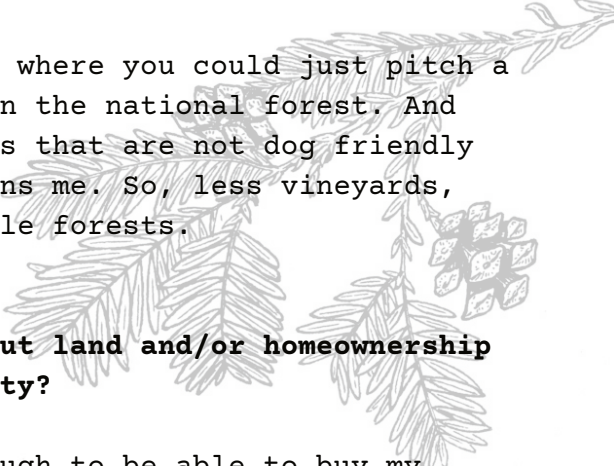
One of my neighbors has a great sticker on her car. It simply reads, "Be nice. Say hi." Because I rescue senior dogs, I'm often seen out and about in our local parks and open spaces on a "sniff safari with my old bears." I almost always say hello to anyone I see and have made many friends on the local trails. Being nice is a great way to engage with the community. And enjoying our local nature is a great way to connect with the land.

**As a resident of Sonoma County, what do you think are the biggest threats to the land and community here?**

For the land, I'd say monoculture crops, the climate crisis, and urban sprawl. The vineyards are beautiful, but do we really need that many of them? Diversifying what we grow here would be a benefit to all.

There's so much I love about Sonoma County, but the one thing I feel is missing is national forest and more freely accessible public land. At times, it feels like every square inch of this amazing land is owned by someone. There





Faren't many places where you could just pitch a tent like you can in the national forest. And the number of trails that are not dog friendly surprises and saddens me. So, less vineyards, more freely available forests.

**How do you feel about land and/or homeownership here in Sonoma County?**

I was fortunate enough to be able to buy my cabin 15 years ago. I'm so glad I did. It's tiny and simple but I feel so lucky to have a little something in these magical woods. It makes me sad that the prices have gone up so much that the dream is now out of reach for many of our community members.

**If you have colonizer/European ancestry, what steps do you take to engage with or support local indigenous communities or Sonoma County in general?**

N/A

**What do you think we owe to the places we live and the communities we live among?**

Simply put, love and respect. We must respect and protect our forests, lakes, and rivers. Likewise, we must respect our community members and celebrate them for who they are. I've loved seeing this area become progressively more diverse because diversity makes us stronger. I do think this vibe is already prevalent here. As

a first-generation Iranian-American, I've never felt like a victim of racism here, and that speaks volumes. Folks are generally open-minded and interested in learning about other cultures and ways of life.

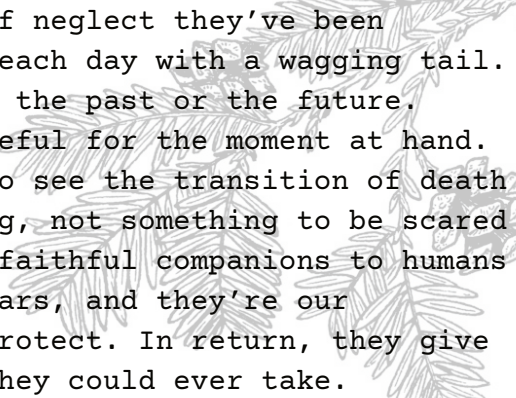
**Optional:**

**Do you have a spiritual practice? If so, how does it influence the ways you relate to your community, and Sonoma County in general?**

My religion is love and my church is nature. I start each day with my "coffee meditation." After I've fed the old dogs and made my coffee, I sit in a special place in my yard to sip and listen to the sounds of the forest. If you listen, it's slightly different each day. I'm not allowed to look at any devices or screens (phone or computer) until after my morning meditation. I end my meditation with a little thanks in the form of: "Thank you for this life. Thank you for this love. Thank you for the opportunity to serve."

**Anything else you'd like to add about ancestors, land/earth reverence, community, etc?**

I've been rescuing senior shelter dogs for 7 years now. I give neglected old dogs the chance to be loved, cherished, spoiled, and to live out their days with dignity and respect. In return, they've taught me so many incredible life lessons. They're among the greatest spiritual teachers I could hope for.



Despite the years of neglect they've been through, they face each day with a wagging tail. They don't dwell on the past or the future. They're simply grateful for the moment at hand. They've helped me to see the transition of death as a beautiful thing, not something to be scared of. Dogs have been faithful companions to humans for thousands of years, and they're our responsibility to protect. In return, they give so much more than they could ever take.



## **Jordan A. Torres - He/Him**

**City/town of residence:** Petaluma

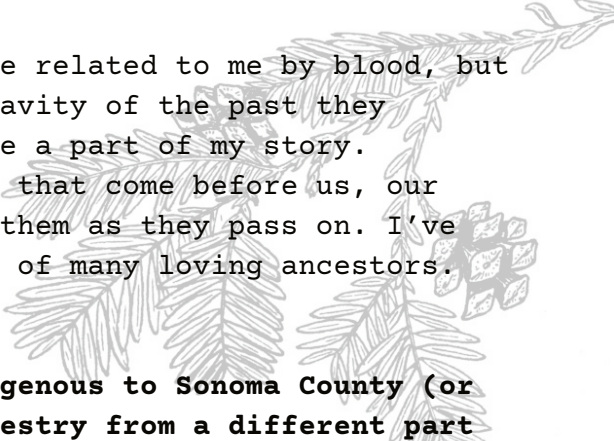
**How long have you lived in Sonoma County?**

I've lived in Sonoma County for 21 years. I moved here from Marin when I was 9.

**Where are your ancestors from?** On my mom's side of the family, I'm Danish and Choctaw, of the Oklahoma tribe. They would have originated from the greater Choctaw Nation of Mississippi before the trail of tears. On my dad's side I'm El Salvadorian. The specifics of that side of the family are likely some sort of mix of indigenous and Spanish blood, like many Latinos. Unfortunately, I simply don't know, and may never.

**Do you have others you consider ancestors (ancestors of spirit, i.e. folks who are a big influence on you, like queer trailblazers, spiritual leaders, social justice activists, musicians, etc)? If so, who are they?**

I feel like I've always had an odd perspective on the idea of ancestors. My family always had a habit of adopting folks into our ranks. I have thought of this in the indigenous way, as our clan. I have, what in western terminology would be called a stepfather, step grandparents; not to mention half a dozen aunties and uncles. None



Dof these folks were related to me by blood, but them and all the gravity of the past they carried, have become a part of my story. Ancestors are those that come before us, our loved ones joining them as they pass on. I've been given the gift of many loving ancestors.

**If you are not indigenous to Sonoma County (or have additional ancestry from a different part of the world), have you visited or lived in the place or places where your ancestors lived? If so, what impact, if any, did that experience have on you and your sense of belonging where you currently live?**

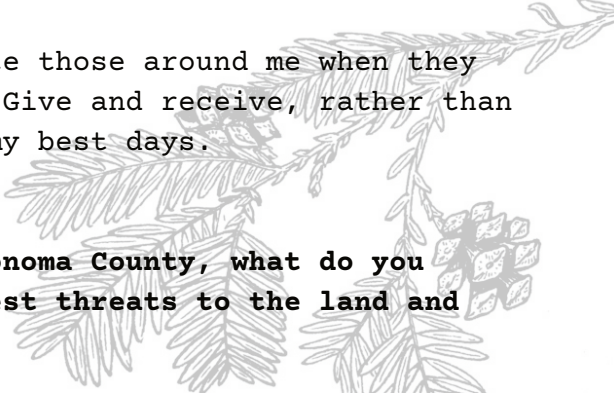
I've been lucky enough to visit the land of my father, El Salvador, twice but have not been to Oklahoma or Denmark. But to be honest, the first time I went I felt a deep sense of alienation. I wanted it to feel like a lost homeland that I was returning to; the prodigal son. But when it wasn't, when I wasn't, it made me contemplate my place in the family chain. Both sides of my ancestry have a history of displacement, loss of land, loss of home. And here I am, a product of that suffering. I simply wouldn't exist without the El Salvadoran civil war, the trail of tears or the great depression. It's odd, but I feel that this gives me a sense of gratitude and connection to Northern California. It's the destination, the refuge, however temporary, for my people. One that I want to protect and improve.

## **What does community mean to you?**

Community...Oof. That word seems like the bastardized holy grail of the 21st century. Everybody wants it, everyone has their own idea on what it is and how to get it. I almost want to refrain from throwing my ideas onto it. Hahaha! Well, I'd say it's you and the people you're sharing the ship with. That group used to be a simple thing to define, who feeds me? Who do I feed? Who guards me when I sleep? Who do I guard? Nowadays who can answer those questions? We seem to build community out of like-minded individuals but there is risk to that style. People's differences can be seen as deviance or dangerous. I think returning the idea of community to the land, the neighborhood, the village, is the right direction but I don't have a complete vision of that yet. Maybe the first step is empathy and mercy for everyone in the same lifeboat as us, even if they are different. Ask me again in 5 years.

## **How do you engage with the land and community here in Sonoma County?**

If you had asked me this question ten years ago, I'd have said activism or politics. Nowadays: as holistically as I can, as many ways as I can. I grow food at home, share and receive seeds from all over. Create art and take as much joy from artists as I can. Make as many friends as I can and try to limit my number of enemies. Offer help when I can to those who need it. Ask for help when I'm able. Try my best to improve



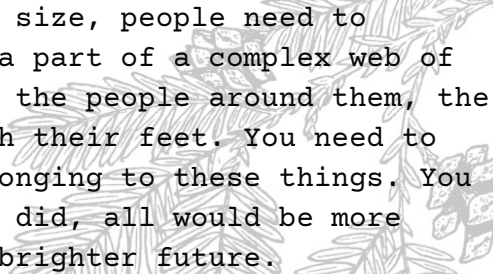
myself and celebrate those around me when they successfully grow. Give and receive, rather than take. At least on my best days.

**As a resident of Sonoma County, what do you think are the biggest threats to the land and community here?**

Climate change. Wow, those are two BIG words. Let's break 'em down a little, to a more human level. Disaster that opens room for land grabs from the rich. The big kids stealing the little kid's lunch when they fall down. This happens all the damn time, legal looting, and Sonoma County seems particularly vulnerable to it. Consolidation of water and land into the hands of the few, whether through shock doctrine or otherwise. This stuff breaks communities and poisons the very earth, preventing new growth. We must be prepared.

**How do you feel about land and/or homeownership here in Sonoma County?**

The idea of ownership is a deep well. I think broadly that to own something means you have to take responsibility for it. Not just paying the taxes or fixing the roof, but holding with care the slice of the ecosystem you are a part of. To own should be synonymous with being a steward. Yet it's not viewed that way. Someone can 'own' thousands of acres and never care for the water or air that will affect people beyond the property line, never even set foot on the land itself. This leads to a lot of misuse. To



possess land of any size, people need to recognize they are a part of a complex web of nature around them, the people around them, the very soil underneath their feet. You need to feel a sense of belonging to these things. You yourself. If we all did, all would be more healthy and have a brighter future.

**If you have colonizer/European ancestry, what steps do you take to engage with or support local indigenous communities or Sonoma County in general?**

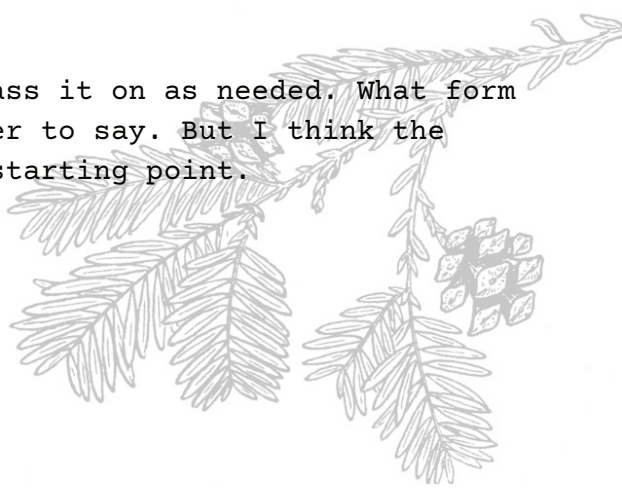
I try to recover my own indigenous roots and learn to embody what that means. I try to not take that which is not first offered. Give what is good, receive that good which is offered.

**What do you think we owe to the places we live and the communities we live among?**

What we owe... We have to recognize that we live as a part of a social ecology. That we consume energy: from the land and water and emotional energy from people around us. That it's ok to take some of that energy, but you must also give back what you take. Inevitably. We seem to want to hoard things: take, consume, benefit, and then end the process there! Driven by a constant state of scarcity. We must step away from that primal fear. When you receive something, embrace being the loving caretaker of it for as long as



you use it, then pass it on as needed. What form  
this takes is harder to say. But I think the  
mindset is a good starting point.



# **Nahara Goodman - She/Her**



**City/town of residence:** Sebastopol and Santa Rosa

**How long have you lived in Sonoma County?**

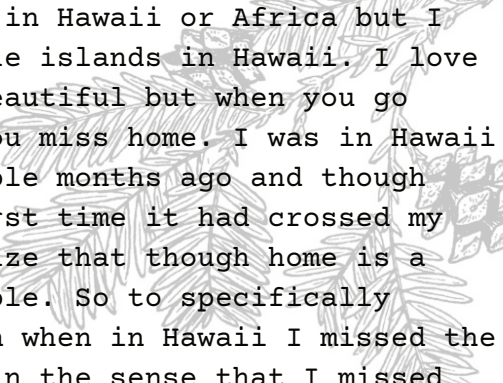
My whole life (14 years)

**Where are your ancestors from?** Hawaii, Africa, America

**Do you have others you consider ancestors (ancestors of spirit, i.e. folks who are a big influence on you, like queer trailblazers, spiritual leaders, social justice activists, musicians, etc)? If so, who are they?**

I don't really have anything like that. I have people like celebrities and influencers who I admire but I wouldn't consider them a form of ancestor, because well they're not dead. There's also fictional characters. I know it's kinda silly in a way but I love fictional characters and the way you can get lost in a book.

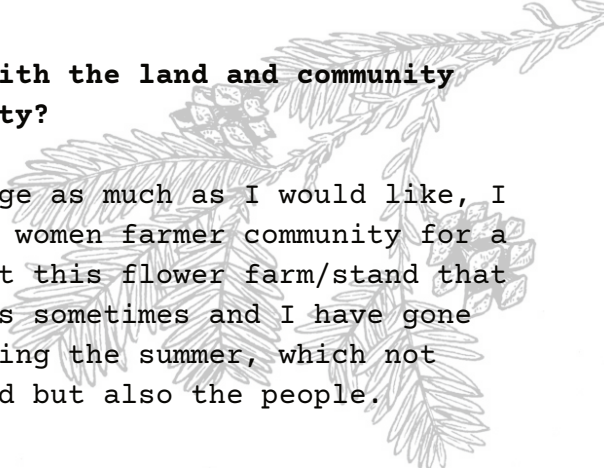
**If you are not indigenous to Sonoma County (or have additional ancestry from a different part of the world), have you visited or lived in the place or places where your ancestors lived? If so, what impact, if any, did that experience have on you and your sense of belonging where you currently live?**



pI have never lived in Hawaii or Africa but I have visited multiple islands in Hawaii. I love it there, it's so beautiful but when you go there for a while you miss home. I was in Hawaii for two weeks a couple months ago and though this was not the first time it had crossed my mind I came to realize that though home is a place it's also people. So to specifically answer your question when in Hawaii I missed the sense of belonging in the sense that I missed being with my mom and my friends. I missed all of the little things.

**What does community mean to you?**

I think that in a way there are different types of communities and the meaning depends on the type. For example there's a class community. The teacher will tell you not to be mean to the other student and participate in class to keep up the classroom community. But let's be real, there are times that doesn't happen and even if it does, most of the time the class isn't that close. But something like a community made up of family and friends who are all there for each other and truly care about one another is a completely different situation. A community of people that you can count on means sooooo much more than just a group of kids who don't really want to be there.



**How do you engage with the land and community here in Sonoma County?**

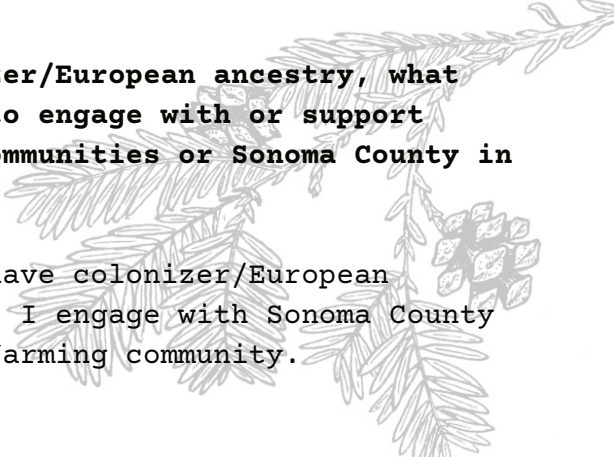
Though I don't engage as much as I would like, I have engaged in the women farmer community for a while. I help out at this flower farm/stand that a family friend owns sometimes and I have gone to garden camps during the summer, which not only helped the land but also the people.

**As a resident of Sonoma County, what do you think are the biggest threats to the land and community here?**

Well I don't know a lot since I'm only 14 but I would assume that one of the biggest threats would probably be the people who build big buildings on the land, destroying more and more of it. Or the people who destroy the land in other ways like littering. For the biggest threat on the community I'm not really sure. Maybe because some land is being threatened? But I'm not really sure.

**How do you feel about land and/or homeownership here in Sonoma County?**

Well I don't know a lot since I'm only 14 but from what I do know I think that both land and houses should be more accessible and cheaper so people with large amounts of money from out of Sonoma County don't buy it all up for business, destroying the land or making it so everything is even more expensive.



**If you have colonizer/European ancestry, what steps do you take to engage with or support local indigenous communities or Sonoma County in general?**

I don't know if I have colonizer/European ancestry. If I did, I engage with Sonoma County through the women farming community.

**What do you think we owe to the places we live and the communities we live among?**

I think we owe a lot. The land gives us food and beauty and the people (hopefully) give us joy and happiness. Without a community, the land, and a place to live we wouldn't really be anywhere in life.

## **Nathan Azhderian - He/Him**

**City/town of residence:** Santa Rosa, CA

**How long have you lived in Sonoma County?**

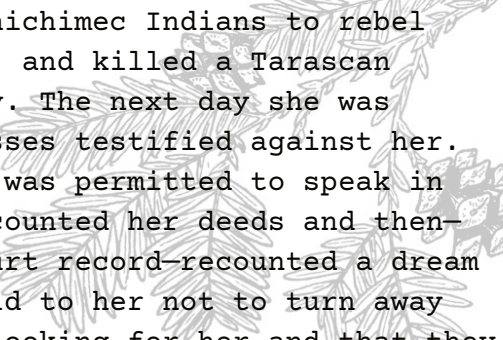
I was born here and lived here until I was 18, and I moved back in 2017.

**Where are your ancestors from?** Armenia, Ireland, Germany, Russia.

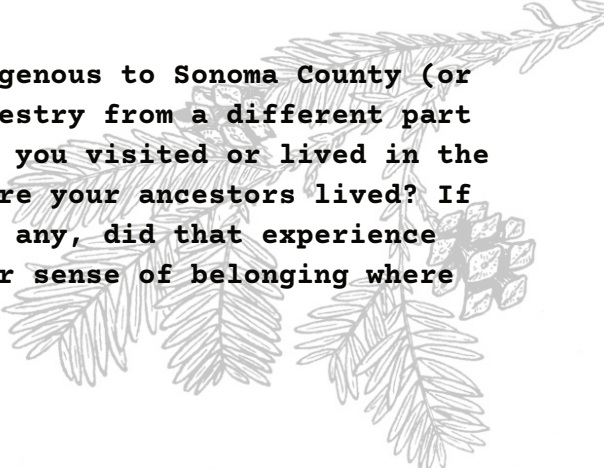
**Do you have others you consider ancestors (ancestors of spirit, i.e. folks who are a big influence on you, like queer trailblazers, spiritual leaders, social justice activists, musicians, etc)? If so, who are they?**

This feels embarrassing, but lately I've been thinking a lot about: Ruth Beckford, Toussaint Louverture, Gustav Metzger, Juan O'Gorman, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Sergei Parajanov, Jack Smith, Sylvester, Vladimir Tatlin, George Jones. I've also been thinking about people whose names are not part of the historical record, like this woman who I read about in Jason Moore and Raj Patel's "A history of the world in 7 cheap things"

It only took a day from her crime to her execution. Yet court documents don't even record her name. She lived in Tlaxcala, New Spain, and on Sunday, July 18, 1599, she smashed crosses in



a church, incited Chichimec Indians to rebel against the Spanish, and killed a Tarascan Indian using sorcery. The next day she was arrested. Six witnesses testified against her. As the sun set, she was permitted to speak in her defense. She recounted her deeds and then—according to the court record—recounted a dream of deer and they said to her not to turn away and that they were looking for her and that they did not want to appear to anyone else but her, because she was ill and they wanted to see her, and she said that she was very old the time she saw the figures and now she is young and healthy and they have taken away some cataracts that she had, and then these two figures went into a cave with her and they gave her a horse, which she has in said pueblo of Tlaxcala, and that one of the two figures was a deer that rode atop of a horse and the other deer had the horse bridled, and on that occasion she was crippled and after seeing the two figures she is well. One of the crimes she committed, her dream was the worst. She might have fueled insurrection, desecrated a church, and interfered with the flow of silver from Chichimec land, but most dangerous, she offered a vision of order and nature contrary to the colonizers'. The horse was ridden not by Spanish men but by a deer—the symbol of the Chichimec: not white men astride nature, but local life upon the colonizers' life. The dreamer of this dream was guilty of calling not just for a political insurrection but for a cosmic one. She dreamed the order of the world seditiously. She was hanged as a witch later that afternoon (pp33).



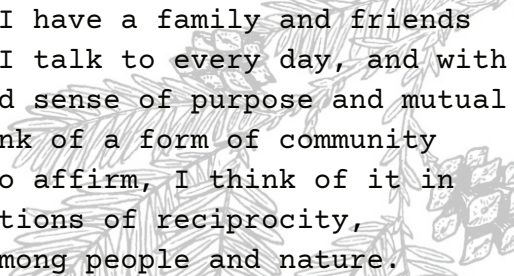
If you are not indigenous to Sonoma County (or have additional ancestry from a different part of the world), have you visited or lived in the place or places where your ancestors lived? If so, what impact, if any, did that experience have on you and your sense of belonging where you currently live?

I haven't.

**What does community mean to you?**

It's a difficult word for me. I feel like my life has been structured by the desire to live in community with other people, but I feel like this is not something that is really possible under market conditions. The arts are doubly challenging in this respect because social relations are masked by a kind of pseudo politics that also make it difficult to connect with people in ways that feel honest to me. I'm alone most of the time, stretched out between projects and jobs or driving from one place to another. I don't like living in America, I think it's profoundly ugly. Not the land, but the culture of America and its cult of entrepreneurialism, extraction, narcissism, historical illiteracy and fraud. The term "community" is like most language in the sense that it is horribly abused by this business ontology, with its "friends and family" fundraiser rounds, targeted advertising campaigns, social media surveillance programs etc. So, there's that.





On the other hand, I have a family and friends and a partner that I talk to every day, and with whom I feel a shared sense of purpose and mutual support. When I think of a form of community that I would like to affirm, I think of it in terms of these relations of reciprocity, exchange and care among people and nature.

**As a resident of Sonoma County, what do you think are the biggest threats to the land and community here?**

I think life in Sonoma County is organized around the same market-Stalinist garbage culture that is the dominant cultural modality across the globe. I think it is important to remember that the process of colonization that has brought us to this point was (and is) apocalyptic in that it enacted the systematic destruction of a life-world in the name of Anglo European supremacy and industrialization. I do not feel that it is possible to speak to the interests of a community here, because there is no narrative of shared history that can be credibly invoked to bind people together in this way. I think the only reasonable path forward involves expropriation and restitution. At the same time, resources of all types are concentrated in the hands of "Libertarian" business interests that grew fat on Clinton-era government subsidies directed to the bay area under the direction of the Democratic Leadership Council. I feel like we are all subjected to the caprice and poor judgment of this group of people, because of our proximity to Silicon

Valley. So I don't know, immiseration and dispossession under a regime of "luxury" techno-financial McMansionization?

**How do you feel about land and/or homeownership here in Sonoma County?**

The idea of carving the world up into little squares that are owned by "landlords" is stupid, of course.

**How do you engage with the land and community here in Sonoma County?**

I work at a local native plant nursery. I run a project space out of a shipping container in my yard that shows local and visiting artists.

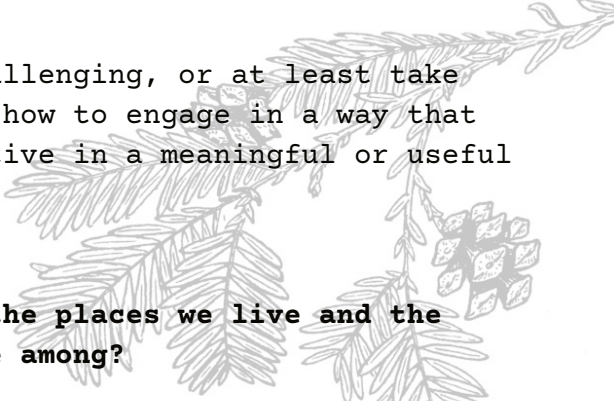
I work as a gardener on land where I am also doing forest restoration work.

I sit on the art in public places committee for the city of Santa Rosa.

I am working on several exhibitions and workshops with a local community college.

**If you have colonizer ancestry, what steps do you take to engage with or support local indigenous communities or Sonoma County in general?**

I recently worked on a garden project with a local artist named Nicole Jones that focuses on southern Pomo foodways. I'm looking for someone to work on a mural to go with the garden. I



think it can be challenging, or at least take time to understand how to engage in a way that is actually supportive in a meaningful or useful way.

**What do we owe to the places we live and the communities we live among?**

My first impulse was to write “everything” here. But then I wondered if framing this relation in terms of debt created issues for me? We have obligations maybe, responsibilities? I do not feel secure in my sense of the virtue of my relations with the plants and animals and people that I work with, but I know that they give something to me, and I give something in return. I feel that tending to this relationship of reciprocity and care is at the core of how I would like to live.



## **Nicole Myers Lim - She/Her**

**City/town of residence:** Windsor

**How long have you lived in Sonoma County?**

My whole life, pretty much. I was born in Santa Rosa Memorial Hospital, raised in Petaluma, and have lived here except for when I went away to school.

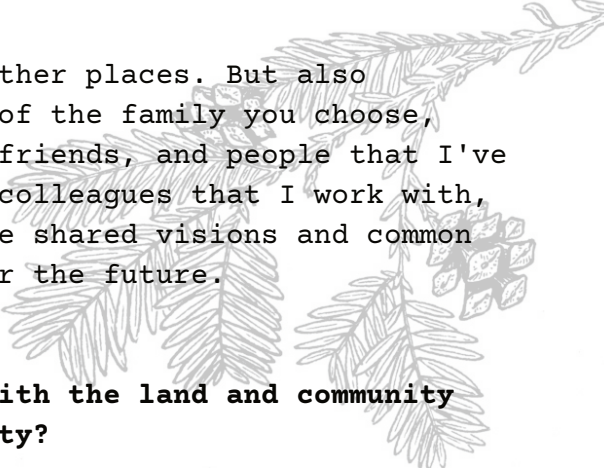
**Where are your ancestors from?** Largely Sonoma, Lake and Mendocino County. I have a great-grandfather who is Miwok from Tomales Bay in Marin, and I have a great-grandmother from Big Valley in Lake County. My dad was raised on the Pinoleville Indian Reservation in Ukiah.

**Do you have others you consider ancestors (ancestors of spirit, i.e. folks who are a big influence on you, like queer trailblazers, spiritual leaders, social justice activists, musicians, etc)? If so, who are they?**

I had a godfather who was Southern Cheyenne Arapaho.

**What does community mean to you?**

I definitely work and have a lot of goals for my tribal community, and that I look at as Pomo, Miwok, and Wappo people in the tri-county area, but also there's a lot of tribal people who live



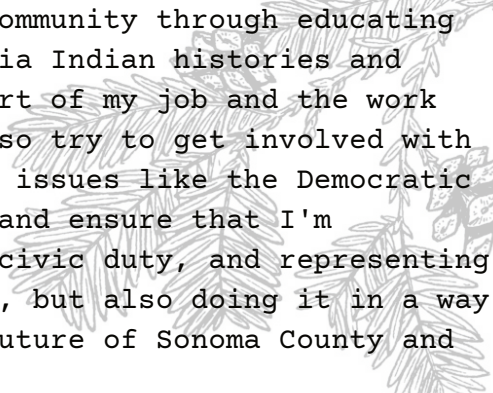
here who are from other places. But also community are kind of the family you choose, right? So, lots of friends, and people that I've grown up with, and colleagues that I work with, and people that have shared visions and common values and hopes for the future.

**How do you engage with the land and community here in Sonoma County?**

Engaging with the land, it's my goal that the folks who this is their ancestral territory, that they feel engaged with it, that they don't feel like strangers in their own homeland. So, we do a lot of cultural education.

Unfortunately, because there's not a lot of tribal land throughout California, we have to do that in private lands and public parks, and that doesn't always give us the cultural educational space that we need.

We do need to engage with our land on a daily basis, not just during harvest or ceremonially. We have to be able to do that all of the time. So, it's important for me that I'm educated, and I'm educating others about plants, and medicines, and cultural resources, and how we are able to do that in a way that's safe, and that we ensure that we decriminalize cultural gathering. In other parts of the United States, it's a treaty right. Because California treaties weren't ever ratified, we have to do that more on an individual basis, and that's complicated.



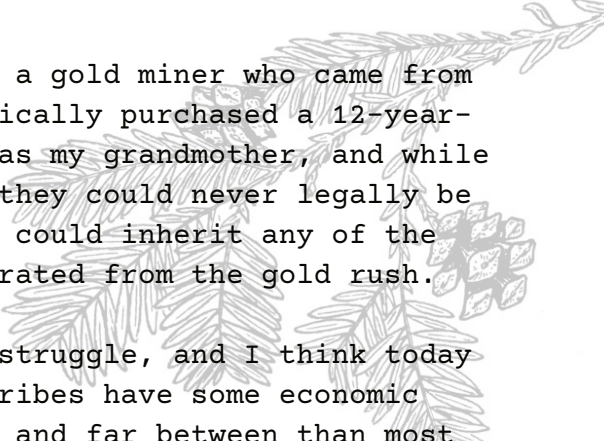
I engage with the community through educating them about California Indian histories and cultures. That's part of my job and the work that I do. But I also try to get involved with local Sonoma County issues like the Democratic Central Committee, and ensure that I'm participating as a civic duty, and representing tribal perspectives, but also doing it in a way that protects the future of Sonoma County and our homeland.

**As a resident of Sonoma County, what do you think are the biggest threats to the land and community here?**

I really think as we're facing the climate crisis and we're seeing the impact of that, that we have to embrace traditional ecological knowledge and we have to lead from place. So, people whose ancestral territories this is, we have a lot of knowledge about how it can be cared for and cared for better, but we have to ensure that those people have a voice, representation, a seat at the decision-making table. I think it's important for us to be looked at as experts in our own homeland.

**How do you feel about land and/or homeownership here in Sonoma County?**

Well, it's a struggle. I think it's a struggle for everyone. Unfortunately, because of the very violent history of California, our people were dispossessed of land and the opportunity to generate generational wealth.



The first Myers was a gold miner who came from Ireland, and he basically purchased a 12-year-old Pomo girl who was my grandmother, and while they had children, they could never legally be married. So, no one could inherit any of the wealth that he generated from the gold rush.

So, I think it's a struggle, and I think today we're seeing some tribes have some economic success. It's fewer and far between than most people think, but that's only in the last 20 years as opposed to the last 200 years. I think there should be more opportunities because it is an economic struggle to be able to survive here, but also to be able to have that continued existence is important. And trying to ensure that I can create an infrastructure so that my children and their children can continue to stay here is important to me.

**What do you think we owe to the places we live and the communities we live among?**

I think we owe gratitude. I think we owe responsibility to not only past generations who fought for us, but future generations who have a right to benefit from these places. This is kind of a loaded question for me.

Because I think California Native people in particular, considering the war of extermination and all the things that happened to our people, probably should be owed an education in their own homelands at minimum. And now I think the Land Back movement is really important, and

being able to have land that we can steward and model the success of since time immemorial how we've cared for the land maybe so others can be inspired and follow, I think is a good thing.

**Optional:**

**Do you have a spiritual practice? If so, how does it influence the ways you relate to your community, and Sonoma County in general?**

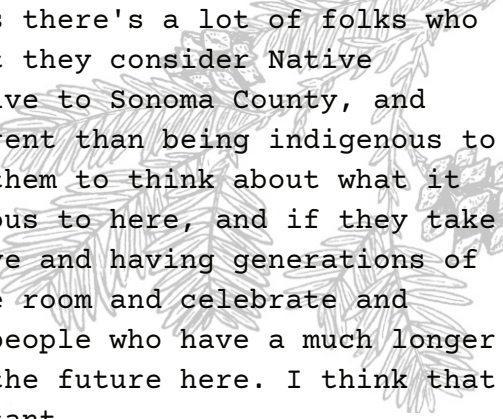
I grew up with some spiritual leaders from Sonoma County, and engaged in traditional dancing when I was younger. Those folks are gone now, and I don't have that same connection that I used to. But everywhere to us in our homeland is a sacred landscape, and there are certain areas that have significance to us.

But also growing up and not having as many family members here as I used to, the land holds those memories. It holds our DNA, it holds spirituality, and that's something that I've tended to become more reflective on recently because I have more people in the spirit world maybe than this world anymore. But I think it's a lifelong process for us. It's a lifelong learning process and something that we continue to evolve through.

**Anything else you'd like to add about ancestors, land/earth reverence, community, etc?**

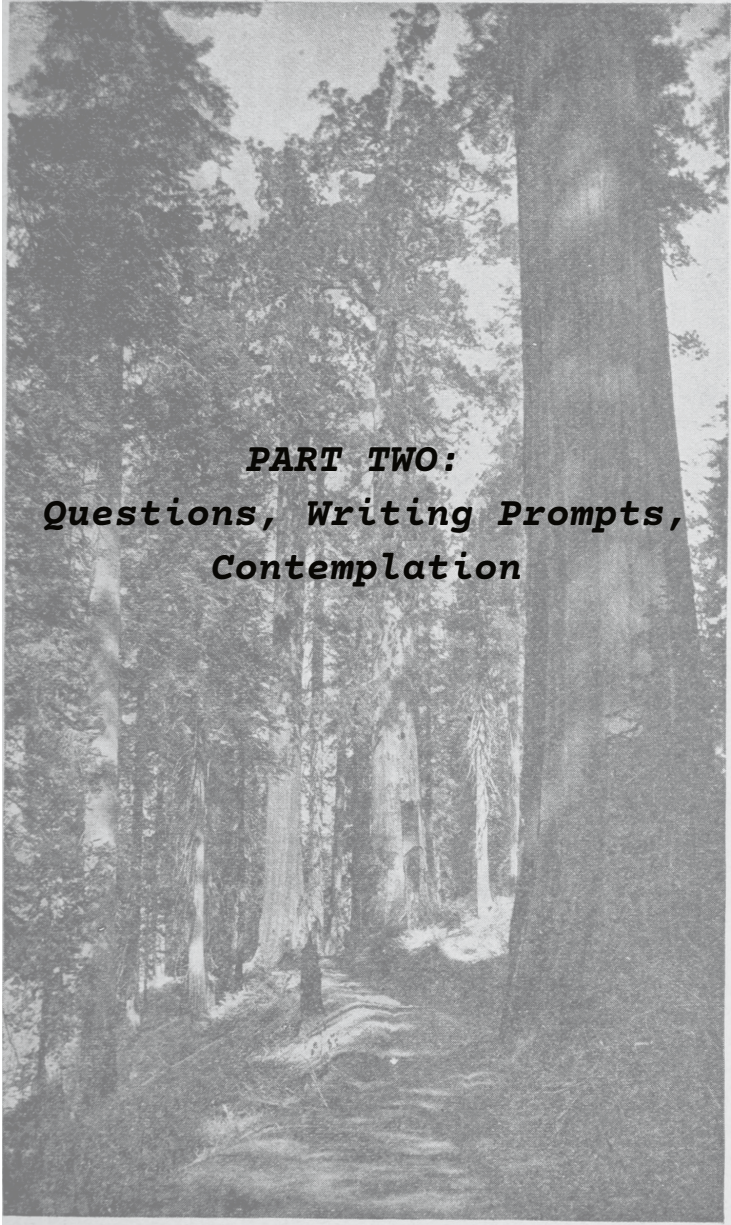
I think one thing as Native people that is





interesting to us is there's a lot of folks who are proud to be what they consider Native Californians or native to Sonoma County, and that might be different than being indigenous to here. But I'd like them to think about what it means to be indigenous to here, and if they take pride in being Native and having generations of family, to also make room and celebrate and respect our tribal people who have a much longer history as well as the future here. I think that that's really important.

The only other thing is that running a museum, we have a lot of folks who live here who've had land who have inherited or extracted tribal cultural items. And I'd just like people to think about not being as interested in the monetary value of those items as being interested in the cultural value and how it can inspire the revitalization of culture from our younger folks. Part of respecting the land is respecting our tribal people, and not looking at those things as possessions, but things that should be shared or returned and restored.



**PART TWO:**  
**Questions, Writing Prompts,**  
**Contemplation**



**Questions:**

The following are the list of questions asked for this project, along with writing prompts from the "Writing with the Land" workshops. I'm offering these as conversation starters, writing, self-reflection, mutual aid tactics, etc.

**QUESTIONS for Dani Burlison's Creative Sonoma Project:**

Name and pronouns:

City/town of residence:

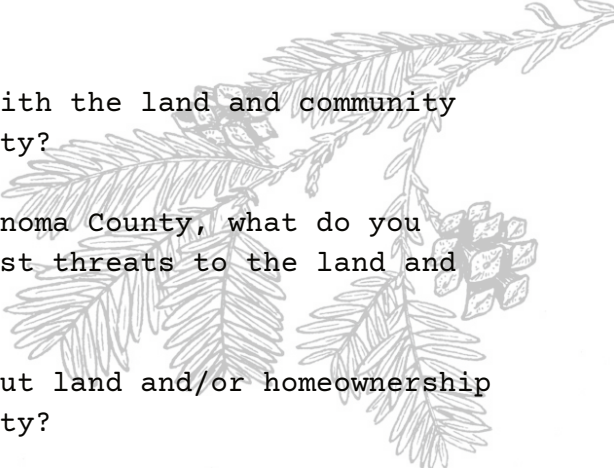
How long have you lived in Sonoma County?

Where are your ancestors from?

Do you have others you consider ancestors (ancestors of spirit, i.e. folks who are a big influence on you, like queer trailblazers, spiritual leaders, social justice activists, musicians, etc)? If so, who are they?

If you are not indigenous to Sonoma County (or have additional ancestry from a different part of the world), have you visited or lived in the place or places where your ancestors lived? If so, what impact, if any, did that experience have on you and your sense of belonging where you currently live?

What does community mean to you?



How do you engage with the land and community here in Sonoma County?

As a resident of Sonoma County, what do you think are the biggest threats to the land and community here?

How do you feel about land and/or homeownership here in Sonoma County?

If you have colonizer/European ancestry, what steps do you take to engage with or support local indigenous communities or Sonoma County in general?

What do you think we owe to the places we live and the communities we live among?

**Optional:**

Do you have a spiritual practice? If so, how does it influence the ways you relate to your community, and Sonoma County in general? Anything else you'd like to add about ancestors, land/earth reverence, community, etc?

## Writing Prompts/Conversation Starters:

How does the land see YOU?

How has this community changed?

Who gets to live where?

Who gets to own? And how much do they get to own?

What do we owe the places we live?

Where are your ancestors from?

Who are the people in your community?

How do you care for your community?

Where are you from?

Who can really live on a "living wage"?

Do you know who was here first? Do you know their story?

What happens to the rest of us?

How do you support local indigenous people?

How do you make people feel?

Where do we go if we can't afford to live here?





**Writing Prompts for Outside/Your Home/Your  
Neighborhood Park/Forest/Etc:**

- How the land sees me
- How has the place where you live changed OR how has your relationship to where you live changed?
- Write about the land or lands where your ancestors are from. If you don't know, you can write about a place you feel drawn to or connected to.
- Who are the people in your community and how do you fit into that group?
- Wander around, find a plant, insect, animal, etc and sit with it, observing every aspect of it for 5-30 minutes. Write a letter to YOU from its perspective.
- Is there a particular tree or plant local to your neighborhood or greater community that you notice or spend time with? Write a biography (real or imagined) of the plant.
- Write a letter to this land 50 years in the future.
- Write a love letter to your descendants from this place.

Dani Burlison (she/her) is a writer, teacher, and social justice activist with nearly thirty years as a practicing witch. She is the author/editor of "All of Me: Love, Anger and the Female Body" (PM Press), "Some Places Worth Leaving" (Tolsun Books), and multiple zines, articles, essays and more. She is currently finishing her memoir in essays about trauma, poverty, and mythology, and is collaborating on an anthology about fires and mutual aid in Northern California. She is a recent recipient of a Creative Sonoma arts grant, through which she developed a writing workshop series and an interview project about relationship to land, ancestors, and community called "Ancestors of Place." A single parent with two grown children, she comes from a rural working poor background with ancestral roots primarily in Northern Europe. Dani has an MA from New College of California's School of Culture, Ecology and Sustainable Community, a BA in Activism & Social Change, and is trained as a trauma informed yoga instructor. She is an Ancestral Lineage Healing Practitioner (as trained by Ancestral Medicine and Dr. Daniel Foor), and a student of western herbal medicine at Heartwood Education in Bedfordshire, UK. She lives with her two cats, surrounded by redwood trees on unceded Southern Pomo and Coast Miwok land in Sonoma County, Northern California.

[www.daniburlison.com](http://www.daniburlison.com)