



Wisdom Keepers' Stories

The following interviews were conducted in 1996 with revered elder women healers who live in a poverty stricken area of Rio de Janeiro.

Brazilian Traditional Healers

Brazil was the last country in the world to abolish slavery. As a consequence, the healing practices of Africa, particularly the use of herbal medicines, survive today among some of those still marginalized from mainstream culture.

Cleisa Nazare Gaudencio

My great grandmother passed her knowledge of healing to my mother and she taught it to me. I wanted to pass it on to my daughter, but she unexpectedly passed away. I started to heal when I was a child. I work with the orisha spirits of the African spiritual world. I heal with natural herbs and a cup of water. Everything I use is natural from the earth. I feel vibrations when I heal. It may be either a positive or negative vibration. I feel a person's pain. That's how it works for me. The spirit of light tells me what to do. It gives me an intuition about the situation.



The spirit speaks through me and someone else writes it down. The orishas often show me things. They give me spiritual insight. The mother of the water does not speak with language. It gives off a vibration. I feel its force in my mind. The spirit takes over and directs me in how to help others.

I have healed a lot of people in my lifetime. Now I am an old woman. I stopped healing on a full-time basis several years ago. Now I only work with someone who deeply needs my help. I used to have a little hut. I would go there to treat the sick. My way of healing is to pray, use water, and medicinal herbs. If the orisha needs to say something to me, he will say it. I use a rattle when I heal. I don't ask God to tell me what is wrong with a person. It's too much for me to see the sickness. I ask only what should be done to help. This is a lot easier on me.



I found that what is really going on with a person may have nothing to do with what they say is the problem. They may be talking about their nervous system, while I feel pain in my colon and stomach. I listen less to the people and more to what God tells me about a situation. I try to be simple, honest, and humble about my healing work. There is no need for me to know or understand much about anything. I just listen to what God wants me do.

When love is pure, you feel a happy, good vibration. It feels good in your body. You don't want to gain any financial compensation for something that feels that good. It is something to give away for free. Happiness is the reward of this work.

People sometimes come in with bad spirits. Through prayer, you try to get that bad





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spirit to leave the person's body. As a healer you need to learn many different kinds of prayers to combat the bad spirits.

When I was 13 years old, I healed my grandfather. He was disturbed and my prayers worked on him. I used a prayer book because at the time I didn't know about any other methods of healing. After that experience, I learned different prayers for each of the diseases.

I also use many different kinds of herbal teas. Some are for the digestive system and some are for flu, among other problems and diseases. I am not against the doctors and the hospitals. I cooperate with them. They do their part and I do mine. We are a team. That is the best way for the patient. There needs to be a good union between the doctor and the traditional healer. It's very important. I often go to the hospital to work with a sick child. I go as soon as I am called. I also go to people's houses. Wherever I'm called, I go.

My link to spirit is through nature. I love the plants and earth. What's really important is to be humble and charitable to others who really need help. I like the smell of grass and the plants. It's tranquil to me. Let's live like God wants us to live.

Dona Filhinha

I was born in Travessao on the 6th of June in 1908. When I started healing I was a child. It was like a game. It was nothing serious. I am now 86 years old. I have eight sons and eight daughters. I have lived a good life. When my husband died, I dreamed of a lottery number that I saw on his coffin. I entered this number and won the lottery, the Jogo de Bicho. I won this on my birthday. I have never charged any money for my healing work. I only ask for a small jar of bee's honey. On my 89th birthday, over 150 people who had been cured by serious bronchitis threw a party for me. They gave me many gifts. It made me very happy.



I healed by cooking with the herbs. I put the herbs in water with some honey, heat it, pray, and give it to the children. My life was pre-destined. God marked my destiny to be a healer. I learned everything through my dreams. I never studied or had a teacher. I dreamed about the plants. When I was a little girl I had dreams about how to use plants for people. It was playful for me to have those dreams and make the medicines out of the plants. It was fun. I also placed my hands on people and made special prayers.



A person should not try to heal unless it is their destiny. This has always been my purpose in life. I have great intuition. I can see where things are and know what to do in a problematic situation. I have never been to a school and I have never been to a doctor in my entire life. I once felt a little pain when I was pregnant. I have lived my life by doing what feels natural, following my destiny. This keeps me healthy and positive.

Not a single child of mine ever went to the hospital or saw a doctor. I knew how to take care of them. My dreams always told me what I must do. I am very careful



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about diet. I don't like rice or chicken. I like to eat bananas. I don't even have arthritis. I am able to successfully treat arthritis and asthma. I have great success in treating people who are sick and are not able to be helped by the doctors.



You are the first foreigner I have ever met. I want you to know that God holds me. I am able to speak with him. I like to smoke my pipe. When I was a little girl, I liked to eat mud. My mother gave me a pipe as a way of stopping me from eating mud. That's how I started smoking. Please understand that this is my destiny. I am here to help heal others. I have never traveled anywhere and I have never experienced any stress or worries. I used to drink five beers a day. It has been a good life.

