UNEARTHING ANCESTRAL POWER

An Invitation to Transformation
by Hawai‘i Lit Production Co.
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Muhammad al-Idrisi (1099-1165) was a prominent Arab geographer, cartographer, and traveler of the 12th century. Under commission of King Roger II, a Norman ruler in Palermo, Sicily, al-Idrisi created a foundational geographic compendium of detailed maps and descriptions of various regions, drawing from a wide range of sources including Greek, Roman, Arab, and other geographical traditions. His work served as a foundation for advancing geographic knowledge for the next three centuries. Legend has it that ten manuscript copies of *Nuzhat al-mushtaq fi ikhtiraq al-afaq (The Excursion of the One Who Yearns to Penetrate the Horizon)* currently survive. Two are in Paris, one is held at Oxford, and another is in Istanbul (Norman). The location of the other six copies is unknown, but no copies have been located in Palermo, Sicily where the map was created.
The Hawai‘i Lit Production Co. was born out of the immeasurable impact that storytelling has had on our personal lives. Extensive unearthing has revealed inner landscapes inclusive of tremendous pain and sublime power. Often the stories making up our past were abandoned on the sidelines of colonization and industrialization. It is clear to us that understanding the complex tapestry of our ancestral cartography transforms lives.

We don’t want to fool you into thinking that doing the work is a service you can purchase, a book you can read, a podcast you can listen to, though all of those things can be major catalysts for growth. This work is microbial; it’s cellular. And just like atoms are the building blocks of energy and microbes are necessary to break down organic matter, so too is knowledge, healing, and discovery essential building blocks for your sovereignty.

To build anything of value requires a certain commitment to create, to stick with a plan, to imagine what you’re assembling. Without a conception you wouldn’t know where to start. The good news is that the blueprint for your building plans are inside of you. They live in your memories and DNA. They live in the stories that have been passed down to you, your nervous tics, your repeated phrases, and in countless other ways we’re only beginning to discover.

Your perception and vision is filtered through the lens of who your ancestors were, what they have experienced, what they have done, and the problems they had to solve to get you here, at this very moment sitting here reading this book. Your ancestors are the keys to your cellular transformation. By gaining and integrating the facts of their lives, you will see the trail of movement and decisions that have led to your very being. You will be empowered by the context of the land from which your ancestors had to traverse, the struggles they had to overcome, the incredible loss, love, and strength they had to push through in order for your awareness of this very moment. After all, they were individuals just like you. Only by embodying your personal history can you move forward in the world with a sense of belonging and agency. Discovering your inner ancestral territory will help you be a better version of yourself and aid the generations of your ancestors who will come after you. So we ask, what vision will you pass on?
Unearthing Ancestral Power

Ambiguity often follows ancestral stories, causing orphaned narratives that don’t fit into an ideal of society: “Grandma disappeared for 20 years when she came to America but our family doesn’t talk about that; grandpa was schizophrenic and spent most of his life in prison; I don’t know if I’m Jewish even though two lines of my family came to America during WWII.” Often the function for dismembering our ancestral stories served as a means to survive.

To do your work, you must be brave enough to adopt the stray facts that sit in dusty attics and perish with your silent ancestors. It’s only by re-encountering these narratives that you can transform them into your personal power by strengthening your identity.

We invite you on the greatest travels you will ever undertake. We can’t promise you’ll come to an end or that you’ll finish what you set out to do, though some of you may and then you’ll be there to help others. What we can guarantee is that you will leave behind a clear understanding of the space you occupy in your history and a starting point for future generations to iterate from. You will do this by charting your progress, by asking hard questions, and collecting the artifacts of your story. By probing the contents of your memories and patterns, you will find the essence of who you are.

The path may seem dreadful. “My aunt won’t talk to me,” or “my mother and I haven’t spoken for 30 years,” or “my father died when I was 14” are just some of the many excuses we could use to negotiate staying in familiar territory. The great news is that this work can be done on your own. You will naturally find your community and healing allies as you bravely cross obstructed ancestral boundaries. You will go deeper still and find life-long partners in your discovery; family of all sorts you can’t begin to imagine. You will in essence, come home.

Are you ready to take the most terrifyingly blissful journey of your life? What do you have to lose besides being disconnected from the strength of your ancestors’ resilience and the very reason why you exist?

In this book, you will find resources to begin your work. This potent primer is intended for your contemplation. It is not a complete guide. There are many books, resources, conversations, and explorations only you can cultivate, and then hopefully share with us, your ancestral healing community. We will be with you every step of the way.

How will you choose to embody your family’s identity with your time here on Earth?

Mary Moody & Krystal Meisel
To do your work, you must be brave enough to adopt the stray facts that sit in dusty attics and perish with your silent ancestors.
Unearthing Ancestral Power

Interviewing the Mind
How does the telling of our ancestral stories tie us to a land that we can speak from. How do we take up space on a map?

“The traumas we inherit or experience first-hand can not only create a legacy of distress, but also forge a legacy of strength and resilience that can be felt for generations to come” (Wolynn, 2022).

In Mark Wolynn’s seminal work, *It Didn’t Start With You*, he made a connection between what his patients were saying and how it connected to their ancestral story. Wolynn began to realize that when his patients were hung up on a phrase like, “nobody loves me” or “I’m not good enough” that with some further questioning he could get close to the source of those patterns.

Much research has been done since Bruce Lipton made his initial discoveries on the rapidly growing field of epigenetics. He wrote, “Just like a single cell, the character of our lives is determined not by our genes but by our responses to the environmental signals that propel life” (Lipton, 2005). Our patterns are intrinsically tied to our family regardless of our contact with or connections to them.

“We know, in the case of the person, that whoever cannot tell himself the truth about his past is trapped in it, is immobilized in the prison of his undiscovered self. This is also true of nations” (Baldwin, 2020).

In the United States, as a nation, we do not own the ugly facts of our past. Erasure of our legacy of slavery and genocide to build this country is ever present. We burn books and attempt to limit the knowledge of young folks to perpetuate White Supremacist ideals so the values that this country was built upon will not have to reckon with its ugly Anglo refugee past.

A memorial art project consisting of small brass plaques embedded in the sidewalks all over Germany known as Stolpersteine, honor the victims of the Holocaust by commemorating their names and life details at their former residences (Glass, 2018). Germany also conserves over 2,000 memorial sites bearing witness to the horrors perpetrated by the Nazi regime (IHRA, 1998). In Sicily, we are confronted with similar memorials to the citizens who were killed at the hands of the Mafia. The National Museum of African American History and Culture is the only national museum in the United States devoted exclusively to the documentation of African American life, history, and culture (National Museum of African American History and Culture, 2022). According to an article regarding repatriation of Native American remains, The Field Museum in Chicago collected $400,000 over three years for the stewardship of artifacts that
were questionably collected (Jaffe, 2023). We observe that the United States is unique in that it is running out of ways to divert the reckoning that is essential to the liberation of its people. This inheritance of denial is a real thing and something we believe should be evaluated collectively.

We understand that there is a continuum of difficulty in accessing the records of our ancestors. Some of our histories have been erased. We are not afraid of these stories. They are an artifact of our history and should be integrated and provided solutions for. Through doing this work together, we can imagine new systems together that may help future generations preserve their family legacies.

“Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome is a condition that exists when a population has experienced multigenerational trauma resulting from centuries of slavery and continues to experience oppression and institutionalized racism today. Added to this condition is a belief (real or imagined) that the benefits of the society in which they live are not accessible to them” (DeGruy, 2005).

This work can be painful. But it is also vital. It can also provide a life-long source of strength. It’s imperative we look deep into the past to see what and who has shaped our environment. We have to look at the political system that governed us, the demographics we were a part of, in the neighborhoods we grew up in, and at the stories of our family members who surround us. We have to remember how we felt in our bodies growing up, where we were uncomfortable, where we were silent, and what we fiercely protected. If we hope to have a chance at finding ourselves and beginning with a territory from which to start, it is within our memories that we must go and piece together the conditions that nursed our aliveness.

Epigenetics is just that, a possibility for a starting place. It is how your environment has shaped your habits that originate from your inherited perceptions of life. If you can get a hold of these perceptions, you can change your life. This is how you can begin to interact with your subconscious and begin to move the compass toward the direction you want to go in and how you want to be. You can only change a system if you understand how it’s not working for you.

We aren’t here to pretend this is an easy starting place. Because we have firsthand experience with this work we can tell you that most likely, if you are starting here then it may be that you do not know where else to start. There may be limited pictures, letters, living ancestors, and artifacts to point you home. To begin the mapping you will have to sift through your interior and piece together a frag-
mented picture and discover what that information is communicating to you. You will undoubtedly encounter moments that will shock you to new levels of growth. It will be difficult, but once you gather these glimpses of your place in the whole, you will gain more clarity. Our hope is to guide you with enough context to assist your journey.

“Traumatized people chronically feel unsafe inside their bodies: The past is alive in the form of gnawing interior discomfort. Their bodies are constantly bombarded by visceral warning signs, and, in an attempt to control these processes, they often become expert at ignoring their gut feelings and in numbing awareness of what is played out inside. They learn to hide from their selves” (van der Kolk, 2014).

Reading books like *It Didn’t Start With You; Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome; The Body Keeps The Score; Everyday Narcissism: Yours, Mine, and Ours; Healing The Shame That Binds You* can be a powerful place to begin. Here we have provided an activity for your interior discovery. A way to penetrate your own horizon. Use it as an intuitive path toward yourself. You must not answer every prompt. Simply see them as different paths that lead you to the same destination. It truly doesn’t matter which way you take, just that you take the first step.
“Definitions are vital starting points for the imagination. What we cannot imagine cannot come into being. A good definition marks our starting point and lets us know where we want to end up. As we move toward our desired destination we chart the journey, creating a map. We need a map to guide us on our journey to love—starting with the place where we know what we mean when we speak of love.”

- bell hooks, *All About Love*
This is an exercise in coming home. By beginning with the most zoomed out portrait of your location, you can start feeling your way inward. To signal to your brain that you are taking this seriously, intentionally carve out time where you can relax and breathe. Arm yourself with your favorite tool for jotting down notes.

We’re going to make a map of your inner environment. The goal is to draw out your emotions. Be detailed. Listen to your body. Where do you get excited? Angry? Peaceful? Passive? Once you’ve finished writing, go back through and take note where you feel strong emotions in your body and name what they are. Emotions are simply energy in motion. This will help you get a good pulse for the energy that motivates your actions.

1. Describe your country and your government:

2. Describe the political boundaries surrounding where you live:

3. Describe your town, city, or village:

4. Describe a/the neighborhood you grew up in:

5. Describe the place you grew up in: This can be triggering because a place indicates a sense of belonging. If you do not identify with having a family home, simply describe whatever details you wish to recall from your childhood.

6. Describe the food you grew up eating:

7. Describe the people that brought you up: What are phrases you remember being repeated by members of your family, maybe you even repeat this same phrase today. Write what that is pointing to.

8. Describe yourself: How you feel in your body right now and compare that to how you felt in your body growing up. What do you feel? Hold space for what comes up.
Unearthing Ancestral Power

Exploring the Past
Before we work with anyone we ask them to tell us their life story, to be detailed, tell us the names of their grandmothers, their grandfathers, and their siblings. What are the stories you always heard? What lands were your people from? Where did they settle?

The answers are sometimes jarringly sparse. “I don’t know,” can be a common refrain. That’s okay. It’s our job to assist you in your explorations and help you rediscover a trail back to yourself. Unknowingly, we leave facts behind, we sign divorce papers, we fill out the census, we lie about how old we are. What’s important is that we start where you are and with what you know.

“Many executives of today are second-, third- or fourth-generation descendants of victims of calamities of the 20th century” (van de Loo, 2020).

Activism has produced incredible material for discovering the territories from which we come. When we are disconnected from the story of our ancestors it’s difficult to imagine the environment from which they came, from where they had to flee. As we begin to explore our own geographies and braid our lives back into the narratives of our ancestors we become curious about the soil from which we came. Reading can be the single most powerful tool for your liberation, discovery, and excitement to get to know who you are in context to the land of your people.

“Create dangerously, for people who read dangerously. This is what I’ve always thought it meant to be a writer. Writing, knowing in part that no matter how trivial your words may seem, someday, somewhere, someone may risk his or her life to read them” (Danticat, 2011).

“I do not write for this generation. I am writing for other ages. If this could read me, they would burn my books, the work of my whole life. On the other hand, the generation which interprets these writings will be an educated generation; they will understand me and say: ‘Not all were asleep in the nighttime of our grandparents’” (Rizal, 1983).

Speaking from the traumas that are specific to a political environment, a culture, and place can give us tremendous clues about who we are and the lives that we embody. It can also activate a deep love for our land. One we may have never even seen.

We have found tremendous healing in visiting and living in the lands of our ancestors. Getting up close and personal to the terroir of your origins is a foundational experience. There is nothing that compares to the discovery of finding your great grandmother’s adoption papers, or standing in the same exact place where she was given up generations ago. Learning your ancestor’s language can be another
way back home. Feeling the words in your mouth and listening to the dialect is a dialogue with your past that only a language can unlock.

“People think that stories can be walled off, kept outside and separate. They can’t. Stories are inside you” (Joukhadar, 2019).

And what’s when we cannot travel to those lands? We read. We find the stories that have been written from the land, from a struggle, from a love for place. We may feel moved to contribute to that body of work in some way. Our contributions can be simple: posting to a social group, submitting a poem to a journal, telling your niece something you’ve learned. Listen to how you are being inspired. How does discovering the voices of your culture affect you? What do you want to know more about? What feels familiar as you read through the history of your respective countries? What do you share? What is different?

As we begin to interrogate our associations to our identities we can understand what’s inside of us, who we are, and perhaps most importantly, who we are not.

Why do you love pasta? Why do you always crave rice? Why do you get excited about architecture or the ocean? Why do you have an insatiable desire to always swim? We are not disconnected from our origins, we are only temporarily wandering in a land whose roots cannot reach to where we are, that have not been nourished to survive. Remembering is an intentional task. But we have to do it.

On a research journey we took recently, we came to a point where the only information we could find was going to be through a local gentleman who might know the family in question. He was well into his 80s. We spoke no Italian then so we relied on the comfortable English vocabulary he had to let us know that what we were trying to do would only be possible if, as he put it, “someone remembers.” Someone must remember he drilled into us. If you have no one who remembers, then you have nothing. Felippo’s message that day was like a chiming bell that resonated with us! Of course, someone must remember. We must have a connection to the past and that’s why remembering is so very important. We rely on memories to guide our research and the more you practice remembering facts that you know, the better chances you have for connection.

You will find that as you begin to embody your healing journey you will find yourself inspired. There will be a time when you will want to share the wisdom you’ve gained. You may not know how to share. Acknowledging the desire to be new is a powerful beginning. Without inspiration we do not act upon our dreams. The path to becoming an inspiring, healing, vibrating organism of life is long and arduous;
bumpy and nonlinear. If you stick with it you will cross a threshold into a brand new life you had never imagined possible.

The world needs your stories. We all need to hear how you made it through to understand your whole beautiful self and the lands that you are from. We as humanity need to see that there are countless infinite ways to liberation. Your journey is important for that reason. It creates possibilities.

“Successful leaders descended from survivors of traumatic events can take rich material from their history and transform it into something positive, productive and results-driven” (van de Loo, 2020).

“No one puts their children in a boat unless the water is safer than the land.”

-Warsan Shire, Home
Start where you are: Where is your mother from? Your father? Their parents? Go as far back as your memory or a call to a relative can take you. Take some moments to jot down what you know about your origins. This will be your map for knowing where to dig.

Research writers, filmmakers, artists, and activists from the places you know your ancestors are from. If you don’t know, start local. Find creators that can teach you about the land, history, or a movement. Seek with a critical eye. Many widely-available works have been penned by people removed from proximity. Do the extra work to find creators who are rooted in place. You will have to leverage sources outside of giant distribution conglomerates. The works are out there and the tools to find them as well as possibly translate the words are getting better every day.

Examples charts from our mapping:

**Sicily - Krystal**

Reading *The Map of Salt and Stars* by Zeyn Joukhadar led to intimate time with digitized versions of *The Excursion of One Eager to Penetrate the Distant Horizons* by Muhammad al-Idrisi. During a visit to the Palazzo Abatellis a tourist vying for a social media snapshot from the entrance to a room in the gallery assured us “there was nothing to see here.” After waiting we entered to find tablets dating from the 11th century holding Arabic script strewn across the floor. Indeed, nothing to see here aside from clues to the mindsets that may be keeping al Idrisi’s work from being the crown jewel of its origin and a whisper from the perpetual belief of not being good enough.

**Philippines - Mary**

Searching for history about the Philippines at the library pulled up this gem: *Barangay: Sixteenth-Century Philippine Culture and Society* by William Henry Scott. By reading part of it, I was intrigued to find out that the pre-colonial term for a shaman, priestess, or traditional healer in the Philippines was a “Babaylan.” They held a significant position within the community and played crucial roles in rituals, healing practices, divination, and communicating with the spiritual realm; they were also gender fluid. Finding this out got me so excited that I did an additional search at the library and found José Rizal’s book, *Noli Me Tangere*. It came to me in Tagalog and although I had taken a couple of classes in college I couldn’t remember anything. I searched for an English version on the internet and found a site to download the PDF free of charge.
Beginning to research yourself and establishing a narrative for your historical and personal story can feel daunting. There’s nothing to be afraid of. We are here to help you through the process! If you ever get stuck, just email us and we’d be happy to point you in the right direction.

“...studying narratives of historical trauma can help disentangle the ways in which contemporary actions perpetuate or repair historical wounds” (Mohatt, 2014).

Genealogy has its roots as a tool for oppression and exceptionalism, so when we reference it as a tool for understanding, we use it loosely. Of course you can plug away at a platform like Ancestry.com (we like doing that too!) and build a tree based on algorithms that can lead you embarrassingly astray or you can map your own tree with any of your family members who still have access to their memories.

Prioritizing primary sources will be the most solid foundation you can stand on (don’t forget that you yourself are a primary resource). Evaluation of primary sources must be rooted in the understanding of who completed the recording. Carry the understanding that “facts” can be flawed and often have roots in some of the greatest atrocities known to our ancestors. We have found that the colonizers of a land often carry the torch of preserving artifacts of their occupation. We would be remiss in this work if we glossed over the root of genealogical search engines in the United States. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, often referred to as the Mormon Church, places a significant emphasis on the importance of family connections and eternal relationships tied to the belief that families can be together not only in this life but also in the afterlife. Names often associated with genealogical research, Ancestry.com and FamilySearch, are run by the Mormon church.

“Dealing with the inheritance of collective traumas opens space for us to embody our emotions and feelings. Embodied emotions enable executives to not think of their work solely in relation to cognitive capacities or skills but to also acknowledge and embrace the positive aspects of being vulnerable, of being fully human” (Tcholakian, 2020).

Do you still have a grandmother who is alive? Ask her if you could spend an afternoon with her and record her oral history. Ever asked your dad what his memories are of his mother and father? What are the memories, if any, of his grandparents? If not, you should! Perhaps you are the only living ancestor in your family that is known to you. Take notes of everything you know. If you are the only ancestor then your story is urgently important to understand and preserve. These are fertile places to begin your journey. You’d be sur-
prised how much you can find out when you approach your research with the lens of investigation and curiosity.

We also want to acknowledge that access to family members is a privilege. It is ok if you do not know them or are disconnected. Their story is often echoed by those who surrounded them and can offer a connection back to the map of origin.

**The Library**

Wealth abounds at your local library, the original internet. A community space where knowledge is encouraged and exploration and curiosity is fostered. If you are curious about writers from the countries where your family came from and are interested in a certain topic from the area, let’s say women’s rights in Ireland during the 1930s then you’re in luck, your local librarian is up for the challenge. These days, particularly in the United States there is access to your State’s catalog of e-books, magazines, and audio books all at your fingertips. Just download the Libby App and punch in your library card number. This free resource will be a lifelong companion as you explore the world of your ancestors.

The library will also offer access to a free version of Ancestry.com. This tool can be extremely powerful in finding primary source material connected to your ancestors, but proceed carefully. Ancestry.com serves as a complex search engine for digitized records and has increasing artificial intelligence power behind search results. We recommend an extremely critical evaluation of any suggestions as the base for recommendations are existing family trees that are often compiled by amateur genealogists.
“A library is a focal point, a sacred place to a community; and its sacredness is its accessibility, its publicness. It’s everybody’s place.”

-Ursula K. Le Guin
Build on your excavation. Begin to place the crumbs from your memory on a timeline and connect to a primary source. Perhaps you have a memory that you’re not sure is true. Look for clues that might be able to corroborate what you know. Keeping in mind that truth is totally subjective.

“I need to remember, however, that there are enormous gaps between what I know and what I think I know.” - Jill Bolt Taylor

Drawing the Map

Begin to connect the dots. Even if you only have questions. Start to record the questions, the facts, the lies, and the epiphanies. We are here when you get stuck. We specialize in digging deep into the lore of your past and charting a path back to today.

Trust your gut and listen to what your heart is trying to say. Observe the world around you for clues. Once you open the door for ancestral connection the life forces whose shoulders you rest upon will reach out to you. We see it in our work constantly. Miraculous discoveries are often a result of energetic connections to the pulse of past lives, past struggles, and past decisions that brought us all here.
The Beginning in Disguise
Unearthing Ancestral Power offers a transformative journey to connect with your foundational roots and unleash your innate power. Our work delves deep into the stories, memories, and experiences of your ancestors, helping you understand the legacy they’ve passed down to you.

Take the first step toward embracing your ancestral power and shaping your own narrative. Through our guidance and resources, you’ll chart your progress, ask challenging questions, and collect the artifacts of your story. By doing this work, you’ll unlock a clearer understanding of your place in history, empowering yourself and future generations.

Join us on this awe-inspiring journey of self-discovery and healing. Visit our website, sign up for our research services, join our workshops, and access our valuable resources to embark on a path of empowerment. Reclaim your ancestral heritage and unlock the keys to your true potential. Don’t wait any longer to make a profound impact on your life and the generations to come. Start your journey today. Reach out through phone, email, snail mail, or telepathy. We are excited to do this with you.

“Remember: the rules, like streets, can only take you to known places.”

- Ocean Vuong, On Earth We’re Briefly Gorgeous
Unearthing Ancestral Power
We read a lot and we source most of our books from the library. We have curated a few here with links to the World Cat listing so you can find copies at your library too. Click on a cover that looks interesting and get the info to go visit your favorite librarian! Want your own copy to scribble all over? Visit your local book store and make a small business owner’s day.

If you have time and interest the work cited follows for this specific book. There are absolute gems tucked in there - hyperlinks included when they are needed. Dig around and let us know if something resonated with you. Happy adventuring!
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Wolynn, Mark. It Didn’t Start with You: How Inherited Family Trauma Shapes Who We Are and How to End the Cycle. Vermilion, 2022.
“Each of us need to have fire lit within us, so we have passion for who we are and what we do and the space we live in.”

- Dr. Pualani Kanakaʻole Kanahele
Mary L. Moody (they/them, she/her) traces their roots of healing to sea-faring ancestors, descending from the land where the sun first rises. Mary is tending to the collective as a Filipinx poet, writer, and documentary filmmaker. As the first-generation born in the San Joaquin Valley of California their stories are steeped in carrying the memories of land and sea across vast distances. Understanding and unpacking their own trauma informs their work as a non-binary creator. A fierce command of foreign languages and mean kitchen skills ensure that Mary is always among supportive allies and friends as they navigate the act of showing up for the healing.

Krystal Meisel (she/her) descends from a myriad of global diasporas that congregated in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Her ancestors include Jews who escaped the Pogroms unleashed in the Pale of Settlements, Sicilian foundlings, and German farmers who were some of the first colonizers of the United States. These identities give Krystal the ability to weave complex immigration stories into a cohesive narrative for herself and for the greater collective. Skills rooted in sacred laws of science and mathematics create unity between her prowess as a visionary photographer, relentless researcher, collaborative designer, and proficient project manager.

The team is based on the Island of Hawai‘i on the ancestral lands of the Kanaka‘ōiwi. Mary and Krystal are fierce advocates for intergenerational healing and embodying the stories of ancestors. Together, they believe that the only way to decolonize the Self is by understanding complex immigrant histories and commit to healing one person at a time. You are invited along on the liberating work of unpacking historical foundations and healing through storytelling.

We look forward to working with you.