



## How Robyn Moreno Gets Rooted

This media-maven turned curandera shares her experience of self-transformation, the loss that defined her early life, and practices you can use to find yourself. It's all part of her new book: *Get Rooted: Reclaim Your Soul, Serenity, and Sisterhood Through the Healing Medicine of the Grandmothers*.

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**Alicia Menendez:** What does it mean to be rooted? That was among the questions Robyn Moreno began to ask as she emerged from the nonstop hustle that had defined the early chapters of her life. She was disconnected from her family, from herself, and she began a journey to reclaim her life, one that would begin her practice of curanderismo, bring her face-to-face with her ancestors, and require her to get sober. Robyn has put it all in her beautiful new book, *Get Rooted, Reclaim Your Soul, Serenity, and Sisterhood Through the Healing Medicine of the Grandmothers*. The first part of our conversation is about Robyn's own journey and the latter is Robyn generously walking us through a practice that you can use to get rooted today.

Robyn, I am so excited for this conversation.

**Robyn Moreno:** Oh my God. Alicia, I am too. I'm so excited and nervous. I'm nervous too.

**Menendez:** Well part of the reason why you're nervous is because you know what it is like to be on the other side of this. You are more accustomed to being the journalist, to be the one asking the questions. I want to talk about your pre-life, about everything that preceded this desire to transform and reclaim and find yourself. What did your life, specifically your professional life, look like?

**Moreno:** It looked pretty good. That was the thing, is it looked really good and shiny probably on the outside. So for many years, over 20 years, I was in media. I was an editor-in-chief. I founded things. I was a host. I was nominated for an Emmy. I was on morning shows like dozens of times. And it was good. It was all really good and worthy, but a lot of times I wasn't showing the full picture. And what was happening internally or off the scenes with my family with me was actually pretty hard.

Go back in time about 30 years ago when I was 13 years old, my dad died, and it was dramatic in the sense that it was late stage diagnosed cancer. From diagnosis to death was 260 days and it just wrecked our family. It just wrecked our family and we didn't have therapy. We didn't have any coping mechanisms. And so I think that probably somewhere along there I learned that achieving and performing was going to fill probably this hole I had and it kept reinforcing itself and it lasted for a long time until it stopped working.

**Menendez:** Tell me about when you realized that that survival mechanism was no longer working and no longer served you.

**Moreno:** There was just a series of what I would call rock bottom moments in this sort of mom boss era. Trying to run a company that was struggling and I was doing a lot of forward facing

things, but I was commuting four hours a day. I had little kids that I would never see and there was one instance where it was our company Christmas party and it was the same day as my daughter's big Christmas recital and she was four years old and had been practicing Let It Snow and all these songs for, it's really so cute, for months and weeks and it was like, "Okay, momma. I'm doing this." And it was on the exact same day. And I was like, "Oh man." And I felt really obliged that I had to go and show up, be a leader, and be a people leader. And so I didn't go to her event.

I sent my sister as a proxy and I had it all planned out 'cause I was like, "I know how to figure this out. It's all figureoutable. Look, I'm going to do this and I'm going to call you and you FaceTime me and I can do it all." I'm the superwoman. I can do everything. So I was at this party drinking a lot, grabbed my white wine, took it to the bathroom, I'm in the stall, I have my white wine sitting on that silver toilet paper dispenser, and I put on my FaceTime and my daughter is singing and I'm not there. I'm not there. And I felt like in my life, I wasn't there. I'm missing it. I'm missing my life.

You can't unknow what you know. And I was like, "I had such a hard childhood that I can't do that to my kids." We see hashtags like generational trauma and I'm going to change things and I'm going to be the breaker of cycles and it's like, "But what do you do? How is this not a meme? And it's an action." And so the action I took most immediately was I left that position, I went back into freelancing, and I had to take a really hard, honest look at my life and figured out where I sort of went wrong and how I could write myself again.

Menendez: Crying now as I cried multiple times, as I told you, on public transportation while reading the book because I don't know anyone for whom that doesn't resonate on some level. And in this project of reclaiming your life, of unpacking trauma and loss, you introduce us to two terms which I wasn't familiar with and which I think are really helpful as we each think about our own journey and those two terms are "susto," which I think translates to fright, but you describe it more as soul loss.

Moreno: Yes.

Menendez: Which, ooh. And then this idea of "ser" of what is your truest, most authentic self, your whole self, your unbreakable self, you. And then you come to us that your "gran susto" is not just the loss of your dad.

Moreno: No.

Menendez: But really the specific conditions around losing him and then the response you have to how you think you are going to make your family whole.

Moreno: Exactly. That's exactly right 'cause after I left this big job, I went to Mexico, my cousin invited me, and I was sitting on the beach and I'm still reeling because I'm sort of coming back into myself and like, "Oh my God. What's next? What do I do?" And all my instincts are, "Fill it with something." And people are like, "Get another job. You can't just leave something. You've got to land somewhere else." And I knew that in my body I was not prepared to take anything on except heal myself. I've always been a spiritual seeker. Alicia, I have two yoga certifications. I've been on eight day silent retreats. I lead meditation, but at this moment, I actually rediscovered a medicina that was from my own Mexican American lineage and it's called curanderismo. And so my great-grandmother was what they would call a curandera, like a healer.

And so there's this book called Woman Who Glows in the Dark and it's written by this very famous curandera. She's from El Paso. I felt very similar to her, I'm a Tejana, American-born Latina, and she was a nurse, but she rediscovers this medicina called curanderismo. And in

it she talks about this condition called *susto*. And when I read these words, this completely changed my life because I like, "This is what I have." And she said something like, "It's a soul loss." When a piece of you has a trauma, you either freeze or you fly away. And that piece of you is gone and you feel a sense of incompleteness. And at this point in my life, I had done therapy, I had done all these things, but when I heard these words *susto*, my soul is gone, there's a piece of me that feels incomplete. I said, "That's it."

"That's it. That's what I have." And it felt like someone that maybe has those undiagnosable illnesses and you go everywhere and you wish somebody would just tell you what you had. And then when I read those words in my sort of own language, in my own culture, I said, "That's exactly what it is. I have a soul loss. I have a soul loss." And so what you do for a soul loss is you do a soul retrieval. And so you try to get your soul back. And so I mapped out this plan for myself, and I'm a planner. I still made it a project because that's how I am. I was like, "Even my healing's going to be work." And I made this plan and I was like, "For the next nine months, 260 days, it's a gestation period of a baby, I'm going to go back in time and figure out where did I lose myself? Where are the pieces that I left myself and how can I retrieve them?" And that's what I tried to do.

Menendez: We'll get into some of the how of that in a little bit. Another thing that really popped out to me was that alcohol is almost a subplot of the book.

Moreno: Yes.

Menendez: And you write beautifully about the first time you drank alcohol and the two lessons you took away. Can you share what that experience was and then the lessons that you learned?

Moreno: Yeah. So my dad died when I was 13, which it's a transformational number. So it's a number of transformation. And he died on Valentine's Day and he was like our heart. So it was always this heartbrokenness. And literally two months after that, I had a boyfriend and he was super cute and he worked at a furniture store and he's like, "We're going to go to the town fair." And he saved up all his money. He worked on weekends and I bought a new top. And so we went out and it was brisk and beautiful and cool and it was alive and there was cotton candy and sausage on a stick and his brothers gave us beer. And I had never had alcohol, maybe a sip there from my dad's beer, but I had never drank alcohol before. And I drank this beer and immediately, Alicia, I must have been in so much pain 'cause my dad probably died eight weeks before. We didn't have therapy, we didn't talk about it, we put black clothes on, we went back to school. Nobody asked me how I was and something about that alcohol, I just was gone. I was out of my body. I was free. I was not in pain. I was like, "This is so buoyant. I'm so big and free from all of this and I don't want to come back." And so I just kept drinking and drinking beer and I threw up and I was like blah and I was throwing up all of this stuff and my boyfriend was like, "Well what happened to you? We've been planning this and I have all these tickets and we're supposed to ride the bumper cars. What's going on?" And I feel like in that moment, I learned two lessons that were so painful: that I could lose myself in drinking and I learned to live with disappointing myself.

Menendez: Your first *limpia*, which you referenced, Patty your cousin asks you what you want to let go of and your answer is, "My guilt that I couldn't save everyone, my anger at myself for always wanting to try, and my ghostly sadness that always lied beneath." Guess my question is, that is a lot to let go of given that that at some point constituted your sense of who you were, what has it required of you to actually stay committed to not living in that survival mechanism?

Moreno: It's a daily process and that's what I do in Get Rooted. It's like I do it every single day where I try to come home to myself. Curanderismo interestingly enough, there's a root word, and it's "cura." And for the longest time I thought "cura" means to cure. And I think maybe it does, but that always was very daunting to me so I was really scared to walk this path of being a helper healer because I was like, "How could I help anybody? I could barely help myself." But I found another definition and that means "to care for." And I was like, "I can do that. I can do that. Every day, I can care for myself and I can show up for myself." And so for today, that actually means not drinking alcohol. That's probably the first and foremost thing. And the next is I don't try to save anybody.

That's not my job. I think so many times when we come from family with trauma, we have such a loss of control that we want to control things. Like I see myself wanting to control when we see, and then as Latinas, there's so much to change and we want to change all the things and I think the intentions are good, but I think it can be unhealthy if we are going outside of ourselves, pushing ourselves too hard to the point that we're hurting ourselves and that way we're not being helpful and that way the most honest thing we can do is actually care for ourselves. And so that's what I try to do humbly and honestly and gently every day is just try to do right by myself. I try to show up. I don't drink, one day at a time. I try to be a good parent. When I don't, I apologize.

I go to therapy. I apologize a lot. I forgive myself a lot and I let go a lot. I let go. The *limpia* is about letting go. And that way, that ghostly sadness, I've always had. I meet it where it is and I invite it in. I don't push it away. But we also invite joy. Joy and presence, possibility, and that's what happens when you have *susto* is that it steals your joy. It steals your presence. You're not there. And who could we be if we allowed ourselves to be seen fully and just were honest and just tried and let go of that? And so we wash it away.

Menendez: Robyn, I want to make sure we walk through at least one of the practices. Tell me about the four paths to rootedness.

Moreno: The Aztecs who did not call themselves Aztecs, the Mexica, our ancient Mesoamerican ancestors, they had this saying that the world was slippery slick. They believed that the world was not stable. It was not stable. And that was a fundamental condition of life and it sucks. You fall. It's slippery. But they also believed in a word, they had a root called "neltitlitzli." It's a Nahuatl word. And it means "to be well rooted." And so there's this amazing professor, his name is Dr. Sebastian Purcell, and he, and I'm sure many people before him, said that the ancient Mexica had four ways to stay rooted.

So the first one was to be in your body, to move your body, to come back to your body. And this really resonates with me because a lot of times, anxiety, stress, worry, *susto*, it's a racing mind. And so breathing, dropping in, feeling your hips, walking around, moving, honoring, listening is the number one way to get rooted. The second way is to balance your emotions. So it's to balance your mind and your heart. And so in curanderismo, we do that with *limpia*. We like inhale and exhale. We do energetic cleansings. I do it on the out breath. I do it with journaling, but it's this idea we're talking about. What are you ready to let go of today? What are you not going to carry around anymore? You've been carrying some shit for a long time. When will you give yourself a break and just let that go? Whether it's *limpia*, whether you write it in a piece of paper, you throw it in the river.

The third way is community. Like we need each other. This path I did not do alone. I didn't do any of this alone. People have been generous, Alicia, beyond measure, be so generous with their time, with their energy, with their knowledge, with their willingness. And we have

to learn to ask for help because a lot of times I didn't feel like I could ask for help. I was scared to ask for help. I didn't want to be honest about what was happening with me. I thought I could do it all, which it's very ego-based. It's much more vulnerable to be like, "I need help." And then the last path is connection to spirit as you understand it. For me, it's nature. It's very simply, I go outside, I put my feet on the grass, I get rooted, I look up. I like bask in the sun. I feel the warmth. I feel the infusion from the top of my head, just warming my face, going down my neck, relaxing the shoulders, shining through the heart, breaking through all that tightness, all that worry, all that stress, just like a beam just lets it go. I feel that in my solar plexus. And then I have will. I have energy. I have belief that I can do this. We can do this together. And so that's what I do and hopefully that's of service to people.

Menendez: I cannot tell you how much it has already changed my thinking. I hope you know the gift that you are giving others simply by flipping some of these paradigms that we as Latinas hold. This idea that asking for help is a show of weakness rather than a show of strength. I think even those pieces of it are going to change lives.

Moreno: I hope so. I'm really grateful and I can't help if I'm hiding. And the truest thing I had was my story. You know what I mean? And so I'm like, "You know what? This is it. This is what happened. This is how I went. This is how it's going. I think you'll relate." I'm always hungry to see myself somewhere. And so very much I hope that me, as scared as I am, is still so raw and tender, if I can just stand up and say, "Look, this happened. This is what I'm doing. If it can be of service to you, like let's do this together, let's heal together," then it's all worth it.

Menendez: Robyn, thank you so much.

Moreno: Thank you so much.

Menendez: Thanks for listening. *Latina to Latina* is executive produced and owned by Juleyka Lantigua and me, Alicia Menendez. Paulina Velasco is our producer. Kojin Tashiro is our lead producer. Tren Lightburn mixed this episode. We love hearing from you. Email us at [ola@latinatolatina.com](mailto:ola@latinatolatina.com), slide into our DMs on Instagram, or tweet us at *Latina to Latina*. Check out our merchandise at [latinatolatina.com/shop](https://latinatolatina.com/shop) and remember to subscribe or follow us on Radio Public, Apple Podcast, Google Podcast, Goodpods, wherever you're listening right now. Every time you share the podcast, every time you leave a review, you help us to grow as a community.

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