SANTES Episode 8:
Luna MerBruja and StormMiguel Florez

Chapter 1: Welcome to Season Two of Santes!

[match strikes]

♪ [solemn acoustic guitar] ♪

[flame flickers] ♪♪

[long exhalation]

LUNA: Welcome back to season two of Santes!

STORMMIGUEL (SMF): Hey, welcome back, everybody! We hope you have been well. We are so glad to be back.

LUNA: Yes. So glad to be back. It's a blessing to be picking up our project again. So much can happen in such a short amount of time, and I'm feeling really grateful that we get to continue holding space for future ancestors and those that have passed.

Chapter 2: Honoring Our Recently Departed

We've been on a break this summer, and there have been a few folks who have passed who've made a huge impact on us, and we just like to take a moment to acknowledge them. To start off with some more well-known people, many of us are connected in our loss for Dolly Parton, Tim Curry, and RJ Mitte, just to name a few.

SMF: And some of the more personal and community losses include, for myself, I wanna acknowledge, my nephew, Jesse Gomez, who just passed, about a week ago, a little over a week ago, and a dear friend and mentor from Albuquerque, Sandrea Gonzalez, that passed before summer started, maybe like in May. And Sandrea was such a pillar in the Albuquerque dyke community and really was such a powerful presence for me when I was a teenager. And she was just like there to mentor me, really supported me after my dad died when I was 19. And just a beautiful, beautiful spirit— always has been and continues to shine on so brightly. So, yeah. How about you, Luna?

LUNA: Thank you for sharing that. I'm just like feeling that pillar of community and who she was to you. I lost someone similarly to me this summer. Her name was Emi Koyama. And I feel really fortunate because she had reached out to me earlier in around January or February. She had been diagnosed with cancer and she created this care team that she invited me to be a part of. So over the months, I really got to be with her, be in some treatments and visit her at the hospital and at home. And it was such a sacred time for us to get to know each other better and really connect. And when she passed, I was there with her that day earlier and meeting her family and her community. And it was a beautiful way to grieve with community. And I think

it helped me so much that there were other folks I could lean on and talk about her and share memories and keep her really fiery activist spirit alive.

SMF: Yeah.

LUNA: Like, I felt so much passion from everyone in that room because they all had these stories of Emi just being a badass in the community.

SMF: Yeah! She was a badass! I knew her back in the day, like the early 2000s, I think, is when I met her. My then partner, Thea Hillman, had put on a show called Forword Girls. It was like a lit event, and Emi came and read at it. And I think that's the first time I met— I might have met Emi through Forward Girls or might have also been through the intersex work that Thea was doing. Emi was just beautiful and awesome person. I loved it when I would get to hang out with her.

LUNA: Yeah. She's so funny.

SMF: Yeah.

LUNA (laughing): She made me laugh so much. Yeah, so I've been thinking about her a lot. And her statues are still here in San Francisco, the Comfort Women statues. I forget what part of San Francisco it's in, but some community members had brought that information to light. And I've been hoping to go make a trip out to see it at some point and leave some flowers for her.

SMF: Well, you just have to keep coming back to San Francisco. Make time for that.

LUNA: Yes. But yeah, and the other loss I had this summer was also my dog, Mimi.

SMF (sympathetic): Mmm...

LUNA: I had known her for so long, like nine years and She's such a sweet girl. Such a sweet girl, and I feel her presence on the other side, like a little comfort dog, you know?

SMF: Aw. Did she have a favorite treat or toy?

LUNA: She did not like toys, but she loved food. You could give her any... Anything. She was one of those— We called her trash dog [laughter] because she would literally... Like, if the trash was on the floor, she would bury a hole in it and dig out whatever she could eat. Even if it was like, rotten meat, she was just that kind of dog.

SMF: I can relate. [laughter]

Chapter 3: Santes Refresher

SMF: So if you're just tuning in for the first time or need a refresher, Santes is a podcast where we talk with community members: artists, activists, brujes, healers, cúres, and sorcerers, you name it, about ancestry work with a focus on the kind of ancestors we want to be when the time comes. We talk a lot about how we want

people to interact with us and communicate with us. Like agency, right? We want agency when we become ancestors. So... (chuckles)

LUNA: Yes. Yes. Yes to agency. That was one of the reasons I really, really loved this project, StormMiguel, when he brought it up many years ago, I was like— oh god, it has been several years now, huh?

SMF: Yeah. [Luna laughs] I really resonated with it because I had lost a lot of folks in community and I didn't know how to honor them and really you know, how to build an altar for them, how to get their attention and give them offerings for all the beautiful things they had done while they were living. So for me, was part of the passion of this project was being able to have those conversations proactively and get that information, so when someone does pass, like in the case with Emi, I would know what to do and what she liked and how to get her attention and what kind of support she'd want to offer. So that to me, is like such a gift that we're able to do and hold that information for folks. And if you're interested in the form, it's open for all trans and queer BIPOC to fill out. And we welcome your information just because we want to make sure you're taken care of too when you become an ancestor, hopefully, far, far, far in the future.

Chapter 4: The Santes Form – What kind of ancestor do you want to be?

SMF: The podcast kind of was born of the Santes Form. The form is something that Luna and I, we are stewards of. We have this form. You can answer questions. It is in the kind of spirit of sainthood because we wanna be able to canonize ourselves and our community while we're still here. And then really, again, that agency, we want to hear from you. How do you want us to honor you? What do you want us to ask from you? If you want us to ask anything from you, what do wanna offer? What do you need from us? What kind of food do want on your altar? These kinds of things. So check out the form and you'll see kind of the foundation of what this podcast came from.

LUNA: Yes. And if you want to hear people talk about it, that's what we also do on this podcast. So you can check out some of our earlier episodes, and we have incredible artists and activists talking about how they wanna be remembered and the power that they're bringing. And for this episode— [crosstalk] kicking off our season two...

Chapter 5: Welcome to our guests...

SMF: Oh my gosh! This is so exciting— I can't even believe we were able to book them.

LUNA: I know. They're amazing. They're incredible! Like, what the hell? How did we do this? We finessed something. We put some magic out there, and our first guests of the season are none other than... BOTH: US!

SMF: Hey! What's up? [laughter] So welcome Luna Merbruja!

LUNA: Heeeyyy. Thank you for joining us, StormMiguel Florez!

SMF: Hey! Thanks for having me on your podcast. [Luna laughs]

LUNA: Oh, yeah. My podcast. This is me.

SMF: Yeah! [laughter] So, Luna, great to have you here. Let's just start with— How was your summer? We took this break, and now we're back.

LUNA: Mhmm.

Chapter 6: What's Luna been up to?

SMF: And we'd love to know what you did during your time off.

LUNA: Summers in Seattle are perfect, and your girl was busy.

SMF: Yeah!

LUNA: I premiered this new play. I titled it "Our Wish." And it was really fun 'cause it was like a 24-hour play festival. And my challenge was to write a one act ten-minute play without any spoken dialogue.

SMF: Oh my gosh.

LUNA: So it was so much fun.

SMF: You had twenty-four hours to do that?

LUNA: I had twelve.

SMF: Oh my— And then you had to— okay.

LUNA: Yeah.

SMF: Carry on. Keep going. This is making me sleepy. [crosstalk]

LUNA: I had 12 to write, and then the actors had 12 to rehearse, and then we showcased it. It was great. And then on top of that, Pomegranate Books released our next anthology called "Tales from the Pomegranate Forest." It's all five new original short fantasy stories written by QT BIPOC. If you're interested, you can check it out on PomegranateBooks.com. I was one of the stage managers at Trans Pride Seattle. There was over 30,000 people who showed up. It was so good.

SMF: Wow.

LUNA: But the best news of all this summer was that my chosen sibling got pregnant!

SMF: Yay! [Luna squeals]

SMF: That's so exciting!

LUNA: I'm gonna be a god parent!

SMF: Congrats. Congrats. Ugh! I'm so happy to hear that.

Chapter 7: What's StormMiguel been up to?

LUNA: Thank you. How was your summer, StormMiguel?

SMF: My summer was pretty great. Yeah. You know, I like, worked a lot. I did my thing, but also got to do some really fun things that just were kinda once in a lifetime things, it felt like. Like, the big thing that stands out is I got to read in a live script reading for Lilly Wachowski and Mickey Mahoney's screenplay, "The Hunted."

LUNA: Shit!

SMF: Which is this beautiful feature trans vengeance, trans love, trans vengeance, fiery kick-ass script. Oh my gosh. I cannot wait til people can see this. It's pretty wild because Lilly, who did The Matrix, right, who did V for Vendetta, who is now out as trans and not making these like action— I mean, is an action, don't get me wrong, but not like, you know, it's... That's something different in, it's an all trans cast. And because of that, she can't get funded.

LUNA: Mhmm.

SMF: And this is like, $10 million to make this movie, which is nothing. It sounds like a lot, but it is nothing to make a film. And no one wants to— no one wants to do it because it's, like, unknown and it's an all trans— pretty much all trans cast, just about. And so Lilly was like, fuck it. Let's do this— let's do a live reading in LA. And it happened. I got to be a part of it. I got to be in a scene where I got to sing with Sandra Caldwell. River Gallo was in it, Honey Mahogany, Brian Michael Smith, Ian Alexander, Abigail Thorne! I'm name dropping all over the place! And I could drop so many more names, but we'll be here for a while if I do that. If I didn't drop your name, know that I am dropping it in my heart.

And so that was amazing. We got to go to LA and just... It was like two days of rehearsal and then two days of half day rehearsal and then performances. It was just like boom boom boom. There were like maybe two people not trans on that set, maybe three, but everyone else was trans and non-binary. Beautiful crew, beautiful actors. It was amazing. Like, it was so cool, and I wanna do more. I love acting. It's not what I wanna do first, like, I've never wanted to put all my eggs in that basket. And you kinda need to as an actor.

LUNA: Yes. It's your craft.

SMF: You know. That's a job. That's a craft. Right? So admittedly, like, I have not honed a craft, but I like to do it when I can. If there's an opportunity I'm gonna do it. And so I had that opportunity and it was really wonderful. And then on the other side

of that, I started filming for a... my next documentary project, which is about queer history in New Mexico.

LUNA: What? You might know a thing or two about that.

SMF: Maybe a little bit. Yeah. I mean, it's kind of the next natural thing, I guess, from my last film, which was a New Mexico queer documentary called "The Whistle," and that film is about lesbian youth in the 70s and 80s in Albuquerque, New Mexico. And so that came out in 2019. It's available on pbs.org for free if you wanna watch it, so check it out.

Chapter 7b: Wrecked for days

LUNA: It's so good. I have not been able to get the phrase "wrecked" out of my mind since watching it, and there's so many shots you have where like, you're— the folks you interviewed are just talking about this world that really brings you into it. And for me, it really warmed my heart because I love seeing queer history and being able to hear it from folks who experienced it and created that culture. It was phenomenal. I loved it.

SMF: Thanks Luna! It was an amazing experience to get to film it and to get to be with these folks— Folks who were like, elders to me. Some of them are my age, but then I got to talk to people who I realized that their lived experience and the things they brought into community directly came to me. Like, I really could see the thread when I was talking to them. Like, I met some folks that were just like maybe ten years older than me. I'm fifty— I'm about to be 55. So, you know, just, I would consider them "young elders." [laughter] I'm like a preemie. I don't know.

[Luna laughs]

But just getting to talk to them and see where the knowledge that I came into and the welcoming that I came into and just the like, the code and the ways that we found each other and the word "wrecked." The word "wrecked," was like when you kissed your first girl, you were wrecked. The question was like, "Who wrecked you?" Watch "The Whistle." You'll learn more about that.

LUNA: And then get wrecked. - And then get wrecked. If you haven't already, it's not too late. Yeah. So that's something about "The Whistle." And then I'm also working on a horror script, but who isn't? So, you know, we'll talk more about that later when it happens, but I'm excited about that. Yeah. But that's what's up. That's what's up. (laughs)

Chapter 7c: More Trans Art!

LUNA: I love that. We always could use more trans art. All of this.

SMF: Yes. We need it. We need it!

LUNA: Mhmm. Absolutely. And it's like— it's my favorite thing because when we make it, it's a moment of capturing what's happening in the culture. So even if it's a documentary or a horror script or a film, it's just—

SMF: An anthology.

LUNA: An anthology. I love it just because it's like, you know, we get to see what people are thinking of in this moment as everything is happening. So for me, it's such a beautiful way to capture someone's spirit, and a community spirit. So yeah, I'm excited for all this art that's coming out!

SMF: Yes! [Luna laughs and then sighs]

LUNA: Alright, StormMiguel... Are we ready?

SMF: I'm ready.

LUNA: Are we ready?

SMF: Yeah, that was just the intro, folks. [Luna laughs] We're gonna get into it now.

Chapter 8: Calling in the Ancestors

LUNA: Yes. We haven't started yet because when we start our podcast, we have to call in our ancestors. And when I was doing— We'll get to this in a moment. But when I was doing this really cool ceremony, someone who came up really powerfully for me was Sylvia Rivera.

♪ [tender acoustic, harmonic music] ♪

And she's come up for me many times in my lifetime, but I think she's done that because I need to really work with her. (laughs) She likes to remind me that she's still there and I'm like, yeah, maybe I should actually open the door and let you in. So for me, I'm calling her in and wanting her to be more present with me, and I'd like to call her in for today.

SMF: Welcome, Sylvia.

LUNA: Mmhm.

SMF: Ugh, yeah. She's just the perfect energy to have here with us. And I'm gonna go kind of opposite spectrum and invite my mom,

[both laugh]

who's also a perfect energy to have with us. But my mom— it's very interesting. I haven't called my mom in before. And in a lot of ways— my mom passed in 2014, Marcella Florez, and she was a Leo. I feel like it's important to say that. I'm a Scorpio. We were fire and water for sure. And, you know, we had— I loved her so much and I know she loved me and we had, you know, we had our differences. And

it was just like an interesting thing— when she passed, I just wasn't feeling her as an ancestor. I was just like, okay, I think we're not we're not there for each other. Like, maybe that's okay. I had to kind of be okay with that. And when I dreamt about her, it was usually like these dreams where she'd be like annoyed with me or like, you know, (laughing) it was just always like, okay, same relationship. Cool. And so like really understanding that sometimes your relationship carries over. Right? It doesn't necessarily change just because someone becomes an ancestor. That doesn't mean your dynamic changes. Right? But then over time, like in living relationships, things change and they shift. And I've been having the sweetest dreams about my mom lately and just feeling really connected to her. I didn't expect that and kind of accepted that that might not happen. And it's been happening. And so I'm feeling really grateful. And so, you know, for that reason, I'm like really just open like, Cool Mom. I'm here. You're here, maybe— I think you're here. Let's let's interact.

Welcome to Santes. I hope you get something out of this. I hope you feel loved and I hope you feel celebrated. And I also know you really love— You used to love to talk about ancestors and ghost story— And ghosts, talking about ghosts. You liked talking about, like, creepy ghost stuff, which I think is also ancestor-related, in our Mexican family and our native New Mexican family. So I hope you have fun.

LUNA: Welcome.

SMF: Welcome, Mom. Marcella.

LUNA: Welcome, Mom.

♪ [dreamy acoustic, harmonic guitar] ♪

Chapter 9: Welcome to StormMiguel's Home: Featuring tiny dog snores

LUNA: I'm feeling the spirit of the veil thin right now. It's October. Día de Muertos is coming up very soon.

[music fades]

And for me, I think that during this time, I wanna really take advantage of being able to cross the veil more easily and be able to do more deeper ancestor work. So I'm glad that we're kicking off this project again and working with folks and calling folks in because I think this is definitely the opportunity to do so.

SMF: Yes. Yeah. Same. This is the perfect time to get started here. And so usually Luna and I record remotely because Luna's in Seattle and I'm in San Francisco. But today, we are recording together in person for the first time from my lovely in home-studio that isn't a studio at all, which is why you're gonna hear trains go by and there's some roadwork happening, I think a chainsaw or something. So someday we'll have a producer in a professional studio to record in. But for now, welcome to my home ambiance. I hope you like it.

[both laugh]

Anyway, Luna and I are together in person, sitting across from my dining room table next to a beautiful altar. It is gorgeous. And we can't forget Cha-Cha. Yes. ChaCha is on the couch asleep right now.

[tiny dog snores]

and finally stopped barking because she has stranger danger and has finally been like, "Okay, Luna. I get it. You're my people."

[Luna laughs]

[tiny dog snore]

Chapter 10: Getting to know each other more through ceremony and magic

LUNA: We are in person because StormMiguel and I were invited to this BIPOC ancestor ceremony in the Bay Area. Neither of us had been before, but I— it ended up being this, like, incredible experience. It was so sacred. I had never felt so at-ease meeting new people, like a group of people as I did at the ceremony. Everyone was just walking their own spiritual path and just so open and warm. It was just unmatched. The energy and the connections there were so wonderfully warm. That's the way it felt in my body was like, our hearts are open, we're here doing ceremony together and we made incredible magic. It was just palpable. So I loved it. And I also really loved meeting StormMiguel's friends from back in the day. (alluding to something juicy) That was fun! And there's some tea, but it's not my story to tell.

SMF: Okay, so Luna wants sooo badly to talk about what they perceived to be a flirtation—

LUNA (laughing): Perceived??

SMF: with an old friend of mine, but that's a story for another time.

[both laughing]

LUNA: Yes.

SMF: But Luna, I was so glad you were there with me. A little backstory, a little context. This was a group of people that I had spiritual community with in the, like, maybe around 2010... 2009, 2010 for a few years. And it was a group of queer men of color, queer masc people of color, mostly men. I would say mostly gay men, cis men. And we would get together once a month and do ceremony or meditation or bring our practices and share with each other. And the love that we walked into was just really palpable and amazing. And I don't know. I was just so glad you were there with me though because I felt really— I felt really grounded with you there. And I— it would have been a great time, but I just felt... Walking into it, I felt very grounded with you. And I really feel like this work we've been doing together was was leading up to that for us.

LUNA: It's like we've made magic every time we've done ceremony and interviews with other folks in the past season. But this time like, being in person and being each other's rock in a new setting and all of the things that were happening, it really felt like my spirit and yours connected in a new way.

SMF: Yeah.

LUNA: And it really felt like I got to know you on a much more deeper level.

LUNA: And now I'm like, oh, we could do some badass magic together too.

SMF: Eeee!

[both laugh]

LUNA: We could do ceremony together. Like it's such a different energy and like level of, like you said, there's a really deep connection there. And again, I think that seeing all those folks love up on you was so sweet.

SMF: And people loved you, and that was really fun too. Yeah. It's just been great. It was such a— Because I think mostly we've interacted each other in a work setting, you know, in person. And so getting to be in this very sacred space together was just really awesome. So thank you.

LUNA: Of course, of course. One of my favorite things about doing ceremony with you and with the group was that I personally haven't really done an altar for Día de Muertos. And in this way, I really felt called to the practice and I've been learning about it for years and I've known folks in my family and community have done it. I've gone to community festivals even. But this practice really opened me up to practicing my own and doing it at home and doing it with my close friends and family.

Chapter 11: StormMiguel's Favorite Holiday

So I'm curious, StormMiguel, like have you practiced this... holiday? Do you call it a holiday? Like what do you call?

SMF: I mean, a holiday to me.

LUNA: Okay. Do you party? Do you have fun? [crosstalk] Do have good food and drink?

SMF: It's my favorite holiday, in fact. This is my favorite time of year. Yeah. And I— It's interesting because I've always known of Día de los Muertos. My family never really practiced it. I've known of it. But then I really got brought into the practice in the more Wiccan sense, in Samhain (pronounces Sow-wen) which is the same time of year. And also known (pronounces phoenetically) Samhain or spelled Samhain.

But I used to go to the Spiral Dance here in San Francisco, and that was a big event done by the Reclaiming group— these huge rituals where they would start by calling in directions and the elements, and everything they were calling in was done in

movement and, like, performance. And so every... Everything was such a like, prayer and performance to the element and to the to the direction to really get the attention. And it was just so cool. And the whole— whole building like, stadium was an altar. Was an altar. So there were like, the big directions, and then community orgs would do altars— Or not orgs, but people. Sometimes orgs, sometimes just people. Like, there was a group of us that put together an altar one time where you can have people interact in whatever ways you want. It's just beautiful. So that was my— That was my kind of introduction to really practicing. From there, I started having a Samhain potluck for the dead, where people would come over—

LUNA: Sounds good.

SMF: and bring food and bring food that reminded them of— Or that was something that someone whose passed— that an ancestor used to make or that they really loved. So everybody would bring a dish. We would all tell— talk about the dishes we brought, talk about who was a part of that and you know, that they made it, that they loved it. We'd tell a story about them. We'd make a plate and put that on the altar, and then we would eat and tell more stories.

And that switched over at a point, I can't say where, where I was like, "Why am I celebrating Samhain?" It's... You know, it really Día de los Muertos, Día de Muertos is where I'm probably closer aligned, you know, culturally and spiritually. So I started kind of learning more about it, and... and so, yeah, it's kind of... they're the same, there's so many different things that are happening at this time of year that people relate to as the veil being thin. And so I think many cultures across the world really understand that the veil is thin right now. For whatever reason, the veil is thin right now, and this is where we celebrate and connect with our ancestors.

So every year, my partner and I build an altar in our house. It switches over. Right now, I'm looking at it. It's "sparkle mantle," which is Halloween themed. There's, like, black feathers and skulls and all kinds of stuff. Like, it's just very Gothic right now.

LUNA: It's great.

SMF: And then on November 1st, it will turn into the Día de los Muertos altar, and we'll put pictures of all of our relatives and friends. It, you know, gets bigger. We need more space. You know, it's just every year, more and more people. And then around... On the 2nd, we cook, and we put plates up for people. And we tell stories, and we call them in, and we watch Coco. (laughs) 'Cause isn't that how— How our ancestors practiced? They would watch Coco?

LUNA: So I'm assuming you're team Coco over Book of Life because I think they're both about Día de Muertos, right?

SMF: I haven't seen Book of Life.

LUNA: Oh, you haven't?

SMF: I've been told I should.

LUNA: I remember they were beefin'.

SMF: Have you seen have you either?

LUNA: I've seen both.

SMF: Which team are you?

LUNA: Coco. The music's better.

SMF: The music! It's all about the music.

Chapter 12: The Lonely Witch Branches Out

LUNA: That's wonderful. I love that. I love that because like for me, I've been such a lonely witch. Like I've practiced so much of my spirituality by myself where like I've made connections with other practitioners of different faiths and religions and they've all taught me things along the way. So like building an altar is something that I've done, but I've not done it for this holiday. Honoring ancestors is something I've done, but not in a way that's done with community.

So lately I've been trying to connect more with local brujas and go out to festivals and really seek out the community and learn more. And I think this year I'm finally making the jump to practice my own and not just be so afraid of it. Because I think if anything, it's— you know, you should always be careful with magic and spirituality. Obviously take some caution with it and not to be afraid of your own ancestors.

I think that was kind of what was holding me back was like, I'm so scared to do something that might offend them. And I'm like, they're actually gonna be honored that you're trying. They're not expecting perfection. They just wanna be connected to you. And I think that's why so many people gather around this time to do that together, to rip that veil apart and say like, everybody, we're here to feast! We're here to party. We're here to remember you. We brought your favorite foods. We got your favorite drink. Let's have a good night. You know?

SMF: I highly recommend a potluck for the dead if you have bandwidth for that. It's really cool. It's a really cool way to bring people together. I'm lazy, so I stopped doing it kind of pre pandemic. I'm lazy and a little antisocial.

[both laugh]

And so even before the pandemic, every year we'd say we would do it, and then be like, "Oh, we're too tired." And... But then once the pandemic happened, it became even, you know, more of a thing. And we're— My partner and I are very... We're still— You know, we don't really hang out— We don't hang out unmasked indoors without testing. So, yeah. So we're just not doing as much of that kind of thing and have to, like, put a lot of forethought into how we interact with people indoors, that kind of thing. But we've talked about maybe doing it in the backyard at some point, but have we? No. Because we're we're tired.

[both laugh]

LUNA: Yes. That is a lot of work. And I'm sure it'll be worth it whenever you're ready.

SMF: I know. At some point.

LUNA: It sounds like we might do a Santes Day of the Dead... I don't know! I don't know. Just putting the idea out there. (chuckles)

SMF: That would be cool.

LUNA: I would love that for us.

SMF: Yeah. Yep.

Chapter 13: StormMiguel's Relationship with Ancestors

LUNA: But, yeah, Storm Miguel, as we're talking about building an altar and working with ancestors, we've asked many of our guests on this podcast about this too. But what is your relationship with ancestors and ancestral practices?

SMF: Yeah. That's such a good question. I feel like I started the Santes project— I started with the idea of collecting people's information because I've wanted for so long, so badly to connect with ancestors in a more... I don't know, ceremonial way or kinda just more formal way than I have. In the past, it's always just been talking kinda randomly or through dreams— ancestors showing up in dreams.

Since I was a kid, I've had a lot of that kind of interaction with people who've died in my life. But I think I just never knew what they wanted. I was just like, okay, we say this is how to do it, but how do we— Ancestors are individuals. So how do I know what they want? How do I know what they wanna eat? How do I know how they wanna be talked to? And I always felt a little bit like I was imposing. So I started the Santes— the idea for the Santes Project because I thought, well, I can start asking now at least, so that when the people I know now who go before me go, I'll know how to interact with them. But in the past, my relationship and practice has mostly been through dreaming.

I think that I've had ancestors show up in dreams and talk with me, and I felt, like, direct messages at times. I remember the first time I felt, like, a really direct message of, like, oh, no, someone is talking to me was when my dad died. He died when I was 19. And I used to go to the cemetery and just talk to him— talk to the headstone or whatever. I'd just be like, "This feels silly, but I'm just gonna talk to you." I remember one time I was there and was like, "I don't know if you hear me. I feel awkward doing this." I have no problem talking, and I have no problem talking to myself. But... Because I do it all the time. But when I was trying to talk to my dad, I was just like... like I don't know. And that night, I went home, went to bed, had a dream. that my dad was like, "Hey, come here. I wanna show you something." And he took me to this desk that I've never seen before. It wasn't like we had a desk in our house. So he opens this drawer, and in the drawer is just a bunch of letters. And he said, "I just wanted to let you know I'm getting your letters." And I was just like, "Okay"

LUNA: Whoa.

SMF: "I will keep talking to you."

LUNA: Yes. It was working.

SMF: It was working. Yeah. It was so powerful. And I remember taking a picture one time at the headstone. I had my friend take a picture with me at his headstone, and there's this light coming out of the sky through my body, down my arm, and into this kinda swirl on the ground. It's just like this kind of... you know, it kinda looked like a camera flaw at first. As I'm looking at it, I'm like, "Oh. No, this thing has direction."

LUNA: Absolutely. And so I really feel like my dad, especially in that place for whatever— was really hearing me.

LUNA: Right.

SMF: And so... Yeah. I I don't know. I think I think I've just... I've had dreams. I've had Miss Major showing up pretty beautifully in a couple of my dreams. Once she was telling me about my car. She was giving me car advice, which is very miss Major. And then the other time, I just got to cuddle with her, and she yelled at me at one point. It was great.

LUNA: Scolding from the afterlife!

SMF: Yeah. Now I got a scolding. I got a talking to. And so, you know, I do feel like my ancestor work really is in dreams, but now that we've started this practice, I feel like the portals have been opening even just when we interview people for the podcast. I feel like, oh, things are opening because I feel like there's times when I'm not feeling it. I don't know if I'm doing it right or whatever, but I feel like this podcast has been a validation of that.

What about you, Luna? What has your practice been with ancestors-- or your relationship to ancestors been?

LUNA: Yes. Before I answer, I just wanna say I love that you are connected. Like, I think some people kind of go into ancestor work because they're curious about it or maybe they're very studious, but I feel sometimes people are just innate, like they have that talent for it. The other side is reaching to them and asking them like, "Remember me, come to me, open your heart to me." And it seems like because of your dreams and your experiences, like they have been on the other side wanting to pull you in. You know? Like... So that's just wonderful that you're able to tap into that. It's powerful as well. Like not everyone can do it, right?

SMF: I feel very fortunate. And like, yeah, I've always had had a pretty strong dream practice.

LUNA: Yeah. Yeah. I don't dream, so I'm jealous. (laughs)

Chapter 14: Luna MerBruja’s spell work calls in the Ancestors

SMF: So then how are you connecting in with ancestors?

LUNA: Yeah. With ancestors, it's been interesting because I think through spell work, I really feel it the most. I named myself Luna MerBruja for a reason. I really, really wanted to connect with these entities larger than me. So when I started doing spell work when I was, I guess in my late teens, early 20s, I always wanted to honor the moon or the ocean, very natural forces. Growing up indigenous, we understood there was that appreciation of spirit and everything in trees, in grass, in animals, in birds, in all the things. So when I started doing magic, I really wanted to tap into natural forces. When I started working with ancestors, I kinda combine the two. So I started doing things like full moon rituals and prayers. I started with dancing and burning incense. And then I started feeling people— like presences and... not so much ghosts, but they felt like they were supportive. They were like, oh, there's something familiar about you. And I may not know your name or what you look like, but there's something there.

And there are moments in my life where I'm like, oh... I've had a lot of near crisis experiences, like almost got hit by a car or something bad happened, but it could have been way worse type of situations. And I've always felt in those moments like, oh, there was something with me, really, really protective. And now as I've gotten older and I'm kind of lifting the veil and seeing what's on the other side, I feel them a lot more and I'm able to meditate and see them.

Yeah, so I really love working with ancestors because they have such a presence. There's something about them that wants to be here for us. And I think as an activist who really cares about people and loves people, I think about when I pass in the future, I'm still gonna be here helping people. I'm sure I'll have some spirit work to do on that side of the realm as well, but I wanna be here helping people who are still alive as well. And because I feel like I've benefited from that, like I've been blessed in that way. There are just way too many blessings that I've had of like where I've come from and like my childhood and my family and community. Like I don't think I did that all alone. I don't think I was just so lucky and fortunate. You know what I mean? Like there were ancestors who really guided me through this life.

SMF: Yeah. I love that you can feel that purpose and they're just so just in tune with, kind of how they are supporting you and when they're there and what you can do to support that continuing to happen. It's interesting because I think for every one of us, there's a different way of doing ancestor work and what that means, right, and what's important about it. And I think I overthink things. I don't know if you noticed that.

LUNA: Just a little bit.

[laughter]

SMF: And so for me, I think I always was like, "Is there a purpose? Am I really being helped?" Like, I get into this, like, why should I... I think it's just by chance that I have the good fortune that I have and that that's just lucky. And then, you know, I start to think about, like, am I getting help from the other side? Why would I deserve help

from... Just I get into that whole thing. Right? There's no answer to that. But for me, I think the purpose has just become to connect and not try to figure out why... Or what the purpose is. And maybe at some point, I'll know. Maybe I'll just hear it, and I'll know. I don't know. But I love that you know. You're just like, yeah, this is this is what we're doing, this work together. And I hope that the Santes Project can help other people to know what it is they wanna do in that way as ancestors. Right? Like, know what I wanna be and do as an ancestor. I know what I want my purpose to be as an ancestor, but I'm still like, what is my purpose with interacting with them besides just, like, cuddling, getting scolded every now and then. having a cool conversation, you know. But being protected? Being helped along the way? Like, I haven't fully tapped into what that is for myself. So it's deaddeagreat to... I think doing this alongside you is gonna help me with that.

♪ [ethereal music] ♪

LUNA: I've gotten this message from other practitioners that, like, I offer and I revere and I love my ancestors and spirit guides and, you know, the deities that I work with. I don't ask for much. And like, I think that they're a little irritated with me because they're like, "You do all this magic and you give us all these offerings and we love it. You know, we're here and we're present, but you're not like..." You know, I've been stuck in such a state of survival that like, I'm not asked for the next part, what I want my dreams to be and to come true. And it's like, they're also there for that. Some of my favorite things is like when we have guests on the podcast, they talk about how they wanna inspire people. And a lot of times it's through art, but other times it's like, yeah, there's people who want you to not just be surviving and not just be dying, but to achieve your dreams. One of my favorite things talking specifically with BIPOC is how we've survived so much through colonization, the transatlantic slave trade, like so much history is here, we've survived it.

SMF: Genocide here.

LUNA: Genocide, absolutely. And our ancestors are like, we want you to be happy. We don't want you to just survive and be living off scraps. Right? Like, they want you to be fulfilled and live to your spirit's full potential.

Chapter 15: Petty Ancestors

SMF: You mean our ancestors aren't like, "Well, I had to pay my student loans, so you have to pay your student loans."

[laughter]

LUNA: No. They are not. Psshh. My ancestors better not be republicans voting for Trump. That's for damn sure.

[laughter]

Or if they are, I'm not gonna call that one in. They can stay on that side of the family tree, and that's fine. No. That's fine. Stay over there. I think I have that inner ancestor

in me where I'm like, well, why should I get help? They they had to do it all on their own.

[laughter]

LUNA: Oh my goodness. Yeah. We would be some petty ancestors.

SMF: Yeah.

LUNA: Like, we would be very helpful, but I think also if someone... We've talked about this.

SMF: We'd be discerning.

LUNA: Yeah. If someone was like, "Hey, ancestor Luna, will you come fuck up this person's day?" You know what I mean?

[SMF laughing]

"Can you make them, like, lose their wallet?" "Can you, like, make sure they don't get this grant?" You know what I mean? Like, I would be like, "Oh, baby. I got you. (laughs wickedly)

SMF: I don't think I'd be that kind of petty. I think I'd be like, "Yeah. I don't fuck with that person."

LUNA: No? Okay.

SMF: Go ask another ancestor. You talked about this once. Like, you don't want white people calling out to you. I don't feel that way. But I think there are certain people who I'd be like, go on and, you know, go somewhere else. Like, go find another place.

LUNA: Yeah.

SMF: Yeah.

LUNA: I do. I— Yeah. I really thought about that a lot because I made that declaration when I was so young. I was in my early 20s when I decided, like, I don't want white people to call upon me and my spirit, make art of me, things like that. And for me, what I think what it was, was that I grew up in a culture in which whiteness was celebrated and it was valued. I felt like I was always treated less than because of the culture I grew up in. And I have magnificent power and I want that to go to the people who need it the most. I feel like if I'm an ancestor and everyone's calling upon me, it's gonna really dissolve or like a, what's the word, reduce the amount of power I could give out. And that's why I felt very particular about that. I know I— to their own. Everyone has their different practices, but

SMF: Yeah. And I wanna say, and white listeners please stick around. Like, we love you.

LUNA (laughs): Yes.

SMF: Like, you know, truly not even joking. Some of my best friends are white. And that's just the truth.

LUNA: Oh, how many?

SMF: A lot.

[Luna laughing]

Chapter 16: More on the Santes Form: What is it and who exactly is it for?

SMF: I have a lot of white friends. My partner's white. A lot of white people in my life who I love dearly. And it's really important for me to have BIPOC space. But also, the Santes Form, while it is for trans and queer BIPOC to fill out, anybody listening can go look at it. If these questions mean something to you and you wanna share them with someone in your life, go ahead and do that. We just ask that you don't fill out the form because there's not enough of us holding the information and stewarding this information.

We really wanna keep it to trans and BIPOC folks that we hold that information. So when people fill out the form, we are holding that data. We're holding that information. We're holding that those, like, that... It's not just data, but it's on a spreadsheet, so it's data.

[laughter]

But that it is something that we're just keeping. We're keeping that information until people die— when they die, we'll share their information with the community. That's why you're filling out the form if you want your information shared with community and you're queer and trans BIPOC. If you are white or if you're a queer and trans BIPOC person who doesn't want that information shared with the community when you die, but you wanna share it with a specific group of people, take those questions and share them among yourselves and make sure that you have that— make it your own spiritual will.

LUNA: Yeah. I think the form is meant to be, like you said, a spiritual will. Like, it's not meant to be an IP. Like, we don't own this information or data or anything like that.

SMF: Or these questions.

LUNA: Yeah. And like these are all things that we sat with and we've refined it over time. People gave us feedback on it and it's really meant to be an honoring. Like we call it information and data, but like really it's directions. How do you wanna be remembered, loved, revered, respected when you pass? That's really what we're trying to get to. And honestly, after losing Emi this year, I feel some regret that I

never sat down during this year and had her fill this out with me. I'm now grappling with that question. I'm like, we started this project, I lost someone who was dear to me and I don't have that information. And yeah, so for me, was a lesson of like, this is actually important. And like for the people I love, I want them to fill this out so that I have that info.

SMF: Yeah. Absolutely. And you all may feel the same way. You might want to have this information about your loved ones. So please share it. Share it with folks. Share the questions with other QT BIPOC folks. Ask them to fill out the form or if they don't wanna fill it out for us to have— Maybe they don't know who the hell we are and— why would they want us holding it? Ask them to fill it out— Or to answer the questions on a separate piece of paper or whatever for you and the people close to them. But for people who are comfortable with us holding this information, we will keep it, and we will not share it with anybody til you die and become an ancestor, and then we will share it with community.

We're kinda thinking because this is within community, we'll know someone— If we find out that someone has passed, then we'll know who to... We'll send that information. One person did come to us and say, hey, did this person fill it out? And sadly, they didn't. But we kinda do want to be that kind of spread out so that people know where they can go to find that information if they need it, if they haven't, like, worked that out just personally with somebody.

LUNA: The beauty of this is that this is not about legalities. This is about you as a person. You know, how do you wanna be loved and remembered?

SMF: Yeah. And, well, let's give some examples.

LUNA: Ooh! Yes. Okay.

Chapter 17: Reclaiming Sainthood

SMF: We don't have to go through all of these, but... Okay. And I also wanna say we're doing this— So for recovering Catholics out there, this might initially be a turn off because we are Santes. We are, like, kinda modeling this after sainthood, and not the kind of sainthood where we're all, like, holier than thou or without any kind of failings or messiness or whatever. We're all messy people. And actually, so were a lot of the saints, like, messy people. And I think that's the inspiration to me too. It's just like we are flawed people or, you know, beautifully so, like, we're beautifully messy people.

But taking back the saint, this idea of saint that means you have to be the certain kind of person within a religious context, but actually making it this, like, this figure that has more, like, in alignment with indigenous practices that have, like, coopted the saints in their own ways to kinda get by. Right? "Oh, yeah. No. No. We're doing the saints... but, no, we're doing something deeply, you know, much deeper than than what your all's saints are.

So we're canonizing ourselves. And so we are asking kinda sainty questions. Like, what are you the saint of? What is the thing that people can reach out to you for and

ask you for? Because, you know— saints have different... You'll look at the little backs of the cards, and it'll say, "This is the saint of long distance trips." or, you know, "Saint Anthony will help you find lost items." We want us to be able to say what that is. Like, do you wanna help people with a particular thing or a few particular things? And this can change all the time, and you can fill out the form and you can change it later. And so, Luna, what are you the saint of? What can people reach out to you for once you become an ancestor? What what can I light a candle and say, "Hey, Luna? Help me out here. I'm ready to start asking for help from my ancestors."

Chapter 18: Luna MerBruja, Saint of Love (and Sluttery)

LUNA: I am the Saint of Love. I'm a Libra. (laughs) I'm ruled by Venus. Yeah. I think being the Saint of Love for me is something that like, I would want someone to call upon me when they're having any type of relationship. Anything. Are you in a situationship and you wanna get out of that? Are you having a great time and you wanna just (chuckles) take it to the tens? You want to be on cloud nine with your partner? Great. I want to be there for all of it. I think love is something I'm deepening my practice with and in my living life. And by the time I become an ancestor, it will be perfected, right. So I would love to be the Saint of Love.

[Luna laughs joyously]

SMF: I love that.

LUNA: Yes.

SMF: You're already doing that work.

LUNA: Heeeyyy!

SMF: We're talking love spells. We're talking sex spells.

[Luna squeals]

SMF: Okay.

LUNA: Yes. (laughs)

SMF: I mean, I wanna... Am I right in saying that that includes sex?

LUNA: Absolutely.

SMF: Okay.

LUNA: Yeah. Yeah. I was gonna say slut... like the Saint of Love and Sluttery—

SMF: Oh, I love that!

LUNA: but like all of it, all of the above. You know what I mean? It's like whatever you're... Whenever you're like needing to connect with someone, like repair a relationship, like just that sense of love. Like love to me is the root and the core of who I am and what I believe in. It's like no matter what I do in my lifetime, I go back to love. So call upon me for that. I can sort you out.

SMF: I love it. I love it.

LUNA: StormMiguel, I'm going ask you a different question.

SMF: Okay!

Chapter 19: StormMiguel wants to *hear* that song through the veil

LUNA: Is there a certain prayer, incantation, or a song that someone could play to invoke you?

SMF: I would say whatever song brings you the emotion it is that is in alignment with what you're needing. So if it is a sad song, if you're grieving and you need just... You just need to reach out to me in your grief, listen to the saddest song you know that's gonna help you cry... and sing it or just listen to it. Bring it. Play it. Make sure it's being played. I wanna hear it. If you want to bring in a certain ecstatic energy into your life, if you wanna bring in— if you wanna bring in revenge, like, whatever it is... I'm not necessarily saying I'm a help you with those things, but I'm saying, let the music play that you're in the... Whatever mood you're at, wherever your question is coming from, wherever your— the thing you're asking me for, and I'll— You know, and I kinda have my own specifics that I want to be asked for, but be in alignment with it through music.

LUNA: Okay. I see.

SMF: It doesn't have to be a specific song or prayer. It just needs to be in the vibe of where you're coming from.

LUNA: Right.

SMF: And you can sing it or you can just play it, but I wanna hear it.

LUNA: I love that. Like, you want that emotion to be amplified.

SMF: Yes. Yes!

LUNA: Like, take it to the next realm. Like, I wanna feel all of your feelings.

SMF: I mean, I love music! I'm like—

LUNA: You are literally a musician.

SMF: I'm a musician. I've... Like, music is my first love of art, my first art love. I'm not playing out so much anymore, I'm not doing as much of my own kind of— My body

as an instrument occasionally still, but music has always been a conduit for me for so many different things. And I think it is for us as humans. Like, music is just like— don't you even need to know the language to feel what a song is saying. And so, yeah, I feel music. Music will get my attention.

Chapter 20: StormMiguel, Saint of Artistic Prosperity and Talking It Out

LUNA: So I play some music. I'm sad, and I'm playing the saddest song you've ever heard. I'm bawling. I'm crying! What can I ask you for once I invoke you?

SMF: You can ask me for... I mean, you ask me for whatever you want, but truly the things I'll probably relate to the most or respond to the best are... And this might change. I know I added one other thing, but I can't think of what it is at the moment. But the things that I initially, when I filled out the form, were I wanna help you get your next art project funded. You need money for something— creativity. You need resources for something creative? Whether it be money or anything to make it happen, reach out to me.

LUNA: You can just imagine putting, like, money on the altar for you like, "Hey, I need some more."

SMF: Put your grant application on the altar. Put some— whatever. I wanna help bring that to you. And sometimes that might come from a very angry— That question could come from a very angry, frustrated, pissed off place. It might come from a very sad place because you aren't getting the thing you need and you're frustrated, or maybe you're working through a grief project. Or it might come from a, like, I'm gonna give you the energy of the project I'm working on and that I wanna bring that in. Like, you know, whatever that is. Play that music! Ask me that question.

The other one is around clear and loving, clean communication with a partner, with a coworker, with somebody in your life. And it doesn't have to be through a hard thing, but just a consistent— how to have consistent communication, accountable communication with another person, how to not be passive aggressive about it, how to not beat around the bush, but how to be direct and loving in your communication with someone and how to maybe even help bring that out in them. Like, that's something I really love in this life and want to help people with. And it's thing I'm always learning, but it's a thing that I feel lucky to have cultivated with with certain people in my life.

LUNA: That is such a skill to help people with, to be able to communicate. I think all of us absolutely struggle with that at some point or another, or you just meet someone who communicates differently from you. So being able to like call upon someone to be like, "Help me. (chuckles) I cannot figure out how to talk to this person." Would you, um...

[both chuckle]

Would you (busts out laughing)

SMF: What are you gonna ask me?

[both crack up]

SMF: What are you gonna ask me?

LUNA (still laughing): Would you, um... love if someone called upon you to help them process?
[Luna laughs]
[SMF scoffs]

Would you like a long—

SMF: You want me to be like a mediator or like a, what is it called? Like a—

LUNA: Yes.

SMF: You want me to come into somebody's nonprofit?

LUNA: Yes, yes. There is an accountability circle...

SMF: Yes! Call on my ass. 'Cause I'm not gonna be like— I won't beat around the bush. I'll be like, you're being... "You're not telling the truth. You're being passive aggressive. [both laugh] "You're lying, straight up." "You! "Speak your power right now. You say what— Say that thing!" Yeah. I will absolutely be— I will have fun with that. Because I'm not gonna be the mediator who's trying to be like, neutral. I will get in people's ears. (laughs)

LUNA: Yes. I'm just imagining, like, a Ouija board right now and (laughs) you being like, "F you!" (laughs) "You're wrong."

SMF: Mmm... I don't know where that question came from, Luna.

LUNA: I don't know! It's so funny! I think you... It's great. I'm glad you love processing.

[laughter]

SMF: I love being right, actually. It's really what it is. I'm like, "I know what people need to say right now, and nobody's saying it." [laughter] Luna and I have a shared past in nonprofit is all I'm saying.

LUNA: Yes.

SMF: We dealt with some shit.

LUNA: Yes. (laughs)

SMF: And I wanted to be that ancestor whispering in everybody's ear.

LUNA: I can appreciate that.

SMF: Speaking to their conscience.

LUNA: You're gonna be there in a million years from now. You're gonna be a fantastic ancestor.

SMF: That's gonna be a long time. I don't wanna wait a million years.

LUNA: No? Some people wanna live forever. [crosstalk] I'm ready to go when it's time. I don't I don't have date.

SMF: I do wanna get old.

SMF: I wanna get old.

LUNA: Mhmm. Yeah.

Chapter 21: We want to grow old!

SMF: I wrote a song recently. What's it called? I already forgot what I called it. But it's about somebody singing from being 99 years old. They're talking about all of the things they had to do to get to be 99 during this moment of fascism and genocide and, you know, it's all the same, right? But the song is written from that perspective and— it's kinda lonely and bittersweet because— you know, their lover's no longer with them. Like, they're looking at a picture on the mantle, and that's their true love. And, you know, they have all of these skeletons in their closet because of all of the kind of terrible things they had to do to survive and help keep their community safe. And so writing that song made me like, both afraid and not afraid of getting old. Like, I've always been afraid of of both, but it made me at peace with, I think, the fears... the hopes and the fears of getting old. And I think I'm down.

LUNA: I need to hear the song. I need it today. I need to get through this moment. I need to know. How am I gonna get to 99 years old?

SMF: We'll link you to it. I have a recording on Instagram.

LUNA: Love that. I talked to an elder this morning. She turns 80 this year and she's my best friend's mom. And I've known her for many years, at least 15... And I was a little late today because I was just talking to her and she was sharing stories and I really was sitting with her and she's talking about California back in the day and decades ago and talking about her dad who was one of the first cable men who rode in LA, who worked that train. And I'm just thinking like, oh, there's so much history. There's so much history in our elders and to be able... It made me excited to be 80 years old someday and talking about my past and what Oakland or San Jose or Seattle used to be like and to be able to share that with younger folks who didn't get to experience it during that time. So even during moments and like history being made and fascism and all the things like there's an 80 year old woman who's lived, you know what I mean, through so many iterations of this, like she lived through the sixties. You know what I mean? Like, so I'm just really grateful for my elders right now to just hear them, whatever they want to talk about. It's like every little piece is a

piece of wisdom or hope that you will also get old one day and be able to carry these stories on for yours. So good. Young elder!

Chapter 22: Time to wrap it up! Want to get involved in Santes?

SMF: Preemie elder. So I think we've... We might need to start wrapping up, I hate to say. But, you know, I think one of the things we wanna do over time is get into these questions for each other in each episode. So we will touch on this, but... And we're also gonna be talking to our guests and asking them these questions. So you wanna hear from other people and how they're thinking of Ancestry and how they're thinking of the ways they wanna be interacted with. Please join us for future episodes of Santes. We're trying to do once a month, but we're also trying to take care of ourselves and not overdo it. And I think we got a little burnt out last time. With just six episodes in six months, it's still— it's a lot of work, and we have like, our day jobs and other art projects we're working on. So please bear with us. We're gonna put out episodes as often as we can, and we're really excited about some of the folks we have lined up for y'all.

♪ [sweet, ethereal guitar music] ♪

LUNA: If you want to learn more about the Santes project, you can find us in a few places. We have a website: www.SantesProject.com, or you can find us on social media @SantesProject.

SMF: Yes. And hit us up if you're interested in getting involved with Santes. Right now, it's just the two of us, but we'd love to build a production team for the podcast so we can sustain it. We wish we had money to pay people. We're not paying ourselves. Someday, we want to be able to get to that place. But if you just love what we're doing and wanna pitch in and volunteer and work with us, please hit us up. ♪ [solemn acoustic guitar] ♪

LUNA: Alright. Thank you all for tuning in. We'll see you on the other side.

SMF: And this one too.

Chapter 23: Closing Credits

LUNA: Santes is written and produced by Luna MerBruja and StormMiguel Florez. Editing and theme music by StormMiguel Florez.

SMF: Additional music by Rrrrrose Azerty aka Loyalty Freak. ♪♪

END