



SALAL, CEDAR & SPRUCE

**A Journey with Salish Plant
and Medicine Traditions**

cwis.org/salish-foods-medicines



“The forest remembers what the world has forgotten – ancient wisdom for a changing world”.

Film Information

Salal, Cedar & Spruce: A Journey With Salish Plants and Medicines

Duration: 30:19 min

Genre: Documentary Short Subject

Language: English Subs: Spanish

Country of production: USA / MEX

Aspect Ratio: 16:9

Sound: Stereo

Year of production / Completed: 2023

Revised and Re-released: 2026

Synopsis ^(Short)

Salal, Cedar and Spruce: A Journey with Salish Plant and Medicine Traditions is a 30-minute documentary about the revival of Indigenous food and healing traditions in the Pacific Northwest. Through the voices of elders, educators, and community leaders including Dr. Rudolph Ryser of the Center for World Indigenous Studies and Charlene Krise of the Squaxin Island Museum Library and Research Center, the film explores how ancestral knowledge of wild foods, medicines, and sustainable farming is helping communities heal, strengthen cultural identity, and build a more sustainable future.



Synopsis

Salal, Cedar and Spruce: A Journey with Salish Plant and Medicine Traditions is a 30-minute documentary exploring the powerful resurgence of Indigenous food and healing traditions in the Pacific Northwest. At a time of growing environmental instability, food insecurity, and cultural disconnection, Indigenous elders, knowledge-keepers, youth, and community leaders are reclaiming ancestral practices that nourish both people and the land.

For generations, traditional Salish foods and medicines were suppressed through colonization, forced assimilation, and the outlawing of Indigenous cultural practices. Today, that knowledge is reemerging as communities work to restore cultural identity, ecological balance, and collective wellness. Through intimate conversations and immersive journeys into forests, gardens, and tribal gathering spaces, the film reveals how ancient teachings continue to offer solutions for modern challenges.



Synopsis

The documentary follows elders and educators who share the cultural and medicinal significance of native plants and foods, including salal berries, cedar tea, and spruce tips. These traditional practices are presented not only as methods of healing but as living systems of knowledge rooted in reciprocity, sustainability, and spiritual connection to the earth.

Central to the film is the work of community leaders like Dr. Rudolph Ryser of the Center for World Indigenous Studies and Charlene Krise of the Squaxin Island Museum Library and Research Center, alongside organizations including Tend, Gather and Grow, whose Wild Foods and Medicines program in Olympia, Washington mentors Indigenous youth through hands-on learning and cultural revitalization. Young participants reconnect with ancestral traditions while developing leadership skills and a renewed sense of identity and belonging.


The film also highlights innovative Indigenous-led food sovereignty initia-

tives, including the Squaxin Island Tribal Garden regional food security project. Through sustainable farming, seed stewardship, and community collaboration, these programs are building resilient local food systems grounded in traditional ecological knowledge.

As the documentary moves from urban woodlands to tribal gardens and communal feasts with the Muckleshoot Tribe, it paints a vivid portrait of cultural renewal and intergenerational resilience. The film ultimately asks audiences to reconsider humanity's relationship with nature and to recognize Indigenous knowledge as essential to building a healthier and more sustainable future.

Both deeply personal and universally relevant, *A Journey with Salish Plant and Medicine Traditions* is a celebration of survival, healing, and the enduring wisdom carried through Indigenous traditions. It is a story of reconnection — to culture, to community, and to the living earth itself.





**So often I've heard
elders say the plants
are our teachers. We
just need to remember
how to listen.**

— Elise Krohn, MA (*Scottish*)

Director's Statement

As a herbalist and storyteller for food sovereignty, I have spent years learning alongside elders, healers, growers, and community leaders across the Pacific Coast — from the Pacific Northwest to Central Mexico. Through these relationships, I've witnessed how traditional plant knowledge carries not only medicine, but memory, resilience, and deep connection to the land.

Salal, Cedar and Spruce grew from conversations with friends and colleagues who continue to protect and revitalize ancestral food and healing traditions despite generations of cultural suppression and environmental loss. What moved me most was the powerful intergenerational exchange taking place: youth reconnecting with elders, communities rebuilding food

systems, and Indigenous knowledge guiding new pathways toward healing and sustainability.

My intention with this film was to create space for these voices and stories to be experienced with intimacy, respect, and humanity. The forests, gardens, and gathering places in the film are not simply locations — they are our living teachers and sources of renewal.

At its heart, this documentary is about reconnection: to culture, to community, and to the living earth. I hope audiences leave with a deeper understanding that Indigenous knowledge is not only vital to the past, but essential to our collective future.



Production Notes

Following its initial 2023 festival run and award recognition, the filmmakers revisited the documentary with a renewed visual and sonic approach. This 2026 revised edition features enhanced sound design, updated color mastering, and newly restored archival imagery.

Salal, Cedar, and Spruce was created through relationships built over decades between one of the film's producers, the Center for World Indigenous Studies (CWIS), its staff, and Indigenous communities throughout the Pacific Coast region. Founded and led by Indigenous scholars and leaders in 1979,, CWIS has long advanced Indigenous sovereignty, cultural preservation, traditional ecological knowledge, and community-based education.

Grounded in trust, collaboration, and shared learning, the production centered on three distinct Indigenous-led programs and communities in Washington State, each working to revitalize traditional food systems, plant medicine knowledge, and intergenerational cultural practices.

Filming took place with the **Squaxin Island Tribe in Kamilche, Washington**, where tribal leaders, educators, and community members shared the ongoing work of the Squaxin Island Tribal Gardens and regional food sovereignty initiatives rooted in Coast Salish traditions, ecological stewardship, and community wellness.



Production notes

In Olympia, Washington, the production partnered with **GRuB (Garden-Raised Bounty) and its Wild Foods and Medicines Program**, where Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth reconnect with ancestral teachings through hands-on learning in traditional foods, plant medicine, seed stewardship, and land-based education. The program creates opportunities for young people to build relationships with the land while fostering social-emotional cultural understanding, leadership, and community connection.

The film also travels to the **Muckleshoot Tribe in Auburn, Washington**, where participants gathered for a traditional foods feast celebrating

Indigenous foodways, communal knowledge, and cultural continuity. Through shared meals, storytelling, and intergenerational exchange, the gathering reflects the enduring strength of Coast Salish traditions and the importance of food as medicine, ceremony, and connection.

Throughout the filmmaking process, the production approached each location with an emphasis on reciprocity, cultural respect, and community collaboration. Rather than presenting Indigenous knowledge as a historical artifact, the film highlights living traditions actively shaping healthier futures for communities, ecosystems, and future generations.



Director Bio

Leslie Korn

Leslie Korn began her filmmaking journey as a feminist activist in the 1970s before moving to Indigenous west Mexico, where she founded a pro bono health clinic and has worked in community health and social justice for nearly 50 years. She attended the Harvard School of Public Health and Harvard Medical School, where she studied traditional medicine and has authored ten books focused on traumatic stress, ethnomedicine, and integrative medicine.

A filmmaker, herbalist, and member of the Ashkenazi diaspora, Korn's work explores Indigenous knowledge, healing traditions, food sovereignty, and cultural resilience in the face of post colonial trauma. Through decades of collaboration with Indigenous communities across the Pacific Coast — from the Pacific Northwest to Central Mexico — her storytelling centers on memory, women's ways of knowing, and the role of nature in collective healing.

Her films include *Cradling the Heart*, *Searching for Capomo*, *Salal, Cedar, and Spruce*, and her first feature documentary, *BreakPoint: The Untold Story of the Constitution Express* (2026), reflecting her longstanding commitment to healing, justice, and cultural memory.



Creative Team

Leslie Korn

Director/Executive Producer

Max Montalbán

Editor / Photographer / Post Production

Alma Méndez

Editor / Photographer / Post Production

Sam Stoker

Project Manager

Michel Medellín

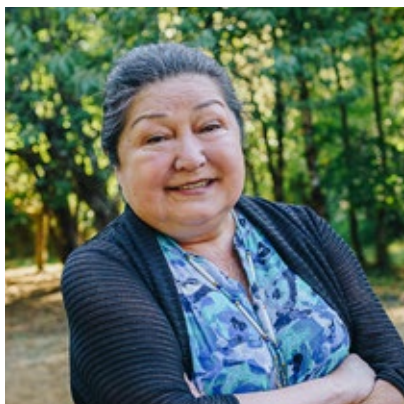
Graphic Designer

NARRATOR:

Christian Rýser (Cree/Métis)

Is a SAG-AFTRA actor and voice artist known for his work in independent film and television, including *Darkdrive*, *The Fugitive*, *Carried Away*, and *Positive Reinforcement*. His narration brings a grounded cinematic presence to the documentary's exploration of Indigenous memory, storytelling, and cultural continuity.

Selected Protagonists



Charleene Krise

Charleene Krise is an enrolled member of the Squaxin Island Tribe and Executive Director of the Squaxin Island Museum, Library & Research Center. A respected cultural leader, educator, and advocate for Coast Salish cultural revitalization, her work focuses on preserving Indigenous history, language, traditional foods, medicines, and ecological knowledge. Through decades of leadership in tribal governance, canoe journeys, cultural education, and community programming, Krise has helped strengthen intergenerational connections to Salish traditions, ancestral waters, and the living landscapes of the Pacific Northwest.



Rudolph C. Rýser, Ph.D. (1946-2023)

Was of Cree, Oneida and Swiss Heritage. He was a scholar, educator, and advocate whose work connected traditional Salish foods and plant medicines with Indigenous governance and international tribal policy. Author of the Salish Country Cookbook, Rýser dedicated his life to preserving Indigenous knowledge, treaty rights, and cultural self-determination.

Selected Protagonists



Valerie Segrest

Valerie Segrest, an enrolled member of the Muckleshoot Indian Tribe, is a Native nutrition educator, author, and co-founder of Tahoma Peak Solutions. Her work centers on Indigenous food sovereignty, traditional diets, and restoring access to Native foods within tribal communities. Segrest has co-authored influential works including *Feeding Seven Generations* and *Indigenous Home Cooking: Menus Inspired by the Ancestors*.



Aleta Poste

(Squaxin Island Tribe) is a traditional foods advocate and manager of the Squaxin Island Tribal Garden and Salish Roots Farm programs. Her work focuses on Indigenous food sovereignty, traditional plant knowledge, community wellness, and the revitalization of Coast Salish growing and harvesting practices.




Elise Krohn

Elise Krohn is an herbalist, educator, and native foods specialist dedicated to revitalizing Indigenous food and medicine traditions in the Pacific Northwest. She is a leader in the Tend, Gather and Grow program and co-author of several publications on traditional foods and medicines.



Mariana Harvey

Mariana Harvey (Yakama Nation) is an educator, artist, and advocate for Tribal food sovereignty whose work focuses on protecting Native foods and medicines through youth mentorship, cultural education, and land-based learning.



Food sovereignty is the inherent right of a community to define their own diet. And how do you do that when you have a policy that's telling you what to eat?

— Valerie Segreast (*Muckleshoot*)

Relevance of the documentary

At a time of growing interest in sustainability, food sovereignty, and cultural preservation, the documentary highlights the enduring knowledge of Indigenous communities whose relationships to land, plants, and traditional foods span generations. Through the voices of educators, knowledge keepers, and community leaders, the film explores how traditional Salish foods and medicines remain vital to cultural identity, environmental stewardship, and community health today.

The documentary also reflects a broader movement among Indigenous communities to revitalize traditional knowledge systems, protect ancestral practices, and strengthen intergenerational connections through food, language, and land-based education.



Film Stills





Western Red Cedar

Thuja plicata

Lushootseed: xpáy'uhc

Called the mother and the tree of life among Salish peoples for it provides medicines from its leaves, bark, and wood for longhouses, canoes, and clothing. The leaves are anti-inflammatory and antibiotic.



Elderberry

Sambucus spp.

Chehalis: ts'ak'wik wun

Elderberries make a cough and cold syrup rich in vitamin C and antioxidants called anthocyanins.



Salish Roots Farm at Squaxin Island Tribe
Kamilche (The Peaceful) Valley





Garden-Raised Bounty, (GRuB)
Olympia, WA





Extra Material



Listen to **Valerie Segreast** describe her collaboration with CWIS working with youth to define food deserts on Muckleshoot Reservation.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=SOUYNI3WNWE&t=2s



Learn from **Aleta Poste** about the ways in which Salish Roots Farm at Squaxin Island Tribe, provides fresh produce for the tribal community.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=u8PMd6PxFA8



Discover how **Keith Stevenson** and **Valerie Segreast** construct and use Cedar bentwood boxes to prepare foods traditionally.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=vgtE110bVso



Learn about **Cinnamon Bear**, **Janay Joseph** and **Lisa Wilson** as they share their journeys studying and teaching herbal medicine.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=P2CH2DGGYJ0&t=1s




Discover the work of **Martell Hesketh** as she explores indigenous sciences and indigenous ways of knowing as methods used to evaluate project success.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qerm9AwM5OA



Listen to **Rose James** discuss her work advancing food sovereignty among nations in the Pacific Northwest.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=d_YEgQFhYa8

A photograph of two women in a forest setting. The woman on the left is looking down at a pile of dried plant material, possibly medicinal herbs. She has dark hair tied back and is wearing a black tank top and blue jeans. The woman on the right is also looking down, and her arm with a colorful tattoo is visible. The background is a lush green forest.

We need to be able to look at our foods, our teas as medicine, and be able to have that reverence to what they do.

— Charlene Krise (*Squaxin*)

Awards



Latino & Native American Film Festival

EUA, 2026

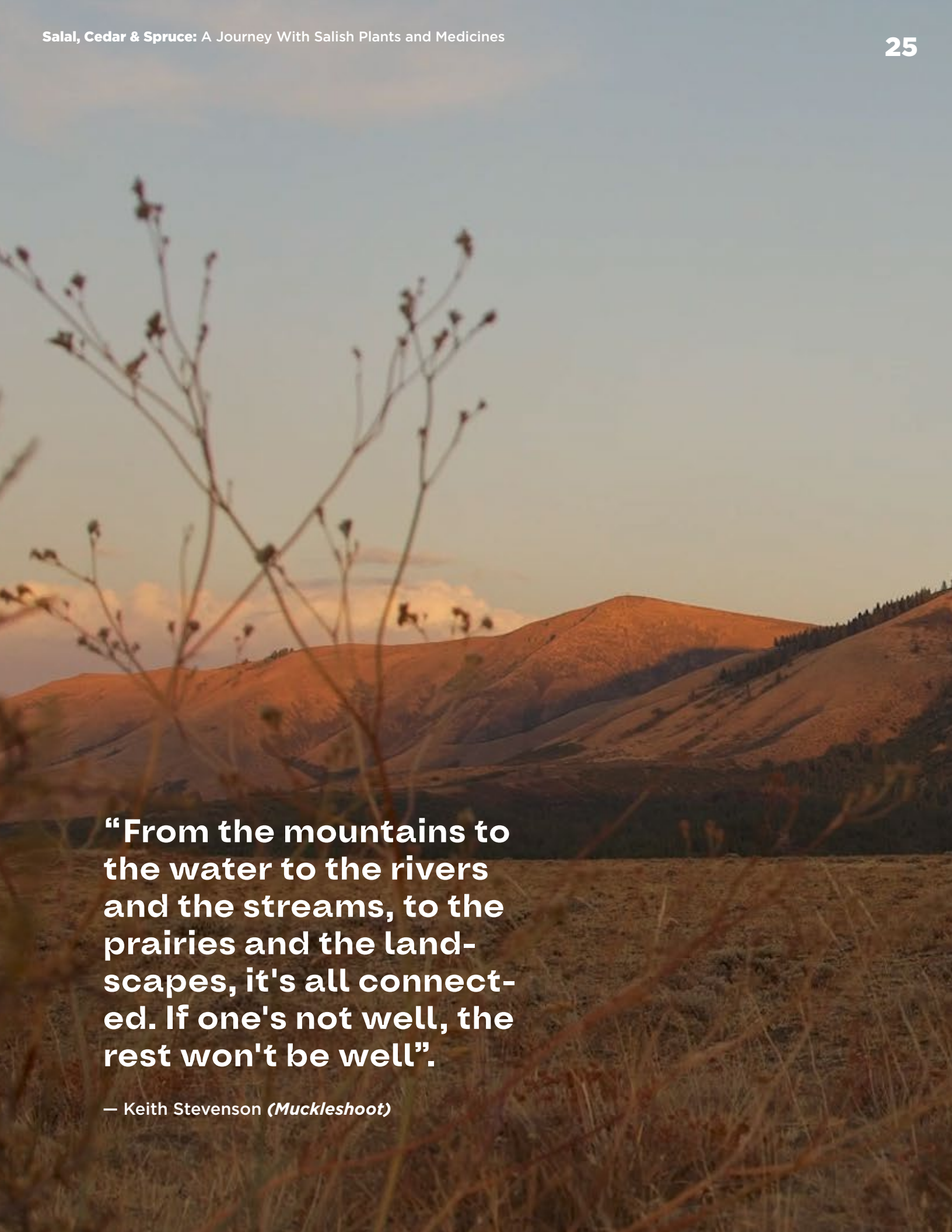
Acknowledgements

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“From the mountains to the water to the rivers and the streams, to the prairies and the landscapes, it's all connected. If one's not well, the rest won't be well”.

— Keith Stevenson (*Muckleshoot*)

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