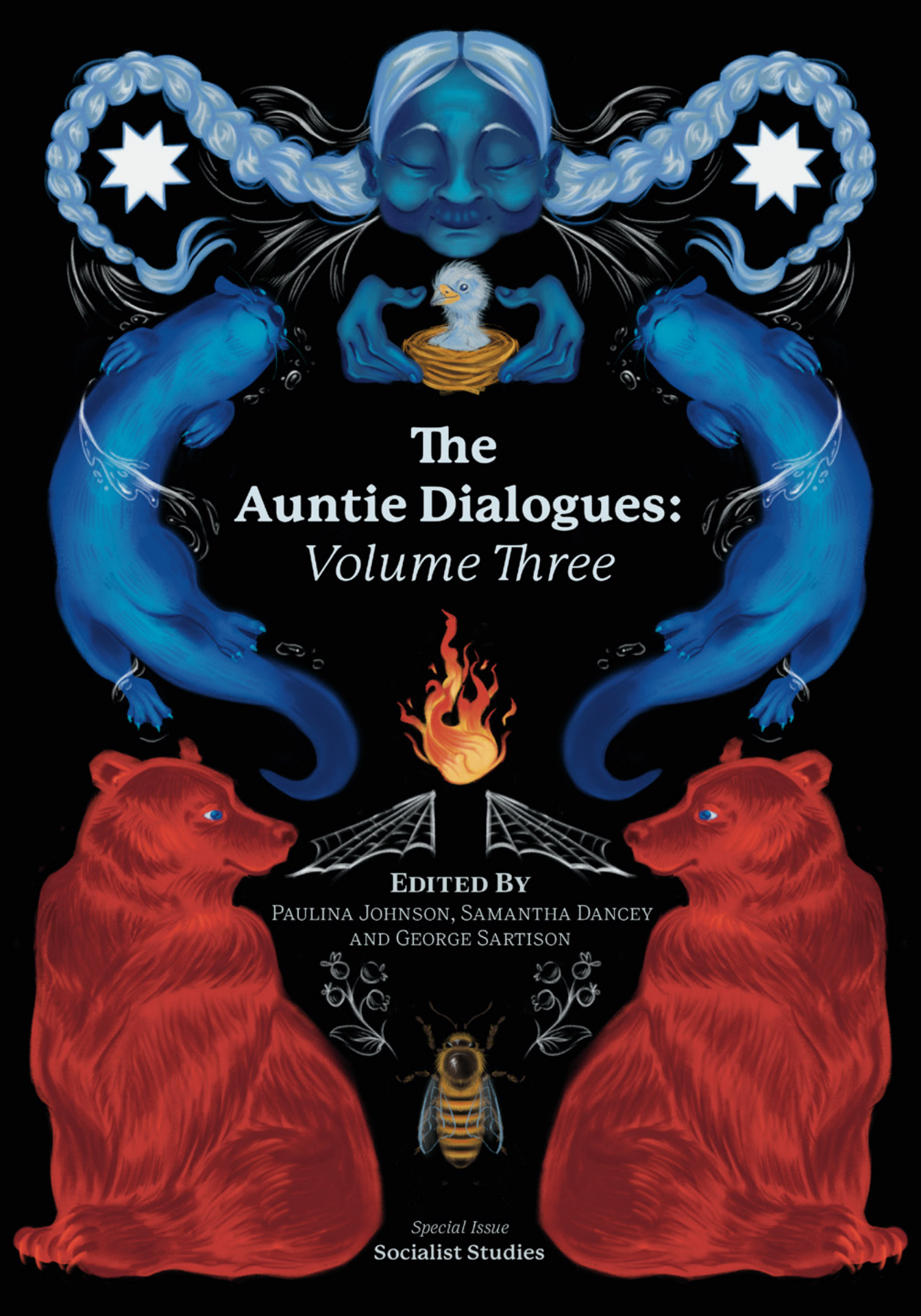

The Auntie Dialogues: *Volume Three*

Edited By

Paulina Johnson, Samantha Dancey and George Sartison

Special Issue

Socialist Studies

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Socialist Studies

To the Original Elders and Teachers of this Universe

May we remember all that you have given us

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Contents

Introduction

Auntie-bitions

The third Season of *The Auntie Is In* is layered in generations of love, care, and admiration. Following a regrounding of myself and the teachings I know, I wanted to go back to my roots of who I am. And this comes from a great cost of lessons from learning which people are my actual mentors and accomplices to who truly has my back. It has not always been easy being the Auntie and learning how to navigate this settler colonial world, but it does not mean that I will easily put down my beaded earrings and let them win. Oh, no, absolutely not. We cannot let them get us down because at the end of the day, they are just praying that much harder for us and I too would want to be me. Sorry, Creator, that wasn't very humble of me.

Regardless, this Season is more than just lessons, it's relearning and growing once again like a baby Thunderbird. Connecting to the elements and those closest to me to offer the teachings of Iskotêw, Askiy, Nipiy, and Yôtin; *Fire, Earth, Water,* and *Air*, respectively. These are the first Elders of this world and universe, they have given us much, but sometimes we fail to see all that they have gifted us. So, in the best way I could think and offer, we present them here in four distinct sections to each Element with four episodes of their own. They are not ranked or set in any hierarchical category, simply, they offer insights, teachings, and ways of knowing that are foundational to being part of this world and existence. While much harm has been done to all four Elemental Elders, my vision was to reawaken the Nêhiyawak sense of connection for all to learn from.

This comes from the fact that *The Auntie Is In* has been listened to nearly 5,500 times in 27 different countries with 570 followers on our Spotify platform. With Canada with 88.3% of listeners, the USA with 6.3%, India with 1%, and the UK and Taiwan with 0.7%. With age ranges between 0-17 at 0.8%, 18-22 at 11.7%, 23-27 at 17.8%, 28-34 at 25.1%, 35-44 at 23.4%, 45-59 at 15.9%, 60+ at 4.7%, and unknown at 0.5%. With 68.2% of our listeners being female, with 21.4% as Male, 5.8% as non-binary, and 4.6% as non-specified. Therefore, the Auntie continues to grow across all spans of this world leaving loud cackles in every direction.

It is bittersweet to see these analyses of the podcast that started as a mere dream of mine to be able to maintain my connections to community and my rezzy self. And now, on our third season of our four intended, it seems like what was once a big dream with so much time on our horizon, is almost at an end. But maybe, I should not think in that manner, instead I should think that this is only the beginning. Because our Nêhiyaw time is not linear, but circular, and maybe, I will venture on to being a new auntie, in a new form, and a new role. Maybe, I should run for Chief of Samson Cree Nation, or better yet, the Prime Minister of Turtle Island (haha).

Either way, I and the Blue Sky Research Team will see you in the final fourth season.

XOXO
Your Auntie

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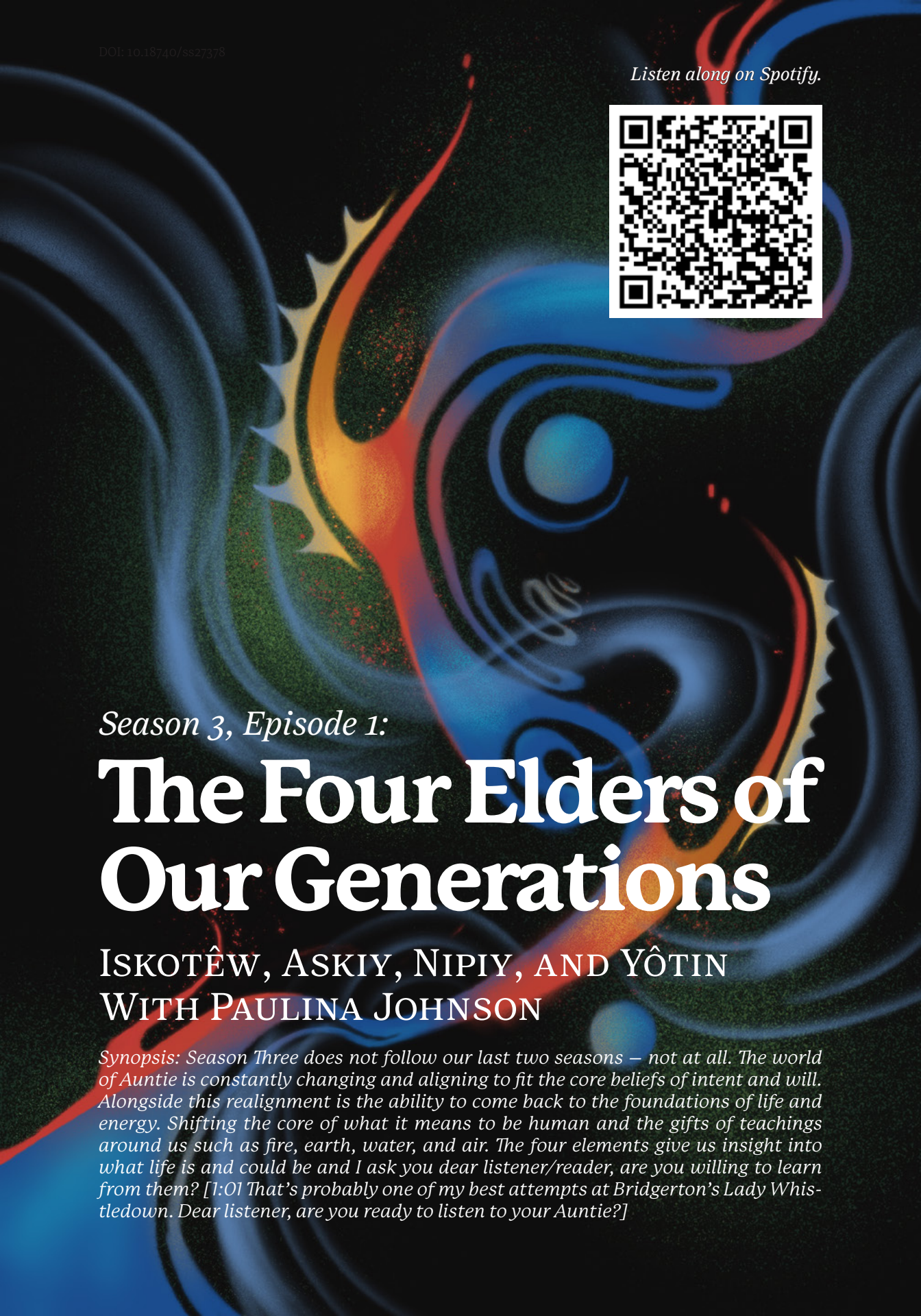
Listen along on Spotify.



Season 3, Episode 1:

The Four Elders of Our Generations

Iskotêw, Askiy, Nipiy, and Yôtin With Paulina Johnson

Synopsis: Season Three does not follow our last two seasons – not at all. The world of Auntie is constantly changing and aligning to fit the core beliefs of intent and will. Alongside this realignment is the ability to come back to the foundations of life and energy. Shifting the core of what it means to be human and the gifts of teachings around us such as fire, earth, water, and air. The four elements give us insight into what life is and could be and I ask you dear listener/reader, are you willing to learn from them? [1:01 That's probably one of my best attempts at Bridgerton's Lady Whistledown. Dear listener, are you ready to listen to your Auntie?]

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Part One:
Thoughts and Aspirations

I remember when I was younger and my mom would tell us she was bringing us lunch to school that day. It wasn't your typical McDonalds meal - oh no, [1:31 absolutely not; it was rezzy as fuck]. It was from K&M, a local convenience store that sits next to the only traffic lights on [1:41 all of the reserve; and right beside it is Burger Baron, where my cousin Kim often frequents for Terry and Wes]. [1:50 But that aside], K&M is a staple for us. My mom would grab me and my siblings roast beef sandwiches, [1:58 cherry jello cups], and a Hostess mini pie. While [2:02 many children would probably have] preferred McDonalds, [2:05 me, deep down, preferred this combination]. [2:09 And this meal today is still] my favourite. And while many would disagree and say I should mention Lucky Dollar Grocery with their massive bologna slices, or Burger Barons bannock cheeseburger, the roast beef sandwich is still my go to, [2:26 especially] when I get home late from the office, or after teaching one of my seminars and I need something quick to satisfy my hunger. A [2:35 little] piece of home that connects me back to the child I once was. The same child who would wonder who they would become as they stayed up late at night.

At night, [I would] watch the stars from my room or as my mom would do and take me outside to watch the stars from our roof while my other siblings were asleep. The brisk night air would caress across my face as I watched the stars glimmer above us, and every so often, the northern lights would dance and tell us stories. On some occasions, I would see shooting stars, and my mom would tell me to make a wish. The southern sky would watch us laugh and talk, and when we got too cold, we would go back inside after crawling through the window to get out. Now older, I realize that my mom needed those nights just as much as I did. What love and thought would go through her mind as she took me to one of my favorite places to be - aware of my admiration for the stars and moon. It is in these moments that I learned to acknowledge those that are not seen or heard and become aware of what I wanted to represent and who I would eventually become - though still learning very often. The elements of being that surround[ed] us, witnessed us, learned from us, laughed with us, and healed us.

The elements of air in the night breeze, the land that held us for a moment's time in our own bubble of being, the fire of the stars watching us below to see generational love, and the water of life passing between us in the memories that she would share with me of her own childhood. These are the elements of being that are of connection and continuation.

Part Two:
The Elementals

The four elements carry stories that pass through time and generations. In Season Three, we focus specifically on them. With Air, Fire, Earth, and Water sharing with us four distinct episodes of each Elder. I do not call them Ancestors - for they are still with us. No, they are Elders who taught us first and they will remain long after us. The elementals are more than just the start of our Creation and being

- they are housed in every fibre of what it means to be human and therefore, we honour them through a unique way this season. Honouring their gifts of insight and knowledge filled with humour and subtle teases that makes our Indigenous world much closer than we have in previous seasons. Woven throughout are insights into my life in Maskwacîs and what I've learned so far. A coming of age narrative told in various sections throughout [5:45 this season; and importantly, being close to my roots as an Indigenous Woman]. [F]rom my [5:52 very] first heartbreak [5:53 that I'm still not over] to learning what it meant to be Nêhiyaw. [5:59 That's what it means to be grounded in the elements; the foundations, the very being of existence. This is what we're bringing back to you.]

Saddle Lake Elder Dr. Francis Whiskeyjack accounts the following teachings of the elements:

> *When we look at the East again, we look at the element of fire. Of course from the fire we receive warmth and light. If you follow this gift you get warmth and light and light often means kindness. If we include this gift within us, if we look at ourselves as being warm and kind (we all carry the light within us), if we have the fire, the sacred fire, within us, then we will be able to spread it to others … That in itself is power. So we can look at fire as positive…*
>
> *We then go to the next element, which is the South. We then see gifts of Mother Earth. The buffalo walking on the earth as a life-giving force is a gift. Like motherhood, Mother Earth means protection and survival. When I look at the earth it gives life to everything—to the grass, to the trees and everything else.*
>
> *The next direction we will go to is the West, which is fall/autumn. When we think of the West we also think of the mountains. When we think of the mountains, we think of water. When you look at the snow-capped mountains of the West you will see a lot of water falls, so the gift of water is in the direction of the West. The water which flows into rivers and streams comes from the glaciers. It feeds all of the plants, animals and every living thing. Everything needs water in order to survive…*
>
> *When we look at the last element, North, the gift from the North is the air. Everything needs the air to survive. This quadrant is often considered as the wind spirit. It gives us breath. It is also the last thing we do before we die. We take our last breath. Air is the life giving force. It is oxygen. We can use it in many good ways. For instance, if the wind spirit, the air, the wind in itself, in its greatest force, is working in a positive way, then it is good. But if there is too much, it can also be a negative thing. Think of the tornadoes and the hurricanes. [In the North] when we think of snow, we think of rest. We, as living creatures, need to rest a little everyday so that we can function properly. When you think about the final journey an Elder makes, we say die here on earth or death or final rest. Elders believe that there is life after death and, of course, while they have left us the seeds, we will continue on…*
>
> *So there you have the circle – air, fire, earth and water. North, East, South and West. All of these elements are life-giving forces (n.d.).*

If the elements hold this force through their knowledge and vibrance, then I believe a proper acknowledgement is needed. Hence, Season Three is known as the

Elemental Season, sharing the insights of Iskotêw, Askiy, Nipiy, and Yôtin; *Fire, Earth, Water,* and *Air*, respectively. With eighteen episodes instead of the typical sixteen, as we allow for their knowledge and expertise to be shared throughout this work. I do not speak for them, simply, [9:58 we] allow themselves to manifest in the research as they guide [us] on what to present and what to share. As I have learned that I, Dr. Paulina Johnson, sometimes do need to listen – but also act upon what is being shared.

Part Three:
Avatar: The Last Auntie

Some days I feel like the Creator has placed me on the path that I am to make me a little more rezzy and rugged than the last day, but then sacred and spiritual the next. A fine, delicate balance like the beadwork that adorns me, the quills that drape around my neck, the silk applique that tells my story, and the heart that carries my hopes and dreams. When I first started "The Auntie Is In," I had no clue what I wanted to present other than truths. To leave parts of myself for the generations to come and those who needed to hear the truths said. As I began my research at the University of Alberta, I realized that the four elements kept emerging as if they were calling me back home. To embrace them once again as I navigated the society and world not made for my People. As I started to reaffirm my kinship to them, I realized that in the hustle and bustle of the ivory tower, I was Rezpunzel trapped away in Tory tower, or the ivory tower, working towards getting tenure. Who was I going to throw my braids down to save me, other than myself? I turned inward towards myself and I comforted the expectations, insecurities, and fearful beliefs of a society that forgets the spirit, community, and prayers. I put back on my moccasins, saddled Chief up with his dog traverse, and said, not me. I called to the elements.

Wind gave me the ability to speak my truths while whispering notions of love and admiration within every intent. But also to blow away the expectations of what I was to represent and portray – that was anything I wasn't meant to be or would be made into. Where Wind allowed me to blow off the negative medicines of jealousy and individualism and take the thoughts of sadness and frustration out of my mind and spirit. Then Fire ravaged inside of my heart, waking up the aunties, uncles, grandmothers, and grandfathers to stand alongside me. Fire allowed my kinship and Ancestors to shield me from losing my soul flame while bringing me new family and relations who would never ask me to compromise or change unless it was for the benefit of the whole. Fire empowered me to know that destruction does not always mean an end but also a beginning. Where Earth allowed me to fall into the land and emerge with new gifts and wisdom. Where the swamp areas of the reserve allowed me to heal in the clay and earth, that has grown medicines upon medicines, nurturing the people since time immemorial and connecting me with them through their stories, experiences, and memory. All while water purified me and held me like it did when I came from the spirit world, caressing my skin, eyes, and mouth, to see as I was always intended to. The Four Elements reminded me of who I am and what I will be. They held me in the sweat lodge and followed my spirit wherever I went. They went into rooms and spaces not designed for me and heard conversations that did not speak well of me. They enlisted the help of Grandmother Spider's many hands

and feet to block all those who do not care for my soul and the generations that flow within me. These generations are reminiscent of the appearance of my face, the connection of my voice, and the charisma of my presence.

How has Western Society not known that they are all within me yet?

Part Four:
Conclusion

[14:56 I think I must intimidate a lot of people with my humor, and my ability to joke - because, I am not only Indigenous;] I am a daughter, granddaughter, sister, auntie, a mother, a teacher, a confidant, a protector, and above all, Blue Sky Woman of the Nêhiyawak Nation. If those who tried to harm or destroy only knew who protects me in the spirit world, I do not think they would act the way that they do. But my People were taught differently, I was raised differently, and I was raised in community.

The tobacco smoked in ceremony prayed for me and those that follow. And those that follow get to see how I constantly heal myself to ensure that I care not only for those that come after [15:54 me], but for myself in particular. While many would give up in the face of adversity, I stand not because I have to, but because I need to. What a different world would it be if they knew how powerful the first Elders were. Not the simplified or dehumanized representations, but the strongest of all our knowledge and power under Kise Manitou, our Creator. How the Creator forged the world and created those Elders and teachers reveals a level of connection and understanding that even Western Science - let alone logic - struggles to understand.

What power and strength does each Element have, and what delicacy and grace do they embody and give? That is what I aim to share with you in this season, the Elements in their most intimate forms, but like all storytellers before me, I want to share the Elements in their most human forms - so that we can not only understand them but feel their connections to the land that makes us Indigenous People aware. And as the Auntie, I am a mere conduit of these teachings and knowledge - for no one can control them [17:17 much like me, though many have tried].

Âstam, Iskotêw, Askiy, Nipiy, ekwa Yôtin, pê-pîkiskwê, come and speak.

Keywords: *Air element, Earth element, Elementals, Fire element, The Four Elements, The Medicine Wheel, Water element.*

Askiy, Iskotêw, Nipiy, Yôtin.

Glossary

Askiy – *the element of earth; land*

Âstam – *come; come here*

Iskotêw – *the element of fire; home-fire; hearth-fire*

Kisê Manitou – *The Creator*

Nipiy – *the element of water*

Pê-pîkiskwê – *come and speak*

Yôtin – *the element of air; wind*

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Listen along on Spotify.

Season 3, Episode 2:

Better Don't (Let It Burn)

Iskotêw, George Sartison and Paulina Johnson

Synopsis: What is the true power of Iskotêw, Fire? Is it really the strength in the flame that burns or is it much more than that? To let things burn is beyond just destruction, it is liberation and self-love. Love for oneself but also one's land and being. Iskotêw teaches us many things and to understand how we learn is to embark on a deep dive into the realms of fire and what it truly offers. Since at the end of the day if this world we have does burn, we are all in it together.

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Part One:
Beyond Destruction

In the 1993 Addams Family Values movie, Wednesday Addams played by Christina Ricci delivers a powerful line: "The gods of my tribe have spoken. They said do not trust the pilgrims … especially Sarah Miller. And for all of these reasons I have decided to scalp you and *burn* your village to the ground" (emphasis added). Burning a settler village would not be my go-to message, as tempting as it may be, but burning the institutional and systemic hold that has dispossessed and displaced us as Indigenous Peoples? Abso-fucking-lutely. Though I have run into quite a few Sarah Millers in my life, and I've thrown hands like Lilo did to Mertle in Lilo and Stitch. There exists an underlying message. It is not the actual burning we fear - no, it's the regrowth that so many fight against.

We are conditioned to think of fire in one way from an early age: destructive. But what if we start to see it as a force of growth, renewal, compassion. An aid with the possibility of tearing down unseen limits of our conditioning, and to know when enough is enough. Although fire has the power to be destructive when managed poorly or fuelled without direction or care, it also has the immense potential to be harnessed as unifying. It is often much easier to deny this potential than to actively seek it out. I get it, it's easier not to, but we might not have the luxury of ease forever. In the wake of fire, rebirth and regrowth are given the chance to flourish in the wake of its cleansing. However, we do not simply stumble upon these planes of rebirth. How do we get there? How do we burn our path towards building ourselves and our worlds up from the cleansed and enriched soil left behind? Through harnessing the fire within.

To foster rebirth and regrowth, the fire within us must be tended to by channeling our refusal, resentment, and rage. Rachel Flowers (2015) reminds us that the reclamation of rage is crucial to Indigenous resurgence. She challenges the idea that anger, frustration, and fury are all-encompassing and immobilizing. These emotions may be all-encompassing, but that does not make them immobilizing. A similar lesson, borrowed from Black feminist author Audre Lorde (1981), is the importance of using one's anger. Anger does no good when bottled up; however, letting it out willy-nilly does little to claim and direct its power either. We're not trying to burn down one another's houses after all. Instead, Lorde (1981) and Flowers (2015) invite us to interact with the anger we feel in the faces of discrimination, oppression, and subjugation, and allow them to fuel the fires within; the fires that ignite change, the fires that allow us to arrive at the planes of rebirth and regrowth.

Use your fire. Don't let it smolder you from within. Direct the flames with care and intent, and let your fire fuel you in creating the life for yourself and your loved ones that you all deserve. Let your fire *burn*.

The Mertle's may have fiery red hair, but the Lilo's hold their fire within. If you didn't catch that reference, you need to *fire* up that old DVD player as soon as you finish this episode.

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Part Two:
Forest Fires & Settler (mis)Management

Settler society is sweating... literally. In the past decade, ecological management related to forest fires has been a *hot* button issue, pardon the pun. We have come uncomfortably face-to-face with the realities of climate change and the ill-advised upkeep of the natural world in settler-managed societies. Within the past year alone, we have seen our own backyard engulfed in flames as the majority of Jasper township burned to the ground. More recently, we watched our neighbours to the south deal with the Los Angeles fires, which resulted from similar settler mismanagement (Delaney, 2025). Although these tragedies are unfathomable, they highlight a much greater issue; Indigenous Knowledge has been diminished and devalued by settler society to such a degree that nature has started to fight back. I mean, I could've told a few people about the importance of environmental stewardship, if they were willing to listen!

In reality, Indigenous Peoples have been at the forefront of climate activism (Recio & Hestad, 2022). Before the term "climate change" was even coined, our Ancestors practiced land stewardship through traditional burning, sustainable harvesting, and a deep relational accountability to the land. The land is not a resource to be taken from, but a relation to be cared for and looked after. Despite having experience nurturing the land since time immemorial, Indigenous Knowledge continues to be ignored or outright dismissed (Christianson et al., 2022). The most violent acts of colonial governments were and continue to be their inaction and feigned ignorance. Even worse, when we advocate for responsible land management, we are immediately under surveillance and even criminalized. I'll tell you a little secret though... When you try to extinguish our flames, we will come back, brighter and hotter than ever, and we *will* protect our relations.

Although fire is *so hot right now*, the Wet'suwet'en Land Defenders and the Mi'kmaq Water Protectors remind us that Indigenous Ecological Knowledges are so much more than just *Ecological.* The Coastal GasLink project, a nearly $50 billion proposal to establish a natural gas pipeline and production equipment across 670 km of Wet'suwet'en land in British Columbia's northeast, has been supported wholeheartedly by the provincial government (McCreary & Turner, 2021). The continuous and unwavering extraction of environmental resources for profit, by settler colonial governments, is exemplified through the government of British Columbia in this instance. The Coastal GasLink project is the largest combined private sector investment towards resource extraction in Canadian history. It is directly opposed to the Wet'suwet'en practice of environmental stewardship and their duty in maintaining the spirit of the land. In fact, this example of - how should we say - *incompatibility* between settler governmental agendas and Indigenous practices of environmental stewardship is nothing new for the Wet'suwet'en. Throughout the tumultuous history of Indigenous and settler relations within Canada - as is the case for all settler colonial states - the provincial government of British Columbia has repeatedly attempted to sever the Wet'suwet'en connection to the land. Whether it be through the banning of Potlatch from 1885 to 1951, or the Royal Proclamation of 1763 that saw government officials simply allot reserve lands as they saw fit west of the British Columbian Rockies. These systemic attempts at cutting land ties highlight a much greater problem: land is knowledge, and what happens when knowledge is severed from a group? This

history of attacks against the Wet'suwet'en was additionally intended to undermine their matrilineal system of descent and kinship through the forced displacement from their lands, further severing people from their source of knowledge.

On the other coast, the Mi'kmaq water protectors also show the importance that the surrounding ecology plays in guiding Indigenous Ways of Life. In order to maintain the prosperity of all relations, the Mi'kmaq water protectors - particularly Mi'kmaq women - have prioritized the protection and maintenance of their waterways and surrounding lands for generations (Pictou et al., 2021). However, in their consistent attempts to skirt treaty rights in the name of resource extraction and profit, settler society - as represented by the government and their corporate allies - always misses the point. The water is protected not only for the vitality of Indigenous Peoples, but for all who depend upon it. In reality, there is a lack of work done on the side of settler society to understand *why* Indigenous Peoples engage in environmental activism. Although settler governmental bodies can and have read the work of the Mi'kmaq water protectors' assertion of fishing rights, in reality this assumption only captures a narrow portion of why the Mi'kmaq water protectors have fought to the point of being criminalized; water informs their knowledge, their relationships to one another including the land, and ensures all these relations have a future. It is about so much more than using the surrounding environment as a resource, yet settler society can't seem to wrap their heads around that (Awâsis, 2020; Do, 2023; Pictou et al., 2021)! We have the knowledge, however - to put it in words that settler society may understand - you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink. We can't solve your problems *for* you, only *with* you. Until then, settler society will be sweating like a pretendian when asked who their relations are, and I don't mean metaphorically. To paraphrase Nelly (2002), "it's getting hot in here"; a little too hot if you ask me.

Part Three:
Wrestling with Fire, Wrestling with Change

Too often, Indigenous resurgence is labelled as a struggle. Its depiction in the media constructed by settler society follows a damage-centred narrative that focuses on what Indigenous Peoples *don't* have. Although I can't deny that 'the struggle' is an inherent part of all of our lives, I think that it's well past due that Indigenous Peoples' stories stop being told as our struggle and our struggle alone. Melissa K. Nelson (2019), an Anishinaabe, Métis, and Norwegian scholar, has attempted to reframe how Indigenous resurgence and resistance movements are contextualized. In her work "Wrestling with Fire: Indigenous Women's Resistance and Resurgence," she proposes the term "wrestling" as a better fit detailing Indigenous resistance and resurgence. "Wrestling with fire" highlights not only the legacies of environmental stewardship and activism championed by Indigenous Peoples since time immemorial, but also their ongoing commitment to the land as one of their many relations. To Nelson (2019), wrestling still incorporates struggle, but shifts focus to resistance and survivance as well. By redirecting narratives of resistance beyond *only* struggle, it allows us to focus on what struggle can teach us without being overwhelmed by it. In the words of Nishinaabeg scholar Leanne Simpson (2017, p. 70):

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> *"'Gzhwe Manidoo (the creator) created the world by struggling, failing, and by trying again in*
>
> *some of our stories... Struggle is inherent to life." (p. 74).*

Therefore, when working alongside narratives of resistance and survivance, struggle is important fuel to the fires of Indigenous resurgence. By divesting from struggle-centred narratives, we have the air to breathe and learn from the struggles of our past relations (Nelson, 2019; Simpson, 2011). By honouring the struggles of our past relations through stoking the fires of resurgence, resistance, and survivance, we ensure a future for all relations yet to come.

Both symbolically and literally, fire is an important signifier of Indigenous sovereignty, resistance, and resurgence (Morgan & Burr, 2024). Remember the Wet'suwet'en land defenders I mentioned earlier? During their advocacy for their land against the Coastal GasLink project, many other Indigenous groups across Canada lit fires along railway tracks in solidarity with the Wet'suwet'en in protest of settler colonial bodies' claims to Indigenous lands and their resources (Abedi, 2020). Here, fire symbolizes the frustration felt in response to the continued dispossession of lands, and in doing so becomes an illuminating symbol of Indigenous resistance, political action, and assertion of sovereignty.

Additionally, fire is often associated with anger and rage. Although Indigenous Peoples have often been painted by settler society as "peaceful" or "of the Earth", there is a detailed history of our political activism. In reality, we have much to be angry about. Rage and frustration are not the debilitating emotions many claim them to be (Flowers, 2015). It is our rage that fuels our resistance. Too often, settler society expects us to stay peaceful and collected in the face of dispossession, dehumanization, and violence. How is that even possible? Although we might be expected by settler society to politically engage with their B.S. with love and light, we owe it to ourselves to let our rage out transformatively before our internal fires consume us. It's well past time to embrace the heat, transform the rage into action, and let our fire light the way to a future where Indigenous Peoples are in control of Indigenous Bodies and lands.

Part Four:
Fire Futurity

So, what does this mean for the future? It means a return to form. Indigenous Peoples and our knowledge systems have always been involved in constructing the future, whether you've considered it in detail or not. I've said time and time again that relationality is key to Indigenous ways of knowing and being. That relationality also includes future relations. The only way for us to arrive at a future fit for our relations yet to come is through embracing our fire, allowing it to combust in our engines of political action and resistance, and harnessing our resurgence into political action aimed at reclaiming and implementing our Traditional Ecological Knowledge. Although comparison is the thief of joy, we can look to the settler state of Australia for inspiration as to a path forward. Following the devastating wildfires from 2019 to 2020, there has been a push within mainstream Australian media to reincorporate

Indigenous-led fire management practices to prevent such devastation in the future (Smith et al., 2021). This act of proposed collaboration between Indigenous and settler populations of Australia represents the immense possibility Indigenous Knowledges, Peoples, and actions have in constructing a new future. Although the conversation of braiding Indigenous and settler fire management practices together has begun in Canada, we may not have the luxury of time before we face the flames of centuries of mismanagement (Hoffman et al., 2022). We must harness our fire in the fight to be heard and respected, but we need more than a respectful listening ear to ensure Indigenous futurity. To return to the words of Melissa K. Nelson (2019):

> *"Our struggles are about not only fighting and resisting, but also the human capacity to learn, grow, connect, repair, and love, despite the ongoing brutal atrocities continuing... on the Earth today," (p. 69).*

Although utilizing our rage and frustration to fuel our fires of change is crucial to establishing a future for us as Indigenous Peoples, our end goal is not to stay in that anger forever. The fire of our rage is a vehicle to arrive at the destinations of love, respect, dignity, sovereignty, and a return to what has been and continues to be taken from us (Flowers, 2015; Nelson, 2019; Simpson 2017). Although it is important to be able to control one's anger, we must not let that control become silence, and that silence become inaction. Our future, and the futures of those yet to come, depend on the fires we hold today (George et al., 2023).

Part Five:
Conclusion

Sadly, I continue to receive death threats as a result of an interview I did on churches being burned in the wake of breaking news of the mass graves from Residential Schools. In the 45-minute interview, the only answer they aired was not to the prepared list of questions, but the one asked after I thought we were finished - I said that in our world, Indigenous and Non-Indigenous, do not see eye to eye, that there needs to be conversations that are not being had. This is nothing new. I did not call for churches to burn - but many, let's just call them unhinged, people claimed that I was a terrorist for simply speaking a truth. Did I deserve that treatment? No. The CBC interview put an Indigenous woman in immediate harm. I am the one who has had to deal with the consequences of other people's actions. But, this has taught me an important lesson - one that is echoed in the experiences of many other Indigenous Peoples around the world - if you try to burn me, just wait for what regrows from the ashes. If you fuck around, you *will* find out. If you play with fire, it's a matter of time before you get *burned*. So make the decision, because the fire in me has never been extinguished.

Research Assistant(s): Senyuan Chen, Sam Dancey, Sharaya Hill, Jessica Morrison, Drake Worth

Keywords: *Indigenous Resistance/Resurgence, Environmental Stewardship, Indigenous Futurity, Fire Management, Indigenous Sovereignty*

Glossary

Iskotêw – *The element of fire; home-fire; hearth-fire.*

Wet'suwet'en – *A First Nation located in the central interior of British columbia, known for their land defense efforts.*

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Season 3, Episode 3:

Honey Girl

Iskotêw, Sharaya Hill and Paulina Johnson

Synopsis: As an auntie, I experience the joys of teaching and sharing, but it is also reciprocal. I get to see myself in the eyes of a child who tells me new insights and hope that grounds me in a worldview that is often left behind. Honey Girl came into my family's life over two years ago, and in those months, we watched her learn to speak, sing, dream, and imagine. Her life has changed ours, but in her spirit lies the overarching lesson of what it means to have familial love and connection. Kinship ties bring us to know this world deeper in the care and warmth we share. This episode is for Indigenous children so they may never forget their role and importance in everyday life.

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Part One:
Honey Girl

> *"We need to be brave girls."*

Those words came from the wisest two-year-old I have ever met. Now, three years old, she has taught me more about myself than I could have ever imagined. And while the context was about how she had found my flashlight and it had elicited a newfound journey to go on an adventure in the dark, those words floated in and out of my mind as I dealt with my everyday life. Be brave. To be brave means we are willing to put ourselves into positions of uncertainty, with elements that we cannot control, despite not knowing what the outcome may be.

When Honey Girl came to my family, she had little hairs that stood on top of her head and a beaming smile that shines just as brightly today. While she couldn't talk then, she now calls me "Pawna," and is eager for the chance to play every day and all games with me. She listens attentively to every joke I make, and picks up on the chance to mimic me in probably not my best moments, but bravery and courage, she has taught me a newfound hope and aspiration in myself. My parents did not know anything but to give her love - that love and commitment was at first sixty days, and now, two years later, she is a Johnson, through and through. There is no world without her by our sides, and I want her to grow up knowing that she is the bravest girl that I have ever known, not because of the damage that is told time and time again about children in the child welfare system, but because she willingly gives love without hesitation. I imagine a world where she wouldn't have to know racism, colonialism, and ignorance, and that love that she holds within her remains whole.

She taught me to be brave and show up every day, even when I wasn't my best self. She taught me to be okay with moving forward and not holding on to the past when it seems so close. It's her ability to communicate without words, holding my dad's head to hers when she first came to us, her admiration and love of my mom, hearing my siblings and me tell each other we love each other, and her knowing that she is very much part of that love.

What Honey Girl doesn't know yet is that while many think she needed us, we needed her. Her love, her laughter, her side eye, which I definitely taught her. But Eagle Spirit Girl will grow into a beautiful, intelligent, and wise Nêhiyawiskwêw who will never doubt the love around her, will never have to search for answers of her worth or feel inadequate in this world because my family and all that we are will stand around her like our Ancestors have always done and the teachings of what kinship means, time and time again, will flow through our generations into her.

This episode is for children who know the child welfare system all too well. Let me carry your spirit while you recharge your home fire within mine.

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Part Two:
What is Indigenous Love and Care?

Let's start with a word: Sâkihitowin. That's Cree for *love*, not just the "text your snag back" kind. It's love that moves through family, community, and self. It's love as protection, as guidance, as a force that says, "I see you, I hold space for you, I got you." And let's be real—this love has had to endure, adapt, and resist. Anishinaabekwe Eva Jewell describes zaagidowin as "*our first knowledge from which we strive to make our choices*" to lead the good life and in which care is rooted (Doucet et al., 2024, p. 113). This is the real stuff: love that moves, through the way we show up for each other, no questions asked. It's me giving Honey Girl or as I call her, Bebe, candy even though I know Luci's going to have my head. It's my cousin roasting me mercilessly but also ready to throw hands if anyone else tries it, you know that's Kim. It's protection. It's care. It's the kind of love that doesn't need to be spoken, and it's demonstrated in action.

Kisâkihitin does not mean *I love you*; it means "You are loved by me." This might seem like a small difference, but it is important. I am not acting on you or possessing you when I say kisâkihitin. Your being is at the forefront; you come first. The colonial way of possession has no role in the way kisâkihitin is delivered. Love in this way should seem simple, right? But here's a question—when was the last time a government policy said that to an Indigenous child? Because the message they actually get is more like: You're being taken. You don't belong here. The system knows best. Yeah. Real warm and fuzzy... So, what is care? Well, first I'll tell you what it's not: it's not a government agency deciding what's "best" for a child without even knowing their community. It's not removing children from their families at rates higher than any other group and then acting surprised when that causes harm. Jewell describes this sort of "care" as a way of shaping Indigenous kids in the settler's eye, having children, quote, "subjected to violence as a necessary means to their maturation" as Canadians, and essentially is the "killing the Indian in the child". This is made necessary not just for Indigenous kids, but settlers also make it necessary for themselves, as part of building and maintaining a settler world; or, in Jewell's words, "[t]he care for and civilizational progress of Indigenous [P]eoples became a moral duty for the settler state". Jewell calls this sort of care the "dark side of care" enacted on several generations of Indigenous children" - it really says something about the evil that can come out of the settler imagination when it can find a way to transform something fundamentally good like "care" into genocide. Cree scholar Megan Scribe conceptualizes this twisted type of caring as "colonial care" (Doucet, et al., 2024, p. 113).

But real care? Jewell describes *this* kind of care as "the loving actions of our Ancestors [and] the protection they tried to secure for us" (p. 114). It's the way the community steps in, not out. It's how love isn't just a feeling; it's a responsibility. It's the feeling of being rooted, being held, being chosen. Because, let's be honest, for Indigenous kids, staying in their families, in their communities, is not always a given—it's a battle. Even when the child is in a kinship home, there is a battle to legitimize the family. Not the needs of Honey Girl. No, she gets to catch butterflies and go on excursions outside in the medicine garden looking for all sorts of bugs and animals. Watching the "maggies" go by - the current term used to refer to all birds because of the magpie on "Steve and Maggie." Or watching "Danny Go" and dancing to her favourite song "The Animal Song," or singing "Let it Go" in Karaoke. No, all this is not seen

when it is a battle over funding and finances. I won't dive too deep into those realities. Still, the truth is, the battle over where she is loved should never be questioned, let alone in a colonial court system that has been used as a weapon against Indigenous families since contact. The only battle Honey Girl should ever know is whether or not I am still the baby girl in the family, and since she has become the core of our family, I think I've lost that battle every single time.

Part Three:

The System is Working to Disrupt Indigenous Families

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission included a report on the history and the impact of Residential Schools. You'd think that hearing over 6000 Indigenous Peoples telling their survival stories would turn away the government from implementing these types of systems (National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2017). Well, you'd be wrong. So, here we are with the Child Welfare System. The modern residential schools, if you will. Yep. If residential schools were the original blueprint for breaking up Indigenous communities, the modern child welfare system is the shiny, government-funded sequel that no one asked for.

Now you might find that too abrasive, but once we dive a little deeper, you'll see. Let's hit the stats. Indigenous children make up less than 8% of the child population in Canada, but somehow make up over 50% of kids in care (Indigenous Services Canada, 2024). And this isn't a coincidence. This is by design. The system doesn't "accidentally" keep Indigenous children away from their families. It intentionally does this with excessive red tape, wrapping up Indigenous kids like gifts to be regifted. Residential schools operated under the idea that Indigenous parents were unfit or "not civilized enough" to raise their own children. By using an argument that sounds more caring, and social workers instead of priests, children were removed from Indigenous homes and put into more "proper", recognizable, nuclear Canadian families, especially those apprehended and taken during the Sixties' Scoop (Spencer & Sinclair, 2025). Today? The same message gets repackaged as "child welfare." Some people even call what is happening today the "Millennium Scoop" (Spencer & Sinclair, 2025). One of the biggest reasons Indigenous children are taken is because of "neglect" or what appears to be "neglect". Which is basically colonizer for "poverty." And what's causing that poverty? Oh, I don't know—centuries of stolen land, broken treaties, and economic oppression? Basically colonialism, but let's not call it for what it truly is.

Wild right? What a wild concept. If the government really wanted to stop Indigenous kids from living in poverty, maybe they could stop keeping Indigenous Peoples in poverty. Instead, they just take the children and place them in non-Indigenous homes, and provide money to those non-Indigenous homes to support raising the kids-money that could have been given in the first place to the *Indigenous* families or funding for families in communities (Kristjansson, 2024). Where they end up losing their culture, their language, and any connection to their community. Which, by the way, violates their human rights. But sure, tell me more about how the system is "doing its best." As one social worker who participated in the Sixties Scoop puts it so clearly,

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> *"There shouldn't be so many kids for adoption, because we fucked up the community - excuse me. I've worked in enough communities to see the struggle with health care, water, housing, all of this. Of course, you'll have problems - that's a problem with child welfare, generally - period - they don't deal enough with prevention stuff. So, that just goes doubly for Indigenous People."* (Spencer & Sinclair, 2025, p. 198).

Let's be real—if the system actually cared about child welfare, they'd be funding Indigenous families, not *removing* Indigenous children. Imagine if the government spent as much money keeping Indigenous families *together* as they do on foster care placements, court battles, and "investigations." Instead, it has been making programs like Adopt-Indian-Métis and permanency planning, where Indigenous kids served as cost-savings for the government and there was financial incentive for settler families (Kristjansson, 2024). It's like setting someone's house *on fire* and then charging them rent to *live in the ashes.*

It's not as if the Canadian government has nothing to work with. In 2019, Bill C-92 passed with the advocacy of Cindy Blackstock (Gitxsan). Bill C-92 officially recognizes that Indigenous children are in *Indigenous* communities' and families' jurisdiction (Spencer & Sinclair, 2025). I can't say that it actually plays out that way for all Indigenous children (Kristjansson, 2024), but the Canadian government can't claim that they're not aware of the violence of removing Indigenous children from their families. The Canadian government might not recognize our relations with each other in our communities, or it might misinterpret our kinship structures to be a form of neglect, as social work did during the Sixties Scoop (Spencer & Sinclair, 2025), but they *do* know that they are to respect them.

Part Four:
Eagle Spirit Woman

She wore a white kôkom scarf and the ribbon skirt I made her when she entered the Sun Dance lodge. Her little hands were placed on the center pole, and she received her spirit name. Okîsikow Kihêw Iskwêw, *Eagle Spirit Woman,* was called and cheers surrounded her by those in attendance as they grounded who she represents and will be for the rest of her life. Her guardians and representatives made themselves known to carry her spirit high up into the spirit world for Ancestors, Family, and the like, all to know her. Her energy, her warmth, her humour, and laughter were on full display as she was welcomed into our Nation and community to be known. Once named she found her favourite animal, the horse, in the nearby field. Or, what she likes to call "neigh neighs". Telling everyone to catch it so she could ride it. The day was joyous and calm - it was a ceremony but also a regeneration. Of continuation and admiration for all that Creator has gifted us.

Gifts such as those in the Grandfather Teachings, has Kihêw, the *Eagle*, represented as sâkihitowin, *love*. Bebe is going to grow into our family and her community. She will learn our love *in our presence*. Not in cold, detached institutions, but in the arms that hold her the way our Ancestors intended. And let me tell you, that's a whole different level of understanding—one that child welfare systems *still* can't seem to wrap their heads around. This is the kind of love Bebe will grow up in. She will learn

respect and freedom not as privileges but as a birthright (Simpson, 2020, p.8). She will hear the language of her Ancestors, not just in stories, but in her everyday life—when mom calls her in for tea, when she sits in ceremony or when she hears her name spoken with care. She will know traditions, ceremonies, songs, and teachings—not as artifacts, but as living, breathing parts of her identity. And most importantly? She will fall in love. With the land, with the people, with a way of being that was always meant for her.

Billy-Ray Belcourt considers how Indigenous People, as quoted, "enact care against the embargo on care that is Canada" (2020, p. 19). When I think of Bebe and our family, I think of the word wâhkôhtowin. Wâhkôhtowin roughly translates to *kinship*. And within Indigenous Knowledge, wâhkôhtowin separates itself from the North American model, which holds its "belief in the superiority of the ideal nuclear family" (Stevenson, 2020, p. 53). But care is not about calling whatever doesn't fit the Canadian ideal "neglectful" (Spencer & Sinclair, 2025); it isn't about fitting Indigenous children into settler boxes. The confines of blood relations do not bind kinship; instead, kinship can be used to form "a network that potentially embraces[s] all members of society" (Stevenson, 2020, p. 50). Relationality and love are not just bone-deep. Adoption has existed within Indigenous Societies long before colonial rule and their imposition of what was and wasn't deemed to be kin. Adoption before colonization worked to create homes and families where it may have been lost; it enabled lineages to continue, so that "children were cared for, and strangers were transformed into kin" (Stevenson, 2020, p. 48). Kinship is everywhere-it's in the smiles you give, the food you share, the love you hold for others; it is not a legal order that can be thrown around to those deemed fit and taken from others-it lives inside us. Kinship holds its own cultural values and guides us morally. How you hold relations dictates so much about how you live and those you live around; it creates a "collective responsibility" (Anderson, 2011, p. 70) to care for those around you. It makes community a place where children can run free with a house always around a corner where they can go and belong.

Part Five:
Conclusion

Honey Girl will continue to love as she has always done so. She will wrap herself in the words that make up her vocabulary of kindness and compassion. Her love of all Creation will be felt in the presence of our Ancestors and trickle throughout our bloodline. My children will look at her with admiration as I do now. She was sung from the stars to be brought to our family. She was seen first by a see-er who told my parents she was coming. Her fearlessness will be her ultimate weapon in the world, a world that I cannot always shield her from. But I will be there with her, without question, without reason other than I love her. Auntie loves you - in this life and on our way to immortality.

The kind of love we're talking about—it doesn't translate well in English. English makes love sound like something you can own, something small enough to be boxed in. But our language? It holds love like the land holds water—everywhere, moving, flowing, shaping, and filling the cracks. That love is not the same. When we say Sâkihitowin, it's not just "*love*." It's a living thing. It moves through you, within you, and

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around you. It is care and protection. It is a blazing, eternal fire that will warm you for life.

And when we say Kisâkihitin and Sâkihitowin, we aren't just saying words. We're reaching across time, across loss, across everything that was meant to break us, and saying: You were never unloved, even when they told you otherwise. Even when they made you feel disposable. You were loved by us. You are still loved and always will be.

For some of you, that love might feel distant. Maybe you grew up in a place where love wasn't soft, where care came with conditions or expectations, and where no one ever taught you that you were sacred or more importantly, deadly. But listen—love, real love, the kind our Ancestors carried—homefire, the kind that moves through our children—it is still yours. You don't have to earn it. You don't have to prove you deserve it. And if you don't believe that yet, that's okay. We will wait for you to remember. As we have always done. And so, from the bottom of my heart, Kisâkihitin

Honey Girl

B: Hi! My name is Lani.

Dr. J: And what do we call you? What does Auntie call you?

B: Lani.

Dr. J: Lani girl.

B: I'm Honey Girl.

Dr. J: And do you want to sing "You Are My Sunshine?"

B: Okay.

Dr. J: Let's sing. Ready?

B: You are my sunshine, my only sunshine. You make me happy when skies are grey. You'll never know dear how much I love you. Please, don't take my sunshine away.

Research Assistant(s): Sharaya Hill, Senyuan Chen, and Giovanni Ursella

Keywords: *Love/Sâkihitowin, Care, Kinship/Wâhkôhtowin, Child Welfare, Kinship Placement*

Glossary

Kisâkihitin – *I love you*

Sâkihitowin – *Love*

Wâhkôhtowin– *Kinship*

Zaagidowin – *Love in Anishinaabemowin, the Anishinaabe language*

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Season 3, Episode 4:

Through the Eyes of the Thunderbird

Iskotêw and Paulina Johnson
With Paul and Luci Johnson

Synopsis: With a foot in each world, how [0:20 do I] does Dr. Johnson navigate the realities of two worlds clashing? What better way to understand the drive, passion, light, and energy of being an academic than to hear from those closest to [0:31 me] her? In an authentic, truthful, and no-holds-barred conversation, [0:38 I want you to meet] Paul and Luci, [0:40 my] Dr. Johnson's parents, [0:41 and we're going to] talk about what they have seen their daughter go through these past years and what it means to support [0:46 me] her through [0:47 the] various means [0:48 that they do].

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Part One:
The Call of the Thunderbird

Piyêsiw, the Thunderbird, is more than just a story about a legend of the past. The Thunderbird is an energy and life force that connects us with assertiveness and passion for healing. Kâh-kitowak, in my people's language of Nêhiyawêwin, refers to how the Thunderbirds are calling - a sensation of knowing that the energy and sky will change. That is, change for betterment rather than chaos or destruction. The Late Elder Whitehead Moose from the Pikangikum First Nation in Ontario tells a story that the Thunderbird had power through their eyes to start fires, especially in regions that needed new, fresh plants and life. The Thunderbird allowed the land to heal itself from being overused through the life found after the fire had raged through. This concept of growth after destruction is vital for traditional land use sites, especially for Indigenous scholars.

Through the eyes of the Thunderbird, a force often perceived as destructive can [2:11 actually] be generative, as a powerful force for futurity and growth. From the static in the atmosphere to the lightning strike, it is an untameable force seen as rage, but in practice, it is protection and care. It is a sensation that raises the hair on our necks as we feel the full force of a reaction [2:36 about to] occur. The electricity creates energy that can be passed on through each of us through love and connection, rage and grief, and even hope and leadership.

When I tell you that the Thunderbirds are calling, it is not just the rain that will be met with thunder and lightning cracks, but the very energy of what it means to be Nêhiyaw today. So many times I imagined what it would be like to be a Thunderbird - never seen, but respected and acknowledged for the power of its hidden presence. I am often uncertain about what representation is expected of me in the spaces I occupy. Do I bring the fire and passion of the energy of my spirit, or do I tame that fire within, forcing me to be anything but my whole self? The Thunderbird can have emotions, but I cannot in Canadian society; [3:41 but] we are the same. I am of the sky and have carried the Thunderbird in my arms. I have taught them just as they have taught me. They have taught me to fight the horned serpents of this land, just as many other Indigenous Nations in North America who have similar stories of the great serpents have told before me. This time, though, the horned serpent is a metaphor for the society I find myself in. And in my experience, the horns are academia.

Many ask me how I can withstand a world that is not made for Indigenous Peoples. Well, it's the very support system I have that allows me to be who I am and will always be. I think it's time for you to meet Paul and Luci and learn how I let the fire in me create a new path forward for all that comes after.

Part Two:
Nohtawiy ekwa Nikawiy, Paul and Luci

[4:52] Dr J: So one of the reasons why I brought you guys here to be on this episode is specifically to talk about, like, academia, and how... you guys are all familiar with, like, one, the struggles of having to be Indigenous and having that representation of

who I am, is at contrast often with having to be palatable - or, you know, something that I'm not. And, uh, you guys have talked to me quite a bit about it - about what I needed to be for myself. And so I wanted to get your perspective on what that means for you, from, like, an outside looking in point of view.

[5:34] Paul: Well that's a complicated question - of course your role was twofold, in that you had one academia, obviously, and because we're a close family, and how you struggled with a decision [on] where to go to school and whatnot. It was like a- it was a unique situation where you were accepted to two schools at the same time, and one was close - well, not necessarily close, it was just a province over - while the other one was across the country. And at that time I would- that conversation, we talked and in addition to academia, you were happy as hell. You were so proud that you were accepted to both schools - and you were also disappointed that the one school that you chose didn't accept you, and that was fine. And I told you at the time that the path is predetermined for you. You had to choose, and this is where you choose where your heart goes; it may be farther from us, but it may be the best thing for you. And so off you went to Western.

[6:25] That being said, you were pretty, um, wide-eyed, I guess in the sense that you were- you had a sense of academia, how it worked [at] the school and college, and [the] University of Alberta. But then you went out [east], it was a different story for you, that you were going to a part of Canada we had never really been to. So I can remember when we packed up your car and took you over, and that was a long trip. But we had fun - and then I stayed for a little bit, and I remember that you struggled a little bit when I left. But that was okay, because it was meant to be.

[6:59] That being said, you went on your academic journey. And I remember you calling me and telling me what your experiences were every day in school like that, and how eventually - I never really contacted you, I let you be, I just text you every day [and] see how you're doing. Just checking- touching in, and, uh, let you be. And you'd tell me your struggles; obviously you had some highs and lows. The funniest story you'd tell me was like, when you were in class, and it was an Indigenous topic, everybody would turn around and look at you. And the biggest, funniest thing when you took one of those classes out there -- in the Indigenous classes there -- because you had some basis, roots, in your Cree language, you excelled at it. And a lot of the students that were of that culture were failing compared to you, and [they were] asking how you do it - and you just said you listened. And I can remember that distinct conversation that's - oh my gosh that's quite a few years ago.

[7:58]And like you said it became more palatable for you, I guess being out there, and we got used to that routine where you'd be there for your six, seven months, and come back. And then you moved in the summer - you were a busy lady! You went to Boston, you went to New York - so you kept yourself busy, and I think that was the ideal for you to do what you needed to do, and that uh, you knew that home was always going to be there. Yeah - and then when you were ready you'd come back, and then things change, and you did things differently. You went to work for the government a little bit, and then you moved on. And because- that's why I told you; no matter where you are at the time, it meant it was good for you to go move on.

[8:40]And then we always talked that conversation - well, who do you talk about - you know, that situation where people are your problem, or if people don't like you and all that stuff. And it's - until recently - I used to tell you that it's not your problem; it's theirs. And now I've come to [the] realization [that] when most people do not like you; that's a them problem. You know? That's not your problem. And like I said, when someone's mad at you? That's their problem, again that's their problem you know. Their reason for some reason may be petty - and if they're not telling you why they're mad, that's [their] problem again. It's not your problem to move and wait, and hover, and wait, and cry, and whatever. It's just- move on and live your life. And sometimes the biggest obstacle in life is to move on and forget, and move past, and live in life's changing moment[s] - or keep it as experience so that things happen for a reason, and here we are.

[9:32] In 2025, things have changed so much in our lives, for you, me, and your mother; now we have a little person in our lives, and she's awesome! So that sense, it's unique how she affects your life and everybody else in our family; it's like she was a missing cog that made a more complete circle now, now like that.

[9:52] Luci: I'm trying to remain calm (laughter). Because I giggle. But for me as your mom, I just said that you wake up every day; you've been blessed another day. For me, watching you go across the country, I was like: right on! I get to go travel again! Just jump on the plane and go visit my daughters; one in London, and one in Montreal. And then come back this way and go out west to see your other sister in Vancouver. So for me it was an opportunity to travel - jump on a plane and go visit for the weekend and come right back. By the time you went to school there was- your two older sisters were already out of the province, so it was easy to let you go. And then I kept your son- I mean your brother, almost like your son because he had basically four moms - he was not going anywhere, he was going to stay in Alberta, which made it a little easier for me.

[10:41] But I got the opportunity to go travel, which was great for me, working in the courts, and to get out of the community; the ones that I see in the community I see in court. But it was good, because I got to go to [the] USA shopping and things like that, just to, you know, make sure all of my girls were okay. I've seen some struggles for you, and I know we heard comments as parents, and it was like - whatever! They don't like you? Tell them to turn their face! That's how I got through when I was a child with my mom in academia - with her in academia, too. If they didn't like us? Turn their face! You didn't like the way that my hair looked, don't look at it! That's how I taught all three of you, my daughters, not really my son - not really your brother - but all three of you, to get through these tough things that you had to do.

[11:28] And it, you know, it worked -- you just had to keep striving. I left my cell on so you could call and express your thoughts, and all your grievances. And it was hard as a mom to let you go, but I had to let you go. I had to let you spread your wings, and just go. Because you are not only our legacy - you're leaving your own tracks with the teachings and parenting we taught all four of you. And I'm proud to say all my kids are high school graduates, and university graduates - and nobody can ever take that away from us. But you did it. You did it with the support of your dad and I, and you never looked back; don't ever look back. You've done what you need to do, and move forward. If you piss people off, that's okay; it just means that you're taking the space

in the universe that Creator has already mapped you out for. And it's good because I see you opening doors, not just for yourself but for your students, for your family, for Lealani - our little boss of the house. She's changed you and your sisters and your brother - not so much your brother - but your sisters, because now you become like you did with your brother, you become little moms to her, too.

[12:55] So she's got, again, four moms that she- you guys guide her and you ground her - she grounds you. When we had our family meeting, when we were bringing her in, I knew it was going to change our lives, but it hasn't changed so much that we've had to upset ourselves, because she just- almost immediately came into our lives, and the structure and the boundaries, and the grounding that she needed she gets from all of us, and that includes spending time at the University of Alberta. She calls your team her- 'my best friends; where's my friends at?' Everyday she asks about the friends - but that's the importance of you being frontline at the university through your academia. Those three little letters behind your name? They mean so much for you because you achieved that for yourself. Not your dad and I, not your sisters, your brother, or little Lani; you did that yourself. And you're kicking doors wide open as a First Nations Woman and I'm proud of you for that.

[14:04] Dr. J: One of the hardest [conversations] I've had to have with Lani is because she always asks me, she's like "you're a doctor?" and I'm like, yes. And she's like "you help people?" and I'm like, not that kind of doctor. But like, I said to her - in a way, maybe, I help people. And then I explained to her that I'm a professor, and then she's like, we're going to the big office? So I think that she calls that the campus - but I think that like, much of what helped me do the podcast and my work lately has been her. She's been a menace, but she's been like a good menace. And, um, I think that's why I really wanted to start this - because she came immediately, what, the week after our first season launch? Or before? She came a week before the first season launch, and she's just been at every single one since then. And I think that that legacy part is really important, because it's like, who you do it for. And I think when you come from community, come from family and the like, that's why we do what we do, even though there's [those] hardships, that loneliness, there's that - often sometimes separation. And so that's really helped me continue to remember who I am and what I want to be.

[15:26] Luci: With Lealani on the grounds, making her tracks at Uof A, too, I was fortunate enough to attend daycare there when my mom was going to school. So it made a lot of sense going over with- she'd be my mom, your kôkum's, fifth generation. So five generations of walking across the University of Alberta to achieve what you need to do for academia, it makes a lot of sense because we're right where we need to be. In our ways, déjà vu, or walking across those same steps; those were already pre-planned for us to be there. So it's good to see that you're still standing there in the same steps that, me as your mom, and your grandma, Grace - it's so important to see that Lealani walks by those same steps where I attended daycare there. Eons ago, at least. I think I was only five; now all of our steps are there at the University of Alberta.

[16:19] Paul: Your mom's story is still obviously a little different from mine, and my parents didn't go to university, but it was okay. They did what they needed to do in the times when residential school existed, and as you know, it was back in the time when they were at that age level where First Nations were not allowed to go to school, and

academia. Now that's the biggest thing like, people are not really talking about that. That's not that long ago - it's been in my lifetime. That, uh- for example for [when] you went to school, you did all your high school and everything - [it would've been] tough to get into school in that time. Because realistically they'd expect you to forget the Native behind you - or the Indian; you'd have to give up your status to go to school. And then there's those people that fought those battles back in the day. I think they were heroes, because they pushed that door open for you - now you're pushing more doors open. It was just a crack when it was back in the sixties, when they opened the door for First Nations to go to school, and even now, in academia, the chance of First Nations' going to school and achieving university-level education [is] still minimal at best. But it's getting better, and I think that's the part where you and- that you've shown people, and [how you attract] people from other First Nations - not only just in Maskwacîs, but across Canada they're [listening] to your podcast and seeing what you've done. And they see that - in their community - that if you can do it, I can do it too. And that's the part I love. Because you can do anything you want nowadays - [there's] two or three regions, because they were still obviously in Alberta, where racism has always been rampant, and [it was] still proven [with] the past election we just saw; now we got separatist ideas. So, whatever - and people saying that the treaties don't mean much, and that we could still follow it with separation.

[18:01] Well I guess it's- I think for academia, for you, I've seen this, like you said you've mentioned struggles. Like, they've had issues with, you know, teachers and stuff in the past - and that's okay, and I told you to just let it go. At the time, a lot of times you- I think you had a problem listening to that observation to just let it go. Because sometimes you can't control what people say. Now I've always said that to you guys; you can't control what people think of you. Now if you worry about that, then you're stuck in a hole - and you just move past that - and you've got to keep moving. Sometimes you may hurt people's feelings [by not listening, and] they take it that you're slighting them because you're not giving them that- they're looking for validation of their anger at you, and that's not your issue. And I think that hurts them more, and they can become more resentful, and that's their problem. Again, at the end of the day, who cares? That's a they problem and not yours. So, you move forward and do your thing - and uh, not necessarily kick the door open, but strut through it like you have already. And be proud of who you are. I like that - actually, I love it.

[19:01] Luci: And I can add to that, the parenting that your dad and I provided for you; you just lay your grounding down. You be proud of who you are, and if they have a problem - [you're] living in their brain, then that's their brain-frame; so, whatever. You just keep going on with life, and [it's] going to come with challenges - [it's] going to come along with that one person that's going to give you a hard time, but I've always told you girls, and even your dad Paul that, if they've got a problem with you, just give a smile. Walk, dance, strut out of there - spin your moccasins and away you go! Because there's one person that's going to be- that's going to have more issues with you than what you have with somebody else, and that person there is going to set them straight. So just go humbly through where you need to go, and every day you wake up blessed. So do what you've been doing, and don't worry about what other people think. That's the hardest thing people don't understand is; don't care what anybody says, in reasoning. If you're there, standing there, somebody guided you to where you're sitting in society - take your place! And don't move from it.

[20:16] Dr. J: What would you tell me, if you knew what you knew now, if I was going to Western again?

[20:24] Paul: For me, nothing. I think I- at that time - it was the right thing to say. You can't look back and say, with regret - because part of regret is part of who we are. Sometimes I could've pushed hard and been mean to you? I don't know - I've never been mean to you, so I don't know, that's not my personality. But I was out there to support you guys, and any questions you had, I did my best to help you guys. I'm not a rich man by any means, but I did my best and when you needed that help, I tried my best to get you guys that - to where you needed to be. So that; I wouldn't change a thing. I'd do the same thing again. Because I think you made the right decision at that time, for you, and look where you are right now. Like, wow! Like I said, this is your third season, and it's flourishing as far as I'm concerned! You're doing awesome, and in the meantime like, we have Lealani now and she's - I don't know - she's that extra spice that adds to our gravy of life, and the family. You know she came at a time when we needed her, and even though we thought our life was perfect - nobody's life is ever perfect, but she added that extra spice! And now she's - wow - I can't picture life without her, really. And in your family, and involved in your life - truthfully she's your minion! When you [speak] she listens, and it's like, even for me and mum she is like- she wants to be with us, but when you're in the room? She's; 'okay see you! I'm gone!' She's going to run and ditch us for whatever, and so it's like you're giving her that independence that we gave you. And that's awesome!

[22:02] Dr. J: I will call her mini-me! [all laugh]

[22:06] Paul: That sounds pretty good.

[22:07] Luci: I think letting you go, too, I know when I had to, um. We drove two cars out there, out to London and to Montreal, we just had to do what we needed to do as parents - plus I got to go shopping in the US at Target and whatnot, eat whatever was there, which is a bonus for us - we took you out there and we had to make it short. [We] dropped you off in London, left the same day to take your sister to Montreal, dropped her off - spent the night - dropped her off, and then came right back to London, and came right back to Alberta. But we had to do that - make it short - so not just you, but us, we had a long journey going there and coming back. Forty-four hundred kilometers one way, you're ten days on the road, your butt's numb by the time you hit the Alberta border, Canadian border. But we had to do what we had to do just to get you there. Feelings or not - we just had to. We just had to get you there! And I'm proud that you went over there because it opened doors for you to be in Boston - we got to go to Boston with you, with our other little granddaughters Mercedes and Makayla - and we got to see other things that, if you were out here, out West, we wouldn't have seen, you know the Plymouth Rock, or Martha's [Vineyard] and eat at In-N-Out Burger or Weinersnitchel. So, you know, there's bonuses by taking you, and the heartache of leaving you there. It's not like we don't trust you, it's the other people we don't trust; it's like when you guys were first starting to drive. You know, I let you drive my Camaro around and I was like- oh no, she's on the road now! But I trusted you, it's all the other people I didn't trust to wreck my first family car. And yeah, so it was just- we had to be strong parents to have a strong daughter too, so you could get where you needed [to be] with your master's and your PhD.

[23:47] Dr. J: So all I hear is I will never get the Camaro back...

[23:50] Luci: No. [laughter from Dr. J] That was my first family car and that Camaro sits in my garage; '87 White Rock.

[23:56] Paul: Probably not.

[23:59] Luci: You can drive your dad's! [more laughter] You can drive your dad's Camaro, but you're not driving your mom's. I let you use it in high school to be the cool kid, and I became the cool mom, but whatever, no. You'll never drive it.

[24:11] Dr. J: I thought you were going to start with 'one upon a time!'

[24:14] Luci: I was going to start but you kind of looked at me like 'I'm a doctor! You ain't gonna start with one-upon-a-time!' One-upon-a-time, there was this little girl named Paulina - and that's the version that Lealani says when we read her books at nighttime. One-upon-a-time, we're sitting here, doing a story for you for your podcast, and I need to get going because I've got things to do.

[24:39] Dr. J: Basically mom's on Bebe-duty. [laughter from Dr. J]

[24:43] Luci: It's fun! The second time parenting is fun. It's more relaxing, not the same as parenting you four -but parenting is- we have more time, we have more opportunities with her. I can take off in the middle of the day if she wants to go to the zoo, so. I haven't changed my parenting with all four of you, but this one's more relaxing, and plus we can afford it now, being at our age.

[25:08] Paul: Yeah, a little more resources helps a lot, definitely. But at the same time, costs have gone up for kids, too, so. It's comparable that - like, I can remember when I was going to school, buying two four-liter milks that came in a two-pack in California, and at that time it was only-I think it cost, if I recall, just three bucks. Now those milks, if you bought them at the same time, it'd be fourteen in Canada! So, it gives you an idea - and even with the exchange rate - that would've been five, six dollars. So, things have changed and advanced in cost, but at the same time it's made it easier because our median has come up, too. But, like I said, it's fortunate that we have those means right now. And that, I would say, is fortunate, fortunate. Don't take everything for granted, and that's- you have to remember that [nothing] comes easy, so far, and you've noticed that, too. In your academia, nothing comes easy - but to a certain degree, I think it does for you. You have something that - it's hard to explain. You can't bottle it, it's something that- it's charisma. For whatever [reason, whenever] you come into a room everybody like- you become the focus, and I think that- I love it when people- I watch from off in the corner in the office [or room], and you walk in and everybody's eyes are all towards you, and they all- they know something, that you're going to say something or do something. And I think that's where you attract so many people that come into your life - good or bad - and many times the biggest thing you have to learn in your life is that you always attract good people, and sometimes you'll get a bad [one] who's there for some nefarious reason. And trust your instinct - a lot of the time instinct says: hmm, what's that person here for? And ask yourself - you question that - and then be mindful of that. And don't always - like you don't always have to be an open-book. It's nice to keep a few chapters to yourself.

That's the way I look at it, so, nobody needs to know all your secrets. But, that's okay to show some people; hey, this is what I can do, and don't be scared of me, I'm here to help.

[27:01] Things you're doing at the U of A right now, people are a little scared of what you can do, and they're a little apprehensive to what you offer. And I think if they let you do what you need to do, I think they'll be fine. In the end they'll see that, hey, you're not the obstacle, you're here to push away the obstacles. [Academia is] cutthroat from what I've seen, from what people are like towards each other. Especially now that they know like - when this was back in twenty-seventeen we were talking about pretendians, and now it's become more prevalent. And you mentioned it - you saw that back in twenty-seventeen how, at that time you were getting your doctorate, how many people were using perceived Indigeneity [or] Indigenous bloodline that they have. They maybe tip-toe over it, if anything at all, or none at all. And they can - especially now with certain cultures - certain Indigenous People in Canada can self-identify. [Even] they're getting better that they have to prove- they have to show a lenience towards a family who has to be - [everything] changed for the better in the last eight years, where Indigenous People have become not a side-thought at the university, but something that's an incredible part of the university. And things have changed so much that people have been kicked out of university, and people have been forced to apologize for being non-Indigenous, but for pretending they are.

[28:02] [Going] back to our conversation back in - not saying any names - back in London you told me like, that person shouldn't be here. [At] that time I told you, it's okay, she'll be found out. And we left it at that, don't worry about it, don't waste any time or tears on that person, their behaviour. They'll be found out, and I imagine they have been. I've never looked back at that story if that person's still there -- I don't know if you have yourself. But as you read through papers and articles and news, stuff like- so many teachers and former professors who are even so-called 'rock-legends,' or folk [musicians] that [we] have found out are not Indigenous - fake tan and all! Like, you never had that issue, because [for] you, like me, we tan pretty good, so we can't disguise who we are. We can't fake it with a fake tan because we have a - pretty funny [laughter] - here we are. And like I said, it goes back to when we were in California and like, we almost, because we looked so Cree, close to Latino, and how you could've been a [telenovela] star, if we said yes to that agent. Imagine that; Dr. Johnson could've been a [telenovela] star! Ooh! And you could've spoke Spanish to us, and we wouldn't have had a clue what she was saying!

[29:40] Luci: You were into Barney then, so who knows, you could've picked up some Spanish words. But in light of everything that - all the words we're sharing with you today - just remember that you've got an amazing research team that helps you. And they look up to you, and it's so nice to know that. Where you're sitting as a professor at the U of A, you've got a lot of students who listen to you, and that's the biggest thing, is the words that are said to them, and they're absorbing that and using it in their everyday life. It's good to see that. Keep standing [your] ground, stay where you are - you're not going anywhere. Just come home when you need a grounding; like I've always said, leave the concrete jungle - I'm going to continue to say that to you and your siblings. Come home, have some bannock, have some - I know you used to call it 'ugly soup,' but as a mom [of] a busy family of six - that's hamburger soup, it fills you up, and it's soul food. So come back, have that, play with Lealani, let her

terrorize you for a little bit, and then your spirit's grounded back where it needs to be, refreshed, and then you go back to the university. And hopefully all your goals and achievements that you want to do for the year get done - and have fun, too, is the other thing!

[30:54] When you're too busy, your body will let you know - take the time off, go to the spa, go get your nails done, go get your hair did. Be who you want to be as a Native Woman. Eat the foods that make you healthy, and talk to the people that inspire you - you know, it's the circle of life how everything's blessed, between where you are as a professor. And don't berate your song - you know that graduation song that they talk about is, wear sunscreen? I usually listen to that song once a month because it grounds me - all the things I have to deal with in the courtroom. [And] if somebody gets after you? I've always told you girls; go and buy yourself something! I don't care what it was - buy yourself a bottle of shampoo, a purse, or some food that's going to help you; that's your self-sacrifice to empowering your own self. You've got to learn how to love yourself from within - nobody can ever give that to you - and once you learn to love yourself, that's the longest journey [anybody] will ever have, is from your head to your heart.

[31:54] Dr. J: Alright.

[31:56] Paul: That got heavy pretty quick.

[31:57] Dr. J: Mhm.

[31:58] Paul: But that's okay. Sometimes you need heavy. Because it's always light. [overlapping conversation and laughter]

[32:05] Luci: He ain't heavy, he's just my brother.

[32:08] Paul: You know with Indigenous People, especially in our home, we have a lot of laughter. You know - it's Indigenous laughter. And it's like- your siblings, most [people] will say when you see our family - I've watched our kids, like, they do some sick stuff to each other.

[32:23, overlapped] Luci: Sister burns [Paul repeats], auntie burns, even daddy burns!

[32:27] Paul: Yeah. But even this - when you watch the siblings, they all laugh at each other. When one crashes or wipes out, they look and they laugh! There's no like 'oh, are you okay?' no! They laugh first, then they go and say 'okay, are you okay?' Then watching our kids like - the stuff that they did to themselves! The stories we could-

[32:41, overlapping] Luci: Yeah, we could write a book on that.

[32:42] Paul: The stories - it's like, wow! And we created these little monsters, and they came up pretty cool.

[32:48] Luci: It's all on his side. [Paul guffawing]

[32:51] Paul: Hey maybe - I don't know.

[32:53] Luci: Yeah - and continue to be active. Play golf. I don't know if you can play fastball, which is my thing when you girls were growing up, but remain active. Keep your mind fresh and healthy. And, I'm going to stress this, Paulina Reghan Johnson - when I say your three names, you're in trouble - don't be a sailor mouth, because you've got a little three-year-old that idolizes you and your siblings, and she's like a sponge; she picks those words up. And she picked a couple words up from your research team! So, yeah. She knows exactly when to say-

[33:28] Paul: And we have to thank Sam for that one.

[33:30] Luci: Yeah - we have to thank your team for the swear word - [Paul: that she learned, yeah] and she instills that swear word into the songs that she sings - like the ending of 'You Are My Sunshine.' Yeah, we had to try and correct that. It's not working yet, but we have to correct that.

[33:36] Dr. J: No way - that one day she was like 'you bum-shit' - that was dad! [all laughing]

[33:53 Luci and Paul overlap]

[33:56] Paul: I got to- like I said; I have to be mindful! Like, you know, ever since she threw that line back to me: 'I don't have time for this!' I remember saying that to her, now she knows the perfect time to say it! When she wants to do something she tells you it to your face: 'I don't have time for this!' Coming from a little toddler like, wow, you little bugger.

[34:17] Luci: If you can recall when we were in Scotland with her last summer, and we roll up to that big, giant, world-renowned castle, Edinburgh Castle. And we walked in and she saw all the artifacts, and a family wearing the kilts, and she said something that I never thought she'd say, at the right time when she said 'oh-my-effing-gee!' Then when we got home she figured out that it's not just that, it's the whole; oh my f-u-c-k and g-o-d! Again, we had to correct that. It was fun, it was [a] laugh, because she doesn't know what she's saying - but we corrected that. Nothing different than when you girls were younger. But, I think that in the position you're sitting at in academia, as a professor, just don't be a sailor-mouth, because she's so impressionable. And again she, like your students, she listens to you, and your students listen to you. Some professors and some of the things that we see - they're listening to you. Remember that every word that comes out of your mouth stays into the universe, so, just be [cognizant] of what you say. You know, around not just Lealani, but your students, your faculty, your professional people you hang with. And they're all really amazing, and the ones I've met, it's just great to know that they know my daughter. Our daughter.

[35:41] Dr. J: I'm the favorite child. [all laugh]

[35:45] Luci: You better take that up with your siblings.

[35:49] Paul: It's like, well, everything you've done we've noticed - I've noticed,

too, myself. Everything you've done you've gathered friends, and you've made impacts on everything you've done. Like from ball to stuff like that - like, do you remember as a kid that one summer you told me you didn't want to play ball? Which was fine. Literally the day before ball was to start, you said 'dad, I want to play ball.' So I called the local town, and there was no room. Called the other local town, and there was no room. So we went to another town that was a little further away, and she got on and tried out that night, and then she played. I can remember - it was funny like - we went to the town that turned you down, that said they were full, when the coach came up to you after your team kicked their butts; how come she's not with us? Well, he said that they were full. No we weren't! So that's the thing, people make preconceptions of everybody who can- and what they do - especially for you. And you've noticed that. Just going 'oh because you're Indigenous' and, you know, who you are. That's like I always told you guys; that's a them problem, not you. [Everything] you've done you've made strides, and you've made friends - lifelong friends - from every place you've been to. It's unfortunate that the one friend that you made in academia, in Red Deer College, never got to see it. And the stories you told me, he made a decision for you - or he guided you. And that, like I said, every person that you've met in your life so far had guided you to where you are right now, and you look back to them, and you have to thank them. And [remember]; raise a glass of water, or whatever your favorite drink may be at the time, and think about them: wow! That little interaction that we met over, six months of my life, you changed me. [I imagine] you made him feel better, too. And it's unfortunate that he died at such a young age.

[37:34] And you can come back and just say, wow, things have changed so much since your academia career has started - and it was a long, winding road. And like I said, I think we talked about the story before, how you started in academia, and at the time you weren't really sure what you wanted to do. [It] almost seems like Paulina hit [the] bullseye that last minute.

[37:55] Luci: Across your country - let's do this!

[37:58] Paul: The last minute; I want to do this! And then, okay; what can we do? And that's how it's always been, like, that's her - I guess - her style. It's 'what can we do,' a thought that comes that's explosive, then boom! I think it comes to you at the time when you need to be told that. And I think that it's that The Creator made a sign for you. And as naive as you think that you're making decisions, that's not you, that's Creator. And that's the way I look at it. So academia may be bold, bad, whatever - that's okay. It is what it is. Like I said, you're making changes to the world that is not- you're not being [a token], as [you] could have been seen as before - you're making strides, and I like that. So, don't be shy - and you never were, as we know.

[38:45] Luci: And just to add on to that, too, is we had to learn this too, as young adults, from our parents. Everything we're told, even from our parents, sometimes is not proper; it's not correct, so, we just learn to adjust our thinking. I know [when] my mum was eighty-two - unheard of for a Native Woman with seven kids, a single mom - she, you know, she addressed the things she had to do there. But, some things that she told me is, I had to find out if it was the correct way to think about it, and same thing probably with you, is we told you some things, and you're like: you know what? No, mum, I'm not going to listen to you this time. I hear that a lot from all of you. But just- you've got to learn to [do] your own thinking. I know through our Cree culture I

try to instill the values of being a daughter, through ceremony, and do the dishes a lot of [the] nights, and then when you girls were older - like, nuh-uh, nobody's valuing our dishes! She's just lying to us to get the dishes done. So, but, you know, things like that you have to learn to [be] accustomed [to in] your life when you're older - what you believe in. Sometimes it's the hard thing, when you think about it; when my parents told me that, and it's not correct. So, you adjust that thinking. And we're your parents; we're always going to be here. For me, working in the legal field, I get paid to argue, you know, daily. So it's like - I'm up for a good challenge! I'll go correct somebody - because you're my child! And um, I try not to do it because that's, you know, your dad will say, no; they got to figure it out on their own. And me, I'm readied up for the fight just because I work in the legal field.

[40:21] It's just the daily thing that you do is: think for yourself. I don't mind being corrected if there's some idea you've learned, that I've told you, because that's just the teachings that we got from our parents; our parents, and our aunties, and our mosôm and kôkom, and you know, all the Ancestors that are not here with us anymore. You just go with the flow. Live and learn. Am I getting too deep? [all laugh] I'm your ma!

[40:52] Paul: But I don't think mum answered the question; what would your advice [be] if you had to do things back when - you said, like, when you were going back to school, back to Ontario - what would you do differently?

[41:02] Luci: I don't think I would have done anything [differently]; you've got to let them fly! I know [our] doctor, which was your doctor too growing up, he asked about [how] you girls were, when you got older. And he explained to me that he has a son and a daughter, too, and his son remained in Alberta, but his daughter flew the coop the day after she was done high school. She went to the University of Toronto, and I think she's working on her PhD in engineering now, too. But he told me, you got to let them fly - it's the girls that you have to let go. Whether you like it or not, they have their own way of thinking, and away they went. And that's why I thought, when your sister said she wanted to go to Vancouver, and the other sister wanted to go to Montreal, and you wanted to go to London; I said, you know, I did it with the two older ones, and we just cut you loose because we had to. I know I had to; and we let you fly! I kept telling your dad, no, let them go! Let them go! If they want to go and get to where they need to be in life, then let them go. It was hard, but it was fulfilling for me to know that my daughters are out there - outside of the province where, if I'm going to go visit them, they're outside of Alberta, and I have to take a flight to see them. So it's not like, you know, you just jump up and drive up to Edmonton or Calgary to go to school, or wherever you wanted to in Alberta. But I was not going to let my son - my baby - go outside of Alberta. So that was good for me, and he wanted to stay in Alberta, too. I think it would've been - because he's my baby - it would've been hard on both of us. But with you, the girls, we let you spread your wings and go. And I think it was a good idea for all four of you, to let you all go to university. And look at where we are today. I think, as a family, we're all in a good spot. We take care of each other.

[42:45] Dr. J: I don't think I ever wanted to go to London, specifically. [all laugh]

[42:51] Paul: I know, yeah! I totally understand not being there in the summer - there's nothing in London! Other than schools, universities and colleges and stuff. But! You know, I think you were there for a reason. Going back, I know nobody wanted

you to go to Western, but Western's a good school.

[43:06] Dr. J: Western is a good school.

[43:07] Paul: And you got what you needed, and you made some life-long friends.

[43:11] Luci: Your mentor, Susan, she was amazing. She became friends of ours! [And] then it was - you know, I came out for visits, dad usually stayed back. I went for visits because I needed to get out of the community to check on you guys - make sure you were cleaning your house and, you know, not making inappropriate things that we don't know of - that 'let's not tell mom at four-a.m. we did this'; I've heard those stories, but you know, those kinds of things. [I] took you from London to Niagara! You know? On that season there was - there was water there - I know, I heard the stories way later. Mommas know everything - they hear things!

[43:46] Dr. J: But what momma don't know, don't hurt her!

[43:49 overlapping] Luci: Yeah I've hear that, all of that -

[43:50] Dr. J: That's Becky and I's motto! What momma don't know, don't hurt her! [laughter]

[43:55] Luci: I heard the story about my Camaro! Like, on dad's birthday, so.

[43:58] Dr. J: Yeah like twenty years later!

[44:01] Luci: I know, I'm your mother! We're still going to eventually hear things. But you know, taking you to those things that, you know, we went to as kids, and giving you those- we went to Philly! We went to Six - no - we went to Eight Mile! You know?

[44:17] Paul: And Detroit- [Luci: and to Detroit!]

[44:19] Luci: You know, that was a hop, skip, and jump from where you were in London. It was cool to go see that! We took you outside the realm of the university, where you were studying, and had fun! Then I got on a plane and came home. But I think you were okay by me leaving, having a real short visit - real short visits! It was two, three days and then back in Alberta. And it helped you get to the next three months you know, your first semester, your second semester. And they were long, but we prayed for you every day, we smudged for you - make sure that, as a family, we- all three of you were outside of Alberta, and that was the hardest thing I could [do] as a mom. Paul, I'm going to Vancouver! Paul, I'm going to Montreal! Paul, I'm going to London, just to check on you girls, and that's what we did. I think I took the majority of the time to come visit you than your dad; my schedule is more flexible than your dad's. But, you know, your dad would go out for a week, where I was only there for just a matter of hours, you know, like three days - that's just hours. But I think it worked, and maybe it helped? I don't know [if] it helped - I mean, you never really told me - but I had fun. [I] cleaned your house, made you some bannock, and your soup, and then away I left.

[45:33] Dr. J: There's no way that I let you make that soup.

[45:36] Luci: That soup was fast in making for six! Just hamburger, vegetable soup, tomato soup, and bannock!

[45:44] Dr. J: Doesn't Bebe now say 'that's yucky'?

[45:46] Luci: Yeah, because you told her that!

[45:49] Dr. J: It is.

[45:50] Luci: But did you know that you had hamburger soup on the third year of your podcast? I was like, mhm.

[45:55] Dr. J: I know! I was like: sick!

[45:57] Luci: Comfort food!

[45:58] Dr. J: I didn't pick the menu, though. [laughter]

[46:03] Paul: That's a good one! Actually, I didn't mind it. The only thing we lacked was - we lacked the condiments. There was no salt or pepper available! Who - well, that's another side story. Here we are. Okay.

[46:19] Dr. J: Alright, well, we're at forty-eight- almost at fifty minutes, actually. So I want to thank you for being on the podcast

[46:27, overlapping] Luci: Yes! Any time!

[46:28, overlapping] Paul: No problem, yeah, no problem! And thank you for being my daughter - that's the biggest one.

Part Three:
Conclusion

I imagine the Thunderbird as an Auntie, and I can only imagine the power of her presence. However, if she were anything like me, I foresee many more fires emerging than need be. Alas, my role is here on this land, though the sky calls to me often. I wait for the Thunderbirds to tell me their stories through the cracks of lightning and the rumbles of thunder. Reminding myself of their epic battles in the sky, I look to my parents to hold and support me when I do not know if I can stand alone on the hardest days. And it's through their eyes that I see myself, grounded in my community, loved in the way that they have loved me. And if it wasn't for Little Bird, and one who works with Creator, I don't think I'd be able to do what I do, and I am so grateful for them.

Keywords: *Thunderbird, Resurgence*

Glossary

Kâh-kitowak – *Thunderbirds are calling*

Piyêsiw – *Thunderbird*

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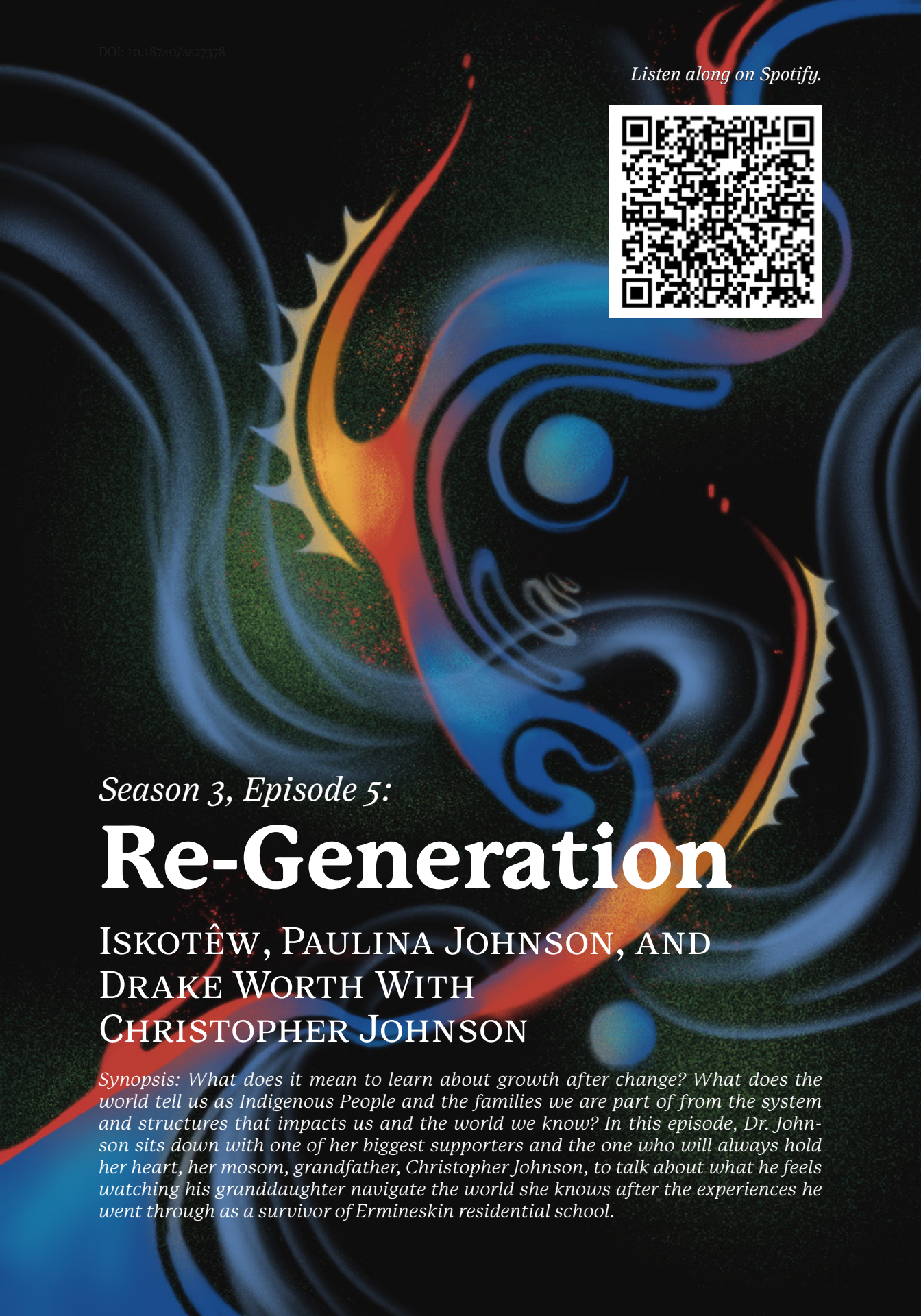

Season 3, Episode 5:

Re-Generation

Iskotêw, Paulina Johnson, and Drake Worth With Christopher Johnson

Synopsis: What does it mean to learn about growth after change? What does the world tell us as Indigenous People and the families we are part of from the system and structures that impacts us and the world we know? In this episode, Dr. Johnson sits down with one of her biggest supporters and the one who will always hold her heart, her mosom, grandfather, Christopher Johnson, to talk about what he feels watching his granddaughter navigate the world she knows after the experiences he went through as a survivor of Ermineskin residential school.

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Part One:
Regeneration of the Land

What does it mean to use fire on the land in [1:11 the] ways that heal, strengthen, and inspire us to stand up for its revival? Often we hear the terms cultural burn or the like, but it's not just destruction, it's renewal and regeneration.

"Cultural burnings" are an approach in which Indigenous communities rely on fire to care for everything from soil and insects to tall forests and roaming animals. While Western-style "prescribed burns" treat the land as needing a clinical procedure, cultural burning is about living relationships. It's guided by ceremony, community, and a profound relation to the lands around us.

Fire is much more than a tool. It's a relative, one that renews habitats and nurtures the plants and animals we depend on for nourishment, remedies, and spiritual traditions. Low-intensity fires can help clear away brush that might feed bigger, uncontrolled blazes. Although many Indigenous communities have practiced this for ages, cultural burning was banned by colonial governments because of their limited view of fire, and saw it only as a force of destruction. Nevertheless, Knowledge Keepers and entire communities protected these teachings and continued their efforts to see cultural burning flourish again (Hoffman et al., 2022).

Across many regions, entire communities are being forced to flee raging wildfires, and a large portion of those affected are Indigenous Peoples who have deep cultural ties to these forested areas. When practices like cultural burning are set aside, dense vegetation builds up, setting the stage for massive, extremely hot, difficult-to-control blazes. Instead of collaborating with local Indigenous experts, governments often pour their budgets into suppressing fires, an expensive cycle that leaves the land increasingly vulnerable.

But cultural burning isn't merely about avoiding disaster; it's also about identity, reciprocity, and well-being. "Cultural" refers to everything from language, tradition, ceremony, and ways of teaching. Fire approached with wisdom and intention, reinforcing these connections. It's not just a tool to be deployed in emergencies; it's a relational force that calls for respect, planning, and a sense of shared responsibility for all beings.

Importantly, fire brings regeneration, and this growth combines beauty and power, much like the fireweed that comes after a wildfire. The regeneration brings us a new reality and one of profound significance. Nimosom, *my grandfather,* Chris Johnson, [4:07 he] turns 86 years old this year and has seen changes on the reserve. He has lived through residential schools and the shame taught by simply being Indigenous, and he has witnessed the changes in being Indigenous today. Still, above all, he has watched me as I was allowed to be everything [4:28 that] he was often denied. But even so, he made sure I knew one absolute truth - he loved me, even when he could not say it outright because love after being told you don't deserve it for your whole childhood was never in his frame of mind. And, also, he's a very stoic individual.

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This is One Who Sits on the Rainbow, Nimosom Christopher Johnson. This will be the first and last time we ever talk about his experiences in the Ermineskin Residential School; not to detail his experiences per se, but to tell the realities of two different generations and the journeys we walk on that are converging and diverging paths of being Nêhiyaw. Often Mosom wasn't allowed to *be* Indigenous, let alone Treaty, but I get to *lead* as Indigenous and focus on those treaty rights.

Part Two:
The One Who Sits on the Rainbow

[5:34] Chris: Where can I start here? Well, my name is Chris Johnson! Okay? So this is what happened - okay. Now I don't know where it started from - I think I said Buffalo Lake once before - that's where my family started from. Like, everybody came from there, and here, in Maskwacîs. In those days, it was Hobema; Hobema-Samson Reserve. That's what they used to call the place. That was my family. I don't know if I was born over there - I can't say for sure where I was born. Anyways, it's in the Samson's - I always see my birth certificate always say Samson-Hobema, and that's what I usually go by. So I don't know where I was born here, where we're at now. My dad came and homesteaded that place where I live now - so I've been there ever since. Well, I got away from it for a while. I got away from it for a while hey, Paulina, and I think I went to residential school for a few years. Then I was kind of getting tired I guess, I don't know, my parents, my dad - whoever it was - decided [to take] me to Samson Day School, they called it. That was - oh my God - that was, I don't know, late fifties, early sixties - must be late fifties. That's when I started Day School.

[7:22] Everybody was there - I [knew] a lot of people that were there - but now, most of the people I went to school there with, they're all deceased. You know, I think the only one - I'll just say - that was there with me who is still around, still walking around, is Roy Lewis. But he's getting a little bit old now. That's the only one that I know that was there with me. I think maybe, not too long - not even a year, I think - Vern Spence is another one I went to school there with, and he's still around. That's the only thing I know that's been there. But as far as I can remember there was a young lady - she was just young then - was Elizabeth Smallboy then. I think when she got out she got older, she got married, now she's a Montour. That's the name she used; Elizabeth. I think that the only four people I know, those days, that were in the school - most of the other people are gone. So I don't know. Even the teachers I had - well, there was nuns. When I moved to residential school - -that's why - the residential school was- they decided to look after that day school, that's why I went there. Because the nuns were there - and those were the ones that [would] teach us for a while - then they closed it down. They decided to close that, so I went back to residential school. That's, you know, that's where [I was]. I traveled at the day school those days now, after that, they had a truck [that] ran to pick us up. Whoever goes to school there [got] picked up by that school.

[9:20] So that's where I was for quite a long time - and that's as far as I can know. But then again, when I was going there, when I was going to school there I never had my, I don't think I had ever had my Treaty rights then. I remember later on in [the early] sixties - that's when. But, when I was going to school here, and going to the

lawyers in some place in I don't know where, I think it was in Red Deer that I used to go to get our Treaty. You know, my parents and some other people with like-names, and like I said, like-names, so most of them I know that were in the same situation, like me. I wasn't- they weren't Treaty; [that's] how they became their Treaty, too. All of a sudden we heard the lawyer, that he won the case. Now [we] had our Treaty rights in the early sixties. That's, you know, everybody was still going to school; I was still- all my- everybody was, all my family were Treaty now those days. [That's] how it started, you know. But in the meantime, in those years, we moved around on reserve; my dad [would] work here and there. And those of us - the band members on the reserve - [they'd] have to work together. That's how they, you know the band - those days, I don't think there was hardly any offices. You know, the band home hall, there was no such thing as a band office [in] those days. Like, where the band office is, there was people living there. That's where they- I think the only place that was [there], they called it an Agency. That was by the - you know, [just] by where the Health Centre is now. They had a [building] there [that they] called Indian Affairs - used to come there all the [time]. Just a few worked there.

[11:39] In those years [that's] where you'd get whatever you want[ed]; you know, [you'd get] your health[care] through there - so that's Indian Affairs that [run it]. That's not the band, nobody, all the band- everything was there [at Indian Affairs] those days. There's no offices there too, eh; there was just the government houses there. All that area there was the government; the people that worked at the residential school like the maintenance guy, teachers, they all lived in that - there was houses there. But they all disappeared; over where the Health Centre is now, in that area. I remember that- I think there was a clinic. Right across where the Ermineskin Daycare - I think there was a clinic there - that's where everybody, you know, if you needed to see a doctor, that's where you'd go. And all that area was all run by Indian Affairs; that's all because the residential school was down there further. You still- some of the buildings are still there. That's where we - that's where everybody was at. But that's, you know, it was quite a few years.

[12:57] As far as I can remember, that's the only way I remember people used to travel is by horse. Horses hey - you know, wagon and horse - that's all [we] had in the old days, see. I think that, once a year, they get to do something that you need, [every] person. You go there; once a year you have to have a chest x-ray - for everybody. That's how they get their medical [care]. And so people would get sick - so they get told that they were sick, they had to go to the hospital; they go to Edmonton. It was the Charles Camsell; that's where all the Natives get their treatment. They get their chest x-rays - there was something wrong; they called it [tuberculosis], I don't know. [In] those days they'd get treated there, and that's where they are. But at that time when you get those x-rays, [and] that same time you get your five dollars. That was the best, that was the good five dollars a year you'd get; that's a lot of money for those days. You know, for one person to get five bucks - besides, on top of that they gave you a sack of flour and some bacon, I remember. But the bacon was not really a hundred percent - it was lots of salt. The way my parents, my mother used to, you'd have to boil it in order to get rid of that salt. That's the way they'd [do it]; if you cook it, there's more salt than anything else. [I] remember that; that's the way they used to do it.

[14:53] Dr. J: I've never asked you about this, but I was wondering if you could tell me that story about when you ran away from residential school?

[15:02] Chris: O-kay! You wanted to hear that; okay! I think- I can't remember what year that was. Yeah me and a girl there - me and my cousin Morris, his parents lived out here - my parents lived here, just out here eh?

[15:20, overlapping] Dr. J: Mhm.

[15:20] Chris: And all this area here where you live now, there were all trees, all everybody was - there was no- it wasn't even clear then. So we- one day we were just reading, I think it was on a weekend or something like that. So me and my cousin Morris were just - what would you say, we skip out - take off. [We] think about it, think about it: yeah, well, I'm ready. So that's what we did, eh. But there was a - it was, uh - what we had; we had a residential school on this side, on this side there was a priest, the priests and all those lived at a house there - it was a church right beside it! Okay, then there was a creek running. Now the creek is not there anymore, it went dry. So, and [Morris] says ' how are we going to [get across]? We'll have to jump - or we'll have to take our [unintelligible] at the school [and] run across' - because that side, where it is now, you can see the residential school and the old church on the West side. There was hardly anybody - there was trees - same thing, eh. That's what we did: we [ran] away, then we stuck around here. We didn't want to go home right away, because I knew for sure, if we get home, they're going to take us back. So we stuck around on this side of the trees we- well we said why don't we stick there, eh? We stayed there, me and Morris, and what we did was breaking branches. And I think we built - now, I think we stayed through one night only [and] we built a fire. Then we stayed there, we sat all night there. I said let's take a- I'm going to take a chance! I'm going to go out and see toward home. He said okay, I'll do the same thing. So we decided the same thing.

[17:18] As soon as he got home, his parents just knew that he'd run away. [They] took him back right away! As soon as he got there, they didn't even stay overnight at his house, they took him back to the [Residential] school! At mine and I didn't; I stayed there one night. So they decided, okay, you have to go back. Then, a promise I think! It was a promise after that - that's when I got out of it. Because my dad, I think they decided that's what I want, too. Morris didn't do that; he stayed there. He stayed there! Because they hadn't - but me, my parents decided, okay you're going to go to - I think they had their sisters there. Jenna got taken, [she] was one of them - they had her other sister, Cindy, passed away. Those were the other three girls. No, Violet- no no, she was still Violet, that was her. You know Robert Johnson?

[18:11] Dr. J: Mhm.

[18:11] Chris: That was her mom. Violet Johnson, her name was. You know Margaret? Margaret Johnson? [She] worked at the health centre?

[18:18] Dr. J: Yeah.

[18:19] Chris: She was the transportation coordinator there. That's how Violet, that's, you know, she was like, Violet- no, Margaret; that was with my mom, too. So [that's] how they all decided to go there. But me; I went to Day School, and that's when I- that's when they were day school - then I just stayed - then they stayed home. That was it. Now, the Day School was over there - [that's how] we got away from there.

Now it went to the shitter. Samson Day School; that was the last day school I went to.

[18:52] Dr. J: Mhm.

[18:53] Chris: I started off- I think I started off with this day school from [unintelligible] when I started telling the story. But I think that's where I- after that I went to school in Ermineskin; Ermineskin Day [School] for a while, because there was quite a few of the kids that came out [of] the Day School, and they decided to do the same thing. They moved to this one here because it was open; because the reason why they opened that - I think the priests and the nuns opened it - that [Day School]. That's why I didn't end up going to that school; because they were there before. But I had to walk from here to there!

[19:33] Dr. J: Mhm.

[19:34] Chris: You know, every day you'd go to school- went to it, and everything. I walked. And that's- [it] was quite a thing, you know, there. It was a crazy little thing out there, when you went to the residential school. It was, you know - plus you stayed there! You don't get to go home; you stay there all the time, you know, steady. But like I said before, Paulina, [a] lot of people there that went to school, I don't know, but me; it was a different story. Okay? You know, when I was there - every time I come home, my parents, you said to them - especially my mom, your late kôhkom - especially my mom says: now, our language - she speaks in Cree to me - our language is Cree. We're going to be talking to you in Cree; you're not going to talk English at all, except for at residential school - that's all you speak of English, hey.

[20:38] Dr. J: Mhm.

[20:39] Chris: That's how- that's why people, they say they lost their language. But what happened? Like I said before; I don't think it's - it started from home. You know? If the kids go home, and the parents would do the same thing - if they would've done the same thing. I think the only ones that - the older ones still speak Cree. Because I remember - because I went to residential school with [the] late Emil Cutknife, he speaks good Cree, pure, good Cree. Robin Littlechild - he speaks, you know - he stays at residential school, he [goes] home, he learns - I think they spoke Cree at home. I think that's how they learned. You know, and daddy Montour - there's another one, I went to residential school with him - he speaks, I think that's when it was late Dave Littlechild- him and Dave Littlechild and I, late Dave Littlechild, we got along really good after even he got out, he came and stayed with us for a long time after - and he ended up getting married and we got out. We got out, we got older, but the rest of us - the other guy, he got married and, you know. He got married to, I think, a lady from the North. I don't think he - they might have some - I think it was Yellowknife or something - I think he -- actually his wife, I know he had two boys. One of them, I came and visited him. I think he might [have] family over there, yet - Dave. And he didn't want her to know, so nobody knows if he's got family over there; but I think he does. But I'm just saying that I - because I stayed with - he stayed with us; him and I got along. We worked together and we worked two things for a long time.

[22:35] You know, him and I, [we] played golf. Him and I, you know, that's what we did. That's the story of my- that's how I got out of it. And you know, there's no other

way I can tell you about residential school; when I got out- when I ran away I think [my] parents kind of got away- I don't know. In a way, maybe they kind of hoped - [felt] sorry for me, doing that. So, you know, I wanted to get away from there and - because even in the summertime. You only stayed there - you only come home a few months, [then] you go back. You know? You don't [stay] there [at home] - you only stay, in the summer, maybe a month or two; whenever the School is out. Then you go back there, hey?

[23:23] Dr. J: Mhm.

[23:24] Chris: And you stay there - you hope everything- you know that - residential school had Cardinal, and a big, big field of potatoes**.** And the students, I remember, that [went] to residential school, picked potatoes, you know? That's, you know, you picked potatoes and put them in a- you haul them all - the people picking. And that's - in a big - and after you're finished [digging] and picking potatoes - [and] they gave you a big picnic. You'd have a wiener roast, all kinds of little games, like a potato-sack race, you know. Potato-sack race - you had that, you know? It was all the little things they set up; little games - that's what they'd do; they have a day off after you picked potatoes. That's all there was. No - nothing else. That's it, my dear!

[24:34] Dr. J: Okay, I have [one] final question. So, when you grew up, right; Canadian society was really, I think, like, hostile sometimes, and racist. What do you see now that I'm in, like, this position of like-

[24:54] Chris: What do I see now?

[24:55] Dr. J: Yeah, with like, compared to [you] and I?

[24:59] Chris: Well, okay. You and I - let's put it this way: what saved everything on the reserve - because they don't know economy on the reserve, okay?

[25:10] Dr. J: Yep.

[25:10] Chris: The way it came - so they let [these] companies come in.

[25:16] Dr. J: Mhm.

[25:17] Chris: Somebody was starting to survey; they had some surveys, surveyors looking around, seeing what kind of income they could [make]. That's how they get these oil wells - gas wells - around there, eh?

[25:31] Dr. J: Yeah.

[25:31] Chris: Well we had a- oh my gosh, you got - they had lots! Lots! Lots of gas, lots of oil - near the East of the reserve, you know, it was on the reserve. Now they've got that Ma-Me-O- that Samson's and Ermineskin's - I used to get mine from Samson's, Ermineskin's, Montana, and Louis Bull. Because that reserve, you know, Ma-Me-O Beach, they decided that was their land, the band. They decided, the band members, the band council, decided whoever wants to move in that area, can get a house built over there; and lots of people decided to do that. Lots of people - well

I think all these - like everything, I think the reason - the ones I know, Paulina, is uh. I think there's some Yellowbird's that live over there - I think mostly Roans - all the Roans that they were around - they were all born, most of them, out there. Even [my] cousin - that's where [Morris'] grandmother; that's where they decided to move, to leave this here - but they had a house they built there. But these guys, here now these - my uncle, Morris' dad, his dad, they were together - -they decided to stay here. [Unintelligible] his wife, Morris' mum, they broke up. But he stayed - he stayed there, his dad stayed there - that's where they live now. That's where Peter's house is now. That's where the mum had a house - she had a house there, eh? That's how they got their money; the first payment, I remember, that's how they got their gas and oil money, they called it, eh? The first payment they got [was] twenty-five dollars a person; and every year it goes up, up, up, up, up, up, down. Oh, they got a lot. I think that was the late eighties. I think late eighties; your dad was already a teenager. Everybody got five-thousand dollars; every band member.

[27:50] Dr. J: Yeah.

[27:51] Chris: But I think the kids, Paul and Claude, lost their money because they're, you know.

[27:56] Dr. J: Yeah, yeah.

[27:57] Chris: You know; I'm not going to say that.

[27:59 overlapping] Dr. J: Yeah! [laughter]

[27:59 overlapping] Chris: I'm not going to name that person.

[28:01] Dr. J: Yeah.

[28:01] Chris: You know. [They] all decided you wanted a little bit of- you got a little bit; I don't know how much you got. He bought a car.

[28:10] Dr. J: Mhm.

[28:10] Chris: He gave you the money to go buy a car. I think he - he bought - that's how he, when he was going out-

[28:17] Dr. J: He bought his Camaro?

[28:18] Chris: You remember?

[28:19] Dr. J: Yeah.

[28:19] Chris: Black Camaro.

[28:20] Dr. J: Yeah.

[28:21] Chris: You wanted - I decided to - that was- I, too, saw a car for him!

[28:28] Dr. J: Yeah.

[28:28] Chris: And I bought that because I gave you the one - I think that me and my brother- me and my buddy, Jim; I was working with him at the arena at that time, I was still working - I was working already that day when he got that money. I was working there. Anyways, when I- so we gave him- Paul was with me already - well he got- he begged hard to get that money. You know.

[28:53] Dr. J: Yeah.

[28:53] Chris: It was- he didn't get- I don't know what it was - but he got something; enough to buy a big- I can't remember how much he paid me for the car. I think he paid twenty-three hundred, or something like that. It was close to three-thousand anyways, what he paid for that car, eh.

[29:06] Dr. J: Yeah.

[29:07] Chris: Me and Jim took a drive; he drove me to the city. Okay, he says. You know, he drove me to the city. I think I bought this car in St. Albert; that black- that was the, you know, that was the- that was it. We lived here and, you know, I stayed here for a while, and they stayed with me, I think, you know.

[29:31] Dr. J: Yeah.

[29:31] Chris: That's how it was.

[29:44] Dr. J: Okay. Is there anything you would want to say for my listeners, on the podcast, about what it means to be an Indigenous Person today?

[29:57] Chris: Like I said before - like I told you before, you know; I wasn't born as Treaty. Okay? I don't think I was born as a Treaty Person.

[30:07] Dr. J: Yeah.

[30:09] Chris: I was Métis. It's that I still think I'm still - [I] still think of myself, in my mind, you know - I'm not Treaty full Native.

[30:25] Dr. J: Hm.

[30:26] Chris: I'm still- because, I can see that, in my family; I can see that some of my family I can- I think that's how- my dad wasn't Treaty. I think mum's side; she was born as a Treaty - I'm not sure.

[30:44] Dr. J: Yeah.

[30:44] Chris: I think that when he moved, I don't know how he got - I don't know how they met-

[30:48] Dr. J: Mhm.

[30:49] Chris: That's- I don't know that. Before that, they had- maybe she was [the] same - or not - maybe she wasn't Cree herself; I don't know that. Because, the reason why I say that; there was two other sisters they had.

[31:05] Dr. J: Okay.

[31:06] Chris: The first two, eh?

[31:07] Dr. J: Yeah.

[31:07] Chris: They passed. They got sick, same as my- I think some of the people got here, they got- I'm not sure. I think that's the same- [but] I don't know, I'm not sure. Maybe they [met] some place - my dad, you know, but that's- when they [were] out travelling, that's how they lost her; that's how they lost one of my sisters. She passed on the way, when they decided to, you know- think about it. To think about it, and I said, always say- I always think about that. I was sitting there; one of these days, I think I will know, that where they come from - at Buffalo Lake - I think there might be some people that were on the way down. Because it took a long time for them; it's not one day that they [were] travelling, eh? It's quite a travel. You know, they had families, and it's hard to travel for them. There might be some people that passed on the way.

[32:09] Dr. J: Yeah.

[32:10] Chris: There's some graves from here to there. There might be some over there, there might be some around the Buffalo Lake area. Nobody knows that.

[32:18] Dr. J: Yeah.

[32:19] Chris: The only one [that] would know - those days - and I don't think they ever mentioned it was our parents. Our dad. You know; the people that were old enough [to remember]. Because we talk about it, me and - I think - because Harvey's - related to Harvey Buffalo-

[32:36] Dr. J: Yeah.

[32:36] Chris: Him and I talked about it one time. Because he used to work at the office, eh?

[32:41] Dr. J: Yeah.

[32:43] Chris: That place that you used to work at, the museum, that's how they started - that's where he started. And he said something about that - he mentioned - I wonder if I ever- and he said: we don't know that. I said to him; the only ones that know - the old parents - the people that were travelling from there to there. The parents [would be] the only ones that knew. But they're gone - they're all, you know.

[33:11] Dr. J: Interesting!

[33:16] Chris: I always say this to myself - the reason I was involved with my dad,

a lot, is [that] he used to walk me- he used to go with me and walk me to school. That's how I know my history.

[33:33] Dr. J: Yeah.

[33:34] Chris: My dad. I don't know why, I always say to myself: why did he pick me? I was always the youngest- just about the youngest, you know. I think my other brother didn't know much, but he's the one my dad picked. He told me everything; what he knows, that's - it's so funny sometimes, I sit down and I think about it**.** You know, why me? Because Pam knows that- you know everything. You know everything: what's going on, what's around [there], you know. That's it. My dad's side, their name - I think what I heard was Kichayas. You know my late- I think my late mother or late dad, his name was Peter. Peter Kichayas**.** When they- I don't know if they got back here, and the government wouldn't recognize that name, it wasn't recognized - Kichayas - so they decided to get that name changed to Johnson.

[34:48] Dr. J: Yeah.

[34:48] Chris: Now that's how we got our 'Johnson'. I think there's two others- there's another one, too, that I think- I can't remember what their- well the Lightning's, it's the same thing.

[35:02] Dr. J: Yeah.

[35:03] Chris: They were changed from different - I don't know what-

[35:06] Dr. J: Yeah.

[35:06] Chris: Well I think the government thought[it's] hard to pronounce it, hard to spell, I think that that's why they decided to do that. I think my mum, [she] was still - they still have that, she was the Whakeno's; Whakeno, you know, that was her name. That was - that's how she came out; Whakeno, eh?

[35:33] Dr. J: Yeah.

[35:33] Chris: Because I know her sister used to live out there somewhere, but I can't remember. She used to go and visit her, her sister; I remember that, I used to go with her. We used to go and visit her sister; that was that uh- I can't remember his name - the son. Uses Whakeno- I think - I can't remember the guy's name. He still walks around. He still walks around on the reserve. That was Whakeno.

[36:04] Dr. J: Oh, okay.

[36:05] Chris: That's- he kept that, you know, that was the mum's name. So when she- when he was born his name was Whakeno, but he didn't change it. So that's- he's Whakeno. He's still- that's how he kept as - you know, because that was his Kichayas. But now looking - all those were changed to Johnson. They took all the- they took away the Kichayas and gave [us] Johnson**.** I think the Lightning's of the - like, I think they had a heart [to pronounce] name when they first came out here. You know, because Lightning, like, you know, it was Pamela, eh. All the Lightning's -

all those Lightning's, you know, like - even the counselor, his side of the family. They were all Lightning's, hey?

[36:56] Dr. J: Mhm.

[36:57] Chris: Like Francis Lightning. Oh, everybody! You know, all those Lightnings, they were- that's how they were when they first gave- they were in Treaty Two, I don't know. You know. That's- I don't think it'd be- I don't think it's recognized as Kichayas.

[37:15] Dr. J: What does Kichayas mean?

[37:17] Chris: It's a smart Indian; it's a gift. That's because it's a, you know, your- you can do anything. It's; this guy's a Kichayas - this guy can do everything. That's- it's some kind of a- it's a powerful spiritual name. Let's put it that way.

[37:35] Dr. J: Mhm. And your parents' names were James and - I always forget your mom's name. What was your mom's name?

[37:40] Chris: Louise Whakeno!

[37:41] Dr. J: Louise Whak- yeah! For some reason I always thought it was Mary. Because that was her sister, right? Mary Whakeno? Oh, wait.

[37:47] Chris: When she got married she was Louise Johnson.

[37:52] Dr. J: Louise Johnson.

[37:53] Chris: Yeah she got- Whakeno's a- you know, like those people over there! All those Whakeno people out there always- they still, you know, they call me grandpa! You know, that's because they're my mom's side.

[38:09] Dr. J: Yeah.

[38:09] Chris: That's- I've been there- now that's where they - that's the end of my story there, Paulina. I got nothing else to tell you! [laughter]

Part Three:
Conclusion

I have never had as much respect for someone as I do my grandfather. He is me, and I am him. He has loved me only a part of his life, but I will love him for all of mine. My father chose him in the spirit world, and I chose my father. Together, our generations flow in between one another. We share similarities in who we are genetically and in our mannerisms, humour, and sense of self. There is nothing I would not do for him because it is through his fight and survival throughout his whole life, even amidst one of the hardest and harshest experiences of residential school, that I can be here today. And I didn't press him on what had happened there. Certain elements have

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come out here and there. But I wanted him to share his reality against mine, to see the human and individual, to see his passion and grace. And I'm so incredibly proud of him. And as I lead and serve the community for the betterment of the People, I am here today because of him. And while many would say that fire destroys, such as the destructive fire that were the residential schools, it is regeneration that is heard in his prayers and hopes that come forward today. Especially in the work, and especially in my role and representation. Often, I think about how I would trade spots with him in his experiences without question, but I know he would never let that happen. He is my protector, the generation of love I know, and importantly, the grandfather I would choose every single time in the spirit world just as much as I chose my father. Mosom Chris. I will love you forever.

Keywords: *Residential Schools, Resurgence/Regrowth, Cultural Burning Practices*

Glossary

Nimosom - *My grandfather*

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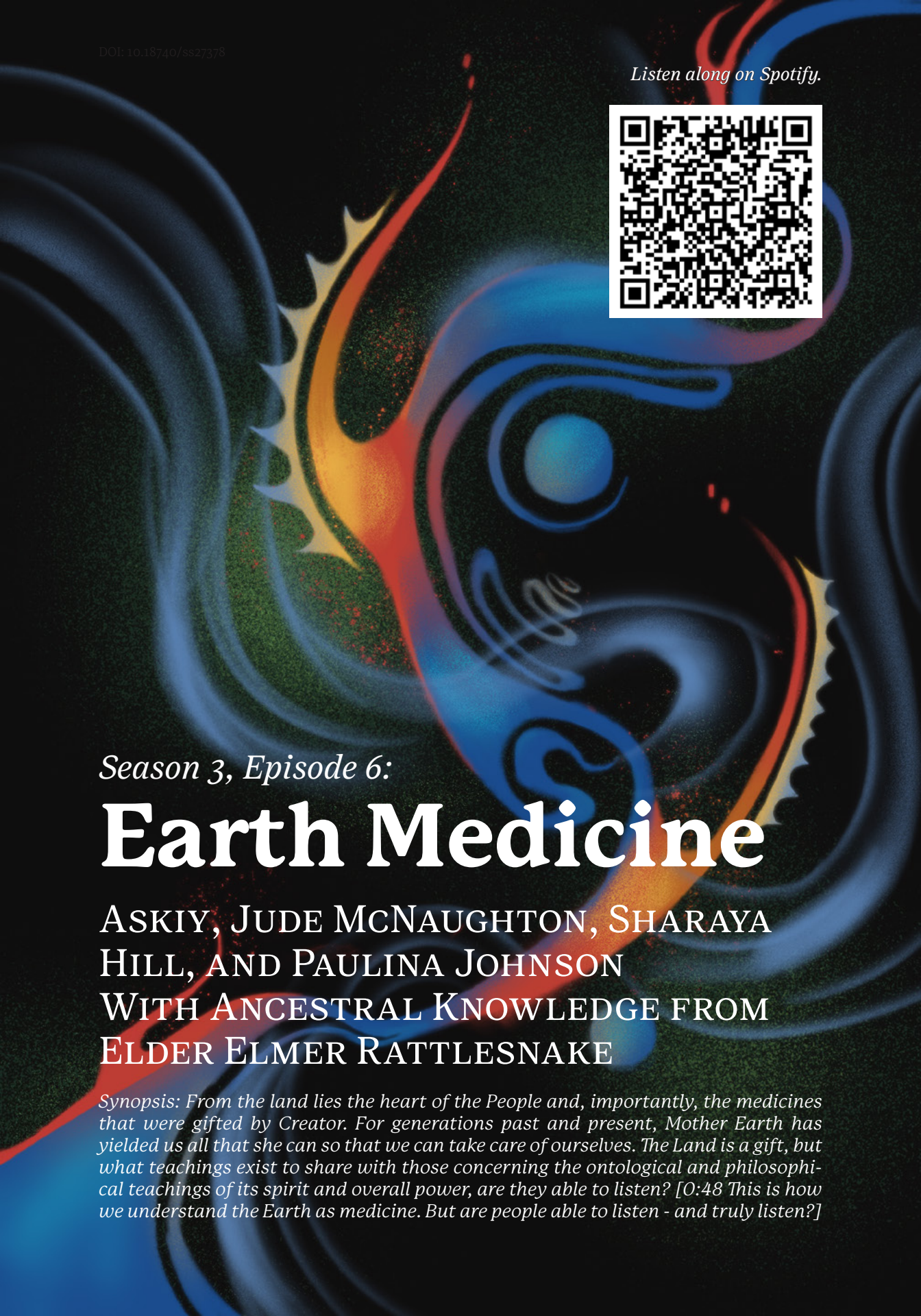

Season 3, Episode 6:

Earth Medicine

Askiy, Jude McNaughton, Sharaya Hill, and Paulina Johnson With Ancestral Knowledge from Elder Elmer Rattlesnake

Synopsis: From the land lies the heart of the People and, importantly, the medicines that were gifted by Creator. For generations past and present, Mother Earth has yielded us all that she can so that we can take care of ourselves. The Land is a gift, but what teachings exist to share with those concerning the ontological and philosophical teachings of its spirit and overall power, are they able to listen? [0:48 This is how we understand the Earth as medicine. But are people able to listen - and truly listen?]

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Part One:
The Grandfathers

When I touch Mother Earth, I envision generations of love and kindness filled with loss and pain intertwining with my spirit, teaching me, mentoring me, and guiding me along the path I am on. Feeling the medicine that our Mother carries allows my anxiety to release itself, as the pressure of uncertainty is, for a moment, not consuming my every thought. Grounding myself in the warmth of our Mother allows me to truly remember what and who I am - a storyteller through and through.

It is nothing new to say that the heart of this podcast is its plethora of stories. In many previous episodes, we've discussed the importance of stories in our everyday lives and their sacred significance in ceremony and medicine. So, it should go without saying that this episode will start with a story, this time about the stars, the Sweat Lodge, and the Grandfathers who sit at its centre. We turn to Wilfred Buck of Opaskwayak Cree Nation (2009), to learn of how we were gifted matotisân, the *sweat lodge:*

> *Once there was a young man named Tikoom – the louse – who had seven uncles and they lived at a time of scarcity and sickness. It came to be that food was needed for the community and the young man's seven uncles decided to go and find fresh meat. They were to return to the community in three days time. The young man waited impatiently, for he wanted to go with them, but they decided against this. After three days, Tikoom's seven uncles had yet to return. The young man waited all the next day and still no one returned, after which he decided that he should go look for them. He left that afternoon.*
>
> *Tikoom travelled all afternoon and into the late evening following their tracks. Eventually he came to the place where they had made camp. Here he found an empty shelter that contained nothing but seven rocks. The shelter offered protection from the cold wind and it was getting very cold and dark. He decided to spend the night there and continue on in the morning. That night, as he slept, he had a dream. In the dream, his uncles came to him and told him what had happened to them. The young man was told that his uncles happened upon a mistapew (Giant). This mistapew traded in spirits and could capture spirits and transfer them from one spirit being to another. This amused the giant greatly because it caused mass confusion and fear and this is what this mistapew lived on. Thus, when the giant saw the seven brothers, he felt that this was an opportunity to capture their spirits. The giant invited the weary hunters into his camp to spend the night and rest. In the morning he would tell them where to find fresh game. As the brothers slept the giant crept into their dreams and took their spirits. He did this because he wanted to eat their bodies but could not do so if they were still in possession of their spirits.*
>
> *The giant transferred the spirits of the seven brothers into seven rocks because he knew that the rock could hold spirits; these rocks were individually regarded as either Nimoshoom Assini – the grandfather rock, or Nookoom Assini – the grandmother rock. These assiniyak – rocks – hold the spirits of the night when it is cold under the moon and the spirits of the light when it is warm under the heat of the sun. Only when the assini are heated until they are bright red are the grandfather and grandmother spirits released. This was how the giant got the spirits of the uncles.*

> *The young man was told by his uncles how to release their spirits. They could not return to him in human form but would visit him if he performed a ceremony they would show him. As instructed, he built a domed lodge using branches from a willow tree as the ribs and hides of deer, moose or buffalo to cover the branches. He placed the seven rocks he had seen in the abandoned camp into the base of the fire he was instructed to build outside of the dome. When this was done, he lit the fire and let it burn until the rocks became red-hot. He brought the red-hot rocks into the domed structure. Once inside the domed structure with the red-hot rocks in the centre, he was to close the door so the dome was completely dark and begin to sing and pray as he was instructed. As he sang and prayed, he splashed water on the hot rocks which released their spirits. He saw the spirits of his uncles first as lights – the uncles were born again from the domed lodge. The willow ribs of the domed lodge symbolize the womb of our mother and it was she who has the power to release and bring forth new life.*
>
> *This is what Tikoom did and released his uncles to the spirit world. For his determination, faith, and trust, the Creator gave to him a ceremony with which to heal and, by doing so, feed his people. He was also given a new name – Assini Awasis – Stone Child [emphasis added]. He would forever be remembered as the boy who bought the sweat lodge to the people* (79-81).

Ever since, we have been able to look up at the night sky and see the constellations that keep record of this story. The Sweat Lodge is one place that facilitates spiritual and physical beings coming together (Laplante, 2009). Holding this story in the stars provides us a reminder of where to go for healing, hope, and spiritual sustenance (Buck, 2009). [7:32 While] western beliefs may give these constellations different names and associate them with different stories, they are the same stars we all share. The *Corona Borealis* is the Sweat Lodge, *Polaris* is the Altar, and *Pleiades* is the fire and rocks at the center of the Sweat Lodge. We are responsible for ensuring that our star stories are passed on as they will continue to guide us for generations to come (Buck, 2009).

Part Two:
Gifts from the Land (medicine)

According to Nêhiyaw Elder Elmer Rattlesnake - who was taught by the late Wayne Roan, Creator designed the elements separately, specifically fire, wind, and water first. These elements, when combined, created Mother Earth; a home for life. Once in place, Creator made the first and oldest living creatures; the *plants*. Fire - the Sun's light and the Earth's heat - was intended to feed and sustain plant life. Air provided the oxygen needed to maintain it. The role of water would be to clean, replenish, and rejuvenate the Earth.

Creator then went on to make the *insects* to prepare the plants to grow and become what they were meant to be; food and medicine. Insects act as a living government, ensuring everything can survive. For example, the bee spreads pollen as it moves from flower to flower collecting nectar. Wherever the bee goes, it creates life, and in doing so, creates more medicine. The third life form was the *animals*, acting as

messengers between humans and nature. Beavers, for example, tell us what we can expect in the coming winter based on where they build their homes. If they make their homes in the middle of the pond, it will be a cold winter; the ice will be thickest at that part of the pond. The signs from [9:39 the] animals tell us what is coming each year, and how we should prepare accordingly. Importantly, this teaching emphasizes that we are not separate from any other life form; we are all a part of Mother Earth and we all have a role within this system. We are separated from the animals because we have a spirit connecting us to Creator, but we also read and follow all other life forms as teachers (E. Rattlesnake, personal communication, April 13, 2025).

As part of Mother Earth, we have an obligation to uphold Natural Law, which includes following protocol. Protocol is hard to clearly define because of its spiritual nature; broadly it is a "set of procedures based upon respect, humility, and kindness" regarding Natural Laws (Laplante, 2009, p. 25). It is about establishing and maintaining those relationships that are important to us. Knowledge is transferred, offered, or gifted using protocol to guide how we act and engage with one another and the world around us. Protocol ensures that when we learn from others, we are responsible to certain obligations outlined by Natural Law.

In return for maintaining our relationship with Mother Earth, she provides us medicines. Many medicines come from plants, including berries and teas. Sage, sweetgrass, cedar, and tobacco are all plants grown by Mother Earth to heal us, protect us, cleanse us and allow us to maintain reciprocity. There is no singular approach or concise label for what is contained within "traditional medicine" because it is entirely dependent on culture and geography (Martin Hill, 2003, p. 9). From an Indigenous framework, a vast diversity of cultural knowledge systems and local ecosystems impact what communities acknowledge as traditional medicine; in many cases, language, ceremony, time and place, and community interaction can also be forms of traditional medicine. Medicine is more than just substances or specific practices, it can be anything that makes a person feel better. It is healing and that is medicine in its own right.

Part Three:
Grounding Ceremony

[11:59 It's among these medicines that we find ourselves communicating in language with each other, or connecting with our power.] Medicines aren't just hanging around, static, waiting to be taken. [12:12 I mean,] Tikoom didn't take some rocks, construct a sweat lodge, and boom [12:16 holy fuck]; the first sweat lodge! There was a process through which he came to know the sweat lodge; listening to his dreams, preparing a place for the rocks, praying and singing; all part of being honoured with the sweat by Creator. In other words, there are *ways* in which medicine is used or *practiced*. There are ways in which ceremony is performed, and through which we ground ourselves.

What is ceremony itself grounded in? There are *spiritual laws*, from the spiritual realm, and they include the Natural Laws of Mother Earth. They must be followed. Or as Marilyn Poitras puts it, "we need to live with [Mother Earth], we have respon-

sibilities to her and [...] we are completely dependent on her. Period. Full stop. She is not dependent on us" (2022, p. 1). [13:17 I made the emphasis very clear!] In contrast, *human-made laws* are developed for relating to our kin, human and more-than-human. But these human-made laws only work if they are in line with spiritual law. So, we have to be good at listening to the spiritual realm and Mother Earth. Ceremony, then, is rooted in spiritual laws. However, much like Rome, ceremony isn't built in a day. It is built and sustained over time, grounding us in the process.

But what happens when all of the listening and work to cultivate ceremony gets lost, or the ways through which we have learned to listen to Mother Earth are interrupted? Potawatomi botanist Robin Wall Kimmerer reflects on [14:04 the importance of] ceremony across the generations of her family (2013). She tells of her father's ceremony, pouring the first taste of brewed coffee onto the land to honour the mountain Tahawus. This ceremony provided belonging in her childhood but later became a source of tension; how did the *real* ceremony go? What was the original, authentic, pre-colonial, non-English one? What words were passed down from generation to generation? She investigated these questions through building relationships and learning from community, and she found that her family's ceremony [14:45 and I quote, "was fed from the same bond with the land, founded on respect and gratitude" (2013)] maintained the connection, respect, and gratitude for the land that older, more traditional ceremonies were founded on, even if the language had been changed. Furthermore, even after finding out that the coffee ceremony began just as a means to clear the spout of any coffee grounds that might be stuck in there, Kimmerer maintains meaning in the coffee ceremony. Kimmerer's father tells us that, over time, the practicality of dumping the coffee grounds, quote, "became something else" (p. 37). Even when the spout didn't have grounds stuck inside, the practice of pouring the first taste of coffee to the ground continued, and *discarding* transformed into *offering*. As the practice became ceremony, it became *ground*-ed. We have a role in creating ceremony, though not always in the ways we might plan to.

I call upon these stories to highlight what grounds ceremony, and how ceremony, in turn, grounds us. Ceremony isn't created out of intention alone; the dumping of coffee grounds didn't become an offering because it was decided to mean something one day. Nor is ceremony necessarily a fixation on an object; it wasn't just about the coffee or the grounds themselves [16:07 or human-made laws]. Participation in ceremony is not to act out rules written in a book, as when [16:17 let's say] "following the law" in a Western understanding (Poitras, 2022); Kimmerer's father's coffee ceremony wasn't a modern [16:26 interpretation] iteration of a traditional law around serving coffee. Its ceremony status was not *written into law*, but was grounded through togetherness and persistence, bridging the spirit world and the physical world (Kimmerer, 2013; Poitras, 2022).

A critical part of ceremony are the relationships that we build and cultivate with all of our kin and with Creator, in line with spiritual truths. The relationships that ground ceremony ground us, becoming part of our way of being. As Kimmerer puts it, "Ceremonies large and small have the power to focus attention to a way of living awake in the world" (2013, p. 36). Ceremonies are part of how we are listening to the spiritual and natural world at once, bridging the gap (Poitras, 2022). The land gifts us more than the harvest itself - the coffee, the rocks, the plants - but also the ways of connecting and being with the world that come out of our relationships with them.

Ceremony is a way for us to offer something back to Mother Earth, to thank her, to all her to sustain and heal us.

Part Four:
When the medicines are gone

Ceremony teaches us miyo-wîcihtowin, *to have good relations,* with one another, with Mother Earth, with our more-than-human relatives, and with the spirit world. It teaches us how to listen and how to offer something back. But what happens when we don't prioritize our relationships with Mother Earth, her medicines, and the ceremonies that connect us? We unravel ourselves as we unravel Mother Earth.

Colonization, capitalism, imperialism; they've all worked to separate Indigenous Peoples from our lands, languages, and knowledges. Since these are all intertwined, when you separate one thread, the fabric of Mother Earth begins to fall apart. This is how we have arrived at the climate crisis we are now facing, one that has disproportionately harmed Indigenous Peoples. From poisoned waters and burning forests to biodiversity loss and shifting growing seasons, our medicines are vanishing (Jackson, 2011). Across many territories, traditional medicines and land are under attack: some are dwindling because of polluted ecosystems; others because land access has been cut off or regulated by governments or large corporations; but medicines can also disappear when we lose sight of them (Anyinam, 2016). That is, when our ceremonies are interrupted, and we learn to recognize only some of our traditional medicines as important, we lose sight of them and their power. However, it is comforting to know that medicines are offering themselves everywhere, even in front of our faces, and we can always learn to see them again through ceremony. Beyond that, the knowledge of where, how, and when to gather medicines has been deliberately eradicated or outlawed. So, what happens if, *when,* the medicines are gone? And what do we do to protect them?

Environmental racism is a term used to describe deliberately targeting communities of colour with environmental harm. This includes the overrepresentation of toxic waste facilities in our communities or the sanctioned dumping of pollutants onto our lands (Mascarenhas, 2012). And decision makers *conveniently* fail to invite us to the table; their (*in*)action is clear. But you know what? We can build our own table, and ensure room is made for more than just humans to have a seat.

When it comes to protecting our lands, we have always been at the forefront. Our responsibility to our lands, waters and relations are [20:29 non-fucking-negotiable] - it's in our blood, our laws and our spirits. You'd better believe we will protect what is ours and who we belong to. Defending our lands means fighting for our knowledge and languages; it means protecting our people. This means preserving our medicines and securing our futures.

The tough truth is that Western systems and colonial governments are not going to save us. They have shown us time and time again where their priorities lie; in profit, in control, and in keeping their systems of domination going, no matter the cost (Jackson, 2011). To safeguard our medicines, we turn to the teachings and practices that

have healed us since time immemorial. While they have tried to unravel us, we have preserved our knowledge through song, ceremony, and language. In the wake of what colonization has attempted to disrupt, we have the ability to listen, reconnect, and rebuild ceremony. We know how to learn from our plant, insect, and animal teachers. We have aunties, uncles, kôkoms and mosôms who know what to do.

When we build our table, it will be built in ceremony around our homefire, from those [21:51 gifts] materials Mother Earth has provided. We will gather around it, call our people home and tell them, 'Astum - come, there's work to do. The medicine is still here because we are still here.' As long as we are here, we carry the knowledge of how to care for the land, how to walk in a Good Way and how to protect our future. Because when we do things in a Good Way - with humility, respect, gratitude and love - we not only protect the medicines, we become the medicines. And that is the kind of power no colonial system can ever take from us.

Part Five:
Conclusion

It can be difficult to ground yourself. Believe me, I get it. I've often talked - both here and elsewhere - about me being stuck in my Tory Tower at the University of Alberta [23:00 as Rezpunzel]. Although I am on the traditional lands of my people, my feet are usually several stories off the ground. I am quite literally *not* grounded. So, how do I keep myself grounded? By acknowledging miyo-wîcihtowin and maintaining our relationships with Mother Earth, especially her medicines and the stories she has taught my people. And when I stay up *way* too late working, I know I can look up and see these stories in the stars to be reminded of how ceremony has the power to heal. This power is not hurled around willy-nilly. Creator isn't like Zeus sitting up on some clouds, javelin-throwing lightning bolts down at us. [23:47 No, he's probably throwing a few uncles my way, but] together with the land we *create* ceremony and the ways in which it can heal. We ground ourselves by acknowledging the medicines around us and interacting with them as responsible and respectful partners in caring for ourselves and Mother Earth.

[24:08 And so,] when I ground myself through ceremony and the connections to Mother Earth's medicines, it doesn't matter how far my feet are from her surface; I know who I am, what I do, and what heals me, and this allows me to stand tall and strong. [24:28 And that's what it means to be grounded in the Earth's medicine.]

Research Assistant(s): Senyuan Chen and Gio Ursella

Keywords: *Ceremony, Healing, Sweat Lodge, Star Stories, Traditional Medicine*

Glossary

Assini* – *Rocks*

Assini Awasis* – *Stone Child*

Nimoshoom Assini* – *the grandfather rock*

Nookoom Assini* – *the grandmother rock*

Matotisân – *the Sweat Lodge*

Mistapew* – *Giant*

Miyo-wîcihtowin– *to have good relations*

Tikoom* – *louse*

***In the Swampy Cree dialect from Buck, 2009.**

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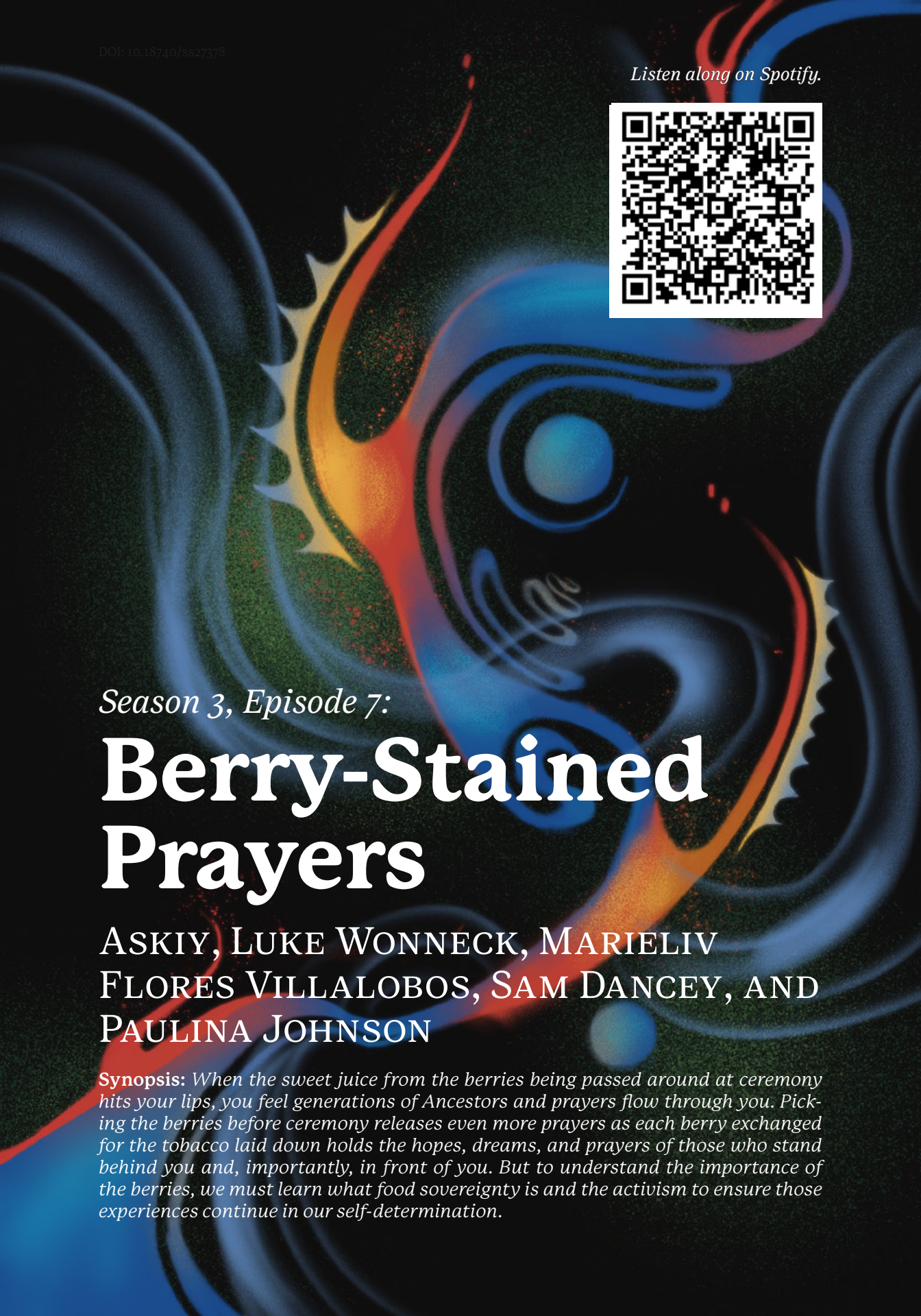

Season 3, Episode 7:

Berry-Stained Prayers

Askiy, Luke Wonneck, Marieliv Flores Villalobos, Sam Dancey, and Paulina Johnson

Synopsis: *When the sweet juice from the berries being passed around at ceremony hits your lips, you feel generations of Ancestors and prayers flow through you. Picking the berries before ceremony releases even more prayers as each berry exchanged for the tobacco laid down holds the hopes, dreams, and prayers of those who stand behind you and, importantly, in front of you. But to understand the importance of the berries, we must learn what food sovereignty is and the activism to ensure those experiences continue in our self-determination.*

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Part One:
Our Elder, Berries[1]

Berries grow in specific places at specific times; to find them, we must know the land and the people who know where and how to look. As Woodlands Cree scholar Herman Michell (2009) says, "In our Cree belief system, there is a time and a place for everything, and there is also a right way of doing things" (p. 67). Berries don't stay ripe forever. Similarly, some knowledge can only be shared at certain times or for certain reasons. When gathering berries, we must prepare for the obstacles, be aware of our surroundings, and understand that conditions may change (Absolon & Willett, 2004; Michell, 2009). We must remain adaptable to whatever may come through the trees.

We begin our harvest by laying down tobacco, giving thanks for the sustenance that the berries give us, and the metaphors of what doing research in and of community means. The saskatoons stain our fingers as we slowly search for riper and riper berries. A few never make it into our baskets and instead serve as a sweet treat that nourishes our souls. We notice where others have already picked and move on not to over pluck one location. Sustainability is vital to understanding the land and the connection to the gifts from Kikâwînaw Askiy, Our Mother Earth. Gathering medicine in this way, being on the land and in community brings us into a calming nature where we hear the land breathe all around us as it teaches us the importance of only "take what you need (and only what you need), give back, and offer thanks" (Kovach, 2015, p. 54). We take not to extract but to feed the continuation of life within and around us; even our momentary sweet treats keep us going. Picking berries is medicine for our senses, but also for our health. As Elder Frank Frederick Sr. said, "[t]o me, being of sound mind … [g]ood food from our land and our resources, you know traditional medicines, berries and all that is what I grew up on" (Howard, 2012, p. 64). That is how we become healthy. The health embedded in the land teaches us what good relations are.

As we pick, conversation rises and falls, and small talk gives way to a comfortable quiet, only to be interrupted by bouts of shared laughter (Michell, 2009). This, too, is healing. We share stories and knowledge, only saying what is needed and continuing in a warm silence. Once our pails and baskets are full, we sit together to pluck out wayward leaves and twigs that we return to Kikâwînaw Askiy. Finally, our berries are rinsed clean and ready to be transformed, preserved, eaten, and shared.

When the sky grows dark or our movements slow, we know it is time to stop for the day. We sit together, share a meal, and process what we have learned that day. The berries become a part of our being through their teachings and nourishment (Michell, 2009). With these gifts in our bodies and minds, we learn how to care for them better; how to care for each other and ourselves better. Who knows, next time we go picking we might do things slightly differently; perhaps we will return with empty pails and berry-stained lips. After all, we constantly learn from those who have been before us. Without them, we cannot become who we are.

1 Part of this section adapted from Johnson et al. (forthcoming).

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Part Two:
Food Sovereignty

In settler society, many think of our current food systems as having arisen through our sovereignty over nature. We all grew up hearing stories of progress as human ingenuity took control of animals and plants through domestication and continually improved its productivity through breeding and later, genetic engineering. Given all this, it's easy to think about and crave foods as commodities. It's also easy to expect that they will be consistent in quality and waiting for us in varying layers of plastic in a well-stocked refrigerator or pantry.

Indigenous Peoples tell different stories. For us, our sovereignty is not over nature. Nature is a gift from the Creator, as are our foods, which are inextricably linked to our sovereignty. That's why the first principle of the Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty is "[s]acred or divine sovereignty [where] food is a gift from the Creator … and Indigenous food sovereignty is fundamentally achieved by upholding our sacred responsibility to nurture healthy, interdependent relationships with the land, plants and animals that provide us with our food" (Indigenous Food Systems Network, n.d.). Our Creation Stories tell us that we are newcomers to these lands compared to our plant and animal relatives. We cannot master our Elder relatives. Instead, we need to care for them as Elders while learning from them how to survive and thrive where we are. Throughout this process, we are dependent upon our relatives taking pity on us and offering us their bodies and stories so that we can live. [6:20 Like, are you fuckin' kidding me?] They may choose not to, especially if we fail to honour our responsibilities towards them.

Of course, colonialism has made it harder for us to honour these responsibilities. For example, a recent nation-wide study of First Nations Food and Nutrition concludes that, "[l]and privatization, government regulations, and overexploitation of resources from industrialization (e.g., hydro-electricity, mining, forestry, and roadways) along with climate change have led to substantive environmental degradation, including increased contaminant risk from pollution, biodiversity losses, and the inability to access sufficient amounts of traditional food" (Batal et al., 2021, p. 53). How do we attain food sovereignty when we don't even have access to food? This is the reason why Indigenous People suffer from disproportionately high rates of food insecurity and food-related diseases (Daschuk, 2014; Tarasuk et al., 2019). It's not because we're choosing unhealthy options or need more help from the wellness industry or Canada's Food Guide. It's because our bodies are connected to the land, or more precisely that our bodies are the land. And the land is being destroyed or cut off from us.

Because of this reality, harvesting and growing our traditional foods has become an act of resistance to colonialism, of decolonization. And we are doing these acts more than you might think. According to that same Food and Nutrition study, 67% of First Nations adults living on reserves in Canada participated in traditional food harvesting or growing in the past year alone (Batal et al., 2021). So, a significant number of us regularly hunt, pick berries, fish, or garden. This persistence of our food systems – the reality that we and our knowledges are not going anywhere – completely contradicts settler myths that we only ever existed in the past, and that we gave up our way of life for quote unquote "progress" once industrial agriculture and grocery stories were invented (Kouri et al., 2020). Although I may make a trip to K&M for a roast beef

sandwich from time to time [8:39 - or the jello cup], you'll also see me in the garden or the berry patch with dirt under my fingernails! We have our underground economies - garages where moose are butchered, backyards where hides are tanned, networks of relatives who share berries, [8:54 and meat, and the like] and medicines and remind us what wâhkôhtowin is. These economies keep us here, even while colonial attacks on our way of life continue from all sides.

Indigenous food sovereignty is a way to bring these everyday actions together into a movement that connects us. It connects families, communities, and nations and connects us all to the lands and waters we belong to. The Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty defines Indigenous food sovereignty as "a specific policy approach to addressing issues impacting Indigenous Peoples and our ability to respond to our own needs for healthy, culturally adapted Indigenous foods" (Indigenous Food Systems Network, n.d.). In addition to its first principle of sacred or divine sovereignty, the Indigenous movement for food sovereignty is rooted in participation, self-determination, and policy change. Altogether, these principles encourage an adaptable approach to food sovereignty that can respond to diverse forms of governance within Indigenous societies. In particular, Mushkegowuk scholar Michelle Daigle notes forms of governance that "center ... the role of Indigenous women, youths, Elders, queer, trans and two-spirited peoples as these sovereign authorities are central in the caretaking of food harvesting grounds and waters" (2019, p. 303). These forms of governance operate at different scales within our nations, from the intimate relation of breastfeeding between a mother and child to the International Treaties we have with other human and non-human Nations. Collectively, they build on and reinforce each other, gifting us with the power to renew our responsibilities towards our lands, waters, and Ancestors. From this very literal place of strength, we fight back against continued attempts to destroy who and where we are, and simultaneously create spaces where we can care for our lands and waters in new and [10:58 ancestral] ancient ways.

Part Three:
Berry Stained Prayers

For us, Indigenous People, the Spirit and Physical worlds coexist as one. When we came to this physical world, animals and plants offered their wisdom to guide and protect us, becoming our relatives. We value and maintain our ceremonies because they are part of who we are and allow us to create a sacred space where the seen and unseen become one (Abram, 1997).

We know this differs from the Christian tradition that underpins many settler understandings of knowledge. When the spirit world is detached from the material lives of humans, animals, plants, fungi, and other earthly creatures, it becomes something aspirational, a heaven that can never be sensed, but where divine entities claim the purest essence of life. In its search for such purity, Western knowledge systems end up becoming the human mind - or if I'm being honest, the white male mind [12:05, yeah] - believing it to be unburdened by earthly constraints (Abram, 1997). You know how those old white guy philosophers are trying to go on about free will? Of course, this relegates the rest of the world, including our bodies, to mere objects which can be used and exploited.

In contrast, Elder Elmer Rattlesnake (personal communication, April 13, 2025) explains that there was an order in the creation of life. Plant life was the first creation, providing food, medicine, and shelter. Then, the insect world followed to control the plant life. After that, animals came to life, bringing messages. Finally, the human world joined the creation. Each of these lives is valuable by itself, equally important, and holds responsibilities with each other. Humans are not separate from the plant, insect, and animal worlds. We all arose as part of an intricately connected and accountable network. We are meant to have a long and healthy life with what Creator has provided.

Berries are sweet and special. They grow in their own time to protect us. For example, strawberries strengthen our hearts for summer activities, ensuring we have enough energy to enjoy outdoor activities. We must acknowledge the Creator for giving us berries as a gift, as they help our bodies and souls stay grounded in our land and future (Elder Elmer Rattlesnake, personal communication, April 13, 2025).

The power of our ceremonies relies on marrying the ordinary to the sacred (Kimmerer, 2013). Berries help us carry our prayers to the spirit world. In doing so, they become the request and answer: the prayer and the healing. When we harvest, give thanks, protect the land, and share its gifts, we are strengthening this connection. Berries help us remember that our "bodies are magical entities" (Abram, 1997, p. 15) that can hold space for our Ancestors, relatives, and loved ones.

Part Four:
Conclusion

I said at the beginning that berries grow in specific places and at specific times. Around here [14:32 in the good old neighborhood of Maskwacîs], you'll find saskatoons at the edges of forests, and they will usually be ripe in the second half of Paskowipîsim, or the Moulting Moon. We might want to gorge ourselves on berries, but we must also consider the future. Soon the berries will shrivel on the branches, the leaves will fall, and the snow will come. We freeze and dry our berries and make soup and pimîhkân to share at our feasts and ceremonies during cold winter nights. At these occasions, the summer's sunlight, water, soil, and prayers give us renewed vitality and hold our communities together during the darkest times.

We all deserve to feel safe while connecting with the Creator's gifts. But how can we do so amid a force that keeps trying to erase our culture? Resisting - or simply refusing - this force can take on many forms. Advocacy, protests, and direct actions all have their place. But intermingled within these more recognizable forms of political action, we also need to remember that berries are what stain our prayers, just as they stain our lips and fingers. And sometimes, those berries hold much more than we may honestly know. And they might just be ripe for picking.

Research Assistant(s): George Sartison

Keywords: *Berries, Food Sovereignty, Prayer, Ceremony, Traditional Medicine.*

Glossary

Kikâwînaw Askiy – *Our Mother Earth*

Paskowipîsim – *Moulting Moon*

Pimîhkân – *A dish made with berries, tallow and crushed meat*

Wâhkôhtowin– *Kinship, interrelatedness, family*

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Season 3, Episode 8:

Maskwa Ceremony

Askiy and Paulina Johnson

Synopsis: *Animistic societies have long believed that inanimate and animate entities can possess souls, especially regarding animals. For many Indigenous communities in North America, Maskwa, the Bear, was an all-knowing entity that is entitled to proper treatment in life and death because it was not just an "animal" but have profound impact on [0:46 Indigenous Peoples'] their daily lives and thoughts. We examine the grandfathers/grandmothers of the Animal Nation [0:53 through the bear], their power and strength, and share what the maskwa represents for the land. But we do so by merging the work [1:03 that I wrote when I was 22 years old, and a fourth-year undergraduate student at the University of Alberta. And the reason we do this is to understand how the Earth brings us full circle] of 22 year old Dr. Johnson with her voice today.*

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Part One:
Anthropologists and Animism

I was obsessed with bears when I completed my undergraduate degree at the U of A—I even asked Dr. Robert Losey if he could supervise me in a directed reading course on bears so [1:37 that] I could examine them further. I don't think many people know that I am actually trained in archaeology and never once took courses in socio-cultural anthropology until my PhD. And like a true academic, I have held on to that fourth-year undergraduate paper, basing this episode on what a 22-year-old Paulina would have loved the world to hear. So, shall we listen to what I wrote years ago? Now, *bear* with me.

In 1871, E.B. Tylor presented the term 'animism' in his work *Primitive Culture* (Bird-David, 1999). Though 'animism' is used by anthropologists throughout the world today, Tylor intended it to showcase how Indigenous Peoples had remained 'primitive' because of their mental inferiority, which was why they had not evolved into civilizations like the ones in Europe [2:40 you know, the ones that marry their cousins]. I know right, what a tool. However, Tylor's term did predate anthropology's daddy Franz Boas , who developed the idea of 'cultural relativism,' the belief that no one has the right to judge other cultures based on their own, however, I still ain't givin' Tylor a pass on that one. That said, I will reclaim Tylor's term, using it to describe the ontological and cosmological beliefs of Indigenous Peoples in North America who hold animistic views.

Animism usually refers to the belief that animate and inanimate things have souls. In many animistic societies, personhood was not limited [3:26 just] to humans (Losey *et al.*, 2010). Many Indigenous teachings encompass the belief that, although animals are distinct from humans, they are persons. Dave Aftandilian (2010) writes that animals have:

> *"Agency and the ability to act consciously in this and other worlds; that we humans have a kinship or familial relationship to other animals that we depend upon other animals for both sustenance and spiritual assistance, and hence ought to act humbly towards them and because of these concepts and others, we ought to adopt principles of restraint and reciprocity in our dealings with animals" (p. 81).*

Aftandilian's description of animals as persons accurately describes how we as Indigenous Peoples interact and relate to animals throughout our lives, and the importance of this interaction and relatedness, but we wouldn't coin it as animism per se - it's really our natural law.

What a nerd for someone who did not want to be in university - but look what happened - [4:37 Creator had will, and strength]! The premise of this episode is to delve a little deeper into my interests in the spirit and agency in the world that we often overlook. What better way to do so than to look into the great Animal Nation through the worlds of the grandfathers? Especially in an independent study course that I first researched in my last year of my undergraduate degree. What teachings are embedded here? Hmmm, I wonder what we will learn, so then, let's carry on and focus on Maskwa, the Bear. But to truly understand 'animism' and the roles of the four-legged or animal world we must first examine the cosmos.

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Part Two:
The Cosmos

The cosmos refers to the order of things in the universe that humans cannot confront nor have power over, and is represented as a series of tiers, [5:42 or realms,] with one such tier occupied by us [5:47 so essentially, in anthropological speak]; the normies (Berres et al., 2004; Ingold, 1986; Losey et al., 2010). [5:51 But let's bear with that concept.] As normal living beings, we are less spiritually powerful than animals since we cannot move between realms. The realms themselves can be argued to be the world of the living and the world of the celestial or spirits. Indigenous Peoples believe that an invisible force – a powerful spirit – permeates the universe and orders the cycles of birth and death for all living things; therefore, the world is infused with the divine (Olson & Wilson, 1984).

The only human able to travel between the spirit world and the living world is [6:28 unfortunately, and I will use this term,] a shaman, [6:31 or a Medicine Person; a healer,] who embodies the essence of an animal, [6:38 and] typically that's the bear, [6:39 and the reason why they utilize the bear is because they need] to survive such a journey. Humans cannot journey without help because they are only part of a larger, eternal whole (Olson & Wilson, 1984). Animals hold such an ability because of the means of regeneration. How the hunter treats the animal appropriately or inappropriately in life and death will dictate whether [7:01 or not the animal] they are sent back to the living world. The one who holds the ability to determine whether or not an animal returns to the hunter is [7:10 essentially] the bear (Hallowell, 1926).

In the threshold between life and death, a liminal state is defined by transition, and the animal can see both worlds. The hunted bear or animal not only sees the world of humans on earth but also the world of regeneration; whether or not they will return is dictated by the actions of the hunters [7:32 or humans]. The hunter's action now dictates whether the freshly caught animal will be reborn.

Rebirth is a prevalent belief for many Indigenous Peoples. Regeneration can be seen in sweat lodges – more on that later – as well as the changing seasons and beliefs about death. It was believed that when bears hibernate, they were said to be reborn, signifying a strong spiritual power and connection to the universe. Inspired by the bear's ability to regenerate or sustain itself during hibernation, Indigenous Women embody the bear's power so that they can give life as powerful and meaningful as the bear. It is not only in childbirth that we believe one can be reborn; adults can also experience rebirth through ceremony and tradition, allowing them to become pure in the presence of community and the gifts of the natural world. As Indigenous Peoples, we firmly believe that the natural world is sacred, possessing a cosmic significance, and therefore, needing protection, nourishment and worship (Olson & Wilson, 1984). The natural world's intangible *je ne sais quoi* is more valuable than any gemstone, gold, designer bag, or even my sick pair of blue and white cowboy boots [8:52 that I'm very, firmly proud of].

Part Three:
Grandfather and Grandmother Bear

In 1926, A. Irving Hallowell presented his dissertation, *Bear Ceremonialism in the Northern Hemisphere,* which was not based on ethnographic fieldwork by Hallowell, but instead on a review of ethnographic literature, much of which predates Boasian Anthropology. That is to say, my guy was making a series of educated guesses, armchair anthropology at best, [9:32 you know] where they just sit there and read with no interaction [9:35 within the communities], you know, like the Canadian Government and Indigenous [9:39 Peoples]. However, even a broken clock is right twice a day. Thus, Hallowell's ethnographic summaries detail many oral traditions. Hallowell's dissertation - a decent example of written accounts of Indigenous storytelling - allows for a deeper look into the practices, beliefs, and spiritual values we shared and still share about bears, even if he penned it from his armchair.

Many oral narratives and stories represent the bear's significance in our lives. In many sacred stories, passed down from Elders to younger generations, animals talk, have plans, play games and generally do what humans do (Aftandilian, 2010). For example, the Creek and Yuchi Earth Divers of the Southeastern United States said that the animals came together in council to "talk about how to find mud with which to make the lands to cover the flooded world" in their Creation stories (Aftandilian, 2010, p. 81). The idea that the lands were covered due to a flood is widely held by Indigenous Peoples and [10:47 many of the] Europeans [10:49 you know; the great flood].

Especially attuned to power, the bear was the watcher of the animal kingdom, and whatever action was taken on an animal by a hunter was accounted for (Berres et al., 2004). The bear was a grandfather; he knew all that occurred (Howey & O'Shea, 2006). Surely, the bear can also be a grandmother, but many ethnographic accounts depict bears as male personas. In this belief, I find that the representation of the bear is characterized as the stoic male because it denotes fear, acknowledgement, and understanding of the bear's power. A male bear would be prominent in Indigenous rituals and stories because it allows human females to become part of the bear world, since Indigenous women could conceive children with a bear (Frank, 2004). But this is not to say, there were no grandmother bears, because we learn of their power in the ability to harness and hold medicine [11:47 which is really crucial for Indigenous Women].

Part Four:
Bear Medicine

Medicine is a crucial factor in understanding the balance of the universe. Indigenous or traditional medicine contrasts with biomedical or 'Western' medical science (Johnston, 2002 Regarding what medicine means to me, I believe a younger Paulina would've said, 'I don't think any English words can describe it because it can only be felt' [12:24 and I still believe that today]. Portman and Garrett (2006) state that Native medicine refers to "the essence of life or an inner power" that has created every living

being in a particular way and presence; it is through Indigenous medicine that "one experiences life through the senses, and it is through one's emotional experience of life that one becomes aware of medicine" (p. 459). In Indigenous traditions, healers are referred to by various titles, such as medicine man or woman, shaman, or herbalist. Much like what we may call them, the role of the healer is also dynamic. Individuals from other nations often seek out the traditional healers outside their territories [13:11 because of the reverence of their powers and abilities]. They are regarded as spiritual and religious leaders who guide their people through ceremony for the renewal of the community and the individual, and in many cases, through visionary experiences (Johnston, 2002).

Through the healer, we find the connection to the bear. Bears are the ultimate healers, and, in many cases, act as guides for midwives or herbalists (Tedlock, 2005). For the Southwestern United States' Zuni, the white bear[1] and the black bear were the foremost medicine animals (Hallowell, 1926). Bears give birth unaided and use herbs to heal themselves. Bears will locate roots, nuts, berries, fruits, or any other plants they want, sometimes venturing far to obtain what they need. This practice is very similar to ours, yet again making identification with the bear extremely relevant to us as Indigenous Peoples. Many Indigenous Peoples would follow a bear's path, showing them the herbs the bear used so they, too, could use them. From the Northwest U.S., the Nez Perce legend tells of how a man marries a female grizzly, who teaches him hunting and survival skills and also passes on information about which plants are edible and medicinal (Sillup, 2010). In the Nez Perce legend, we notice that a man marries a female grizzly; however, since she is a female, only then could her husband learn what plants offered medicine. Since bears were considered guides for midwives and herbalists, many women had the opportunity to become midwives and herbalists [14:50 because of this].

Aftandilian (2010) states that animals are not just people but our kin and our direct relations. The Koyukon of Alaska say that animals once had "human form and society and spoke human languages because they were once human, animals can understand human speech and behaviour" (p. 82). Bears can foretell future events, [15:18 guide us in finding medicines,] which also shows the bear's ability to know all and why they are revered as the grandfather and grandmothers of the animal [15:28 spirit] world [15:29 and why they have such strong bear medicine].

Part Five:
Conclusion

Those whose beliefs lie within the animistic [15:46 societies] carry different perceptions from those of the world of Western science and logic. Scott (2006), in his *Spirit and Practical Knowledge in the Person of the Bear,* debates the religious and scientific basis of animism, where he later states that there is a "degree of communication, agency, and social relationship (both animal-to-animal and animal-to-human) that exceeds commonplace scientific expectation" (p. 55). Regarding the bear, this is a valid argument. Animistic societies hold beliefs that contrast with scientific and Western knowledge. Tylor stated that 'primitive' people held animistic beliefs due to their inability to advance along the social series because they were a static people;

however, we *excel* differently. Our ontological and cosmological connection to the universe, areas that science does not need to prove or disprove, those that Tylor never even considered, show how our long-held rituals and practices held close to our hearts connect us to a picture much broader and more vivid than the average Western eye can see. [17:00 End, period].

When Hallowell presented *Bear Ceremonialism in the Northern Hemisphere*, he allowed the public and academia to learn about the Indigenous Peoples in North America. However, he did not know them firsthand. Though Hallowell's dissertation is remarkable in the ethnographic and ritualistic traditions, it is limited by the lack of human connection to the animistic peoples. To read something does not give the full effect of knowing what something truly means or is. This is evident in how Hallowell presents female roles, customs and precautionary measures through male informants.

In Hallowell's work, we only witness a fragment of insight into animism and the Indigenous People's traditions, practices, and rituals that became part of that boxed narrative.

As an anthropologist, now also a professor, podcaster, and all-around boss, I still fear that what I write may not justify what I mean. Like all things in life, we need to take that chance, just as the hunter takes a risk to go after an animal, or a shaman to transfer between the cosmos. Interpretations allow for deeper meanings to be presented. Howey and O'Shea (2006, as cited in Brown, 1997) state that "when archaeologists venture into the realm of ritual, many tend to draw heavily on ethnographic and historical sources or their interpretations; it is commonplace for archaeological material to be interpreted directly in terms of either ethnology, folklore, iconography, or astronomy" (p. 261). This statement is true, but it is in ethnology, folklore, iconography and astronomy that we learn who the past peoples were, even if the sources are limited and need to be interpreted to understand the realm of ritual. Only if we do not incorporate the people in question and their beliefs do we misinterpret what is being told and presented to us.

[19:05 And as I read out these sentences, as I reflect on what was being written down as a twenty-two year-old,] and not knowing what the future holds will always be frustrating, scary, and intimidating, but it can also mean that without risk, what is the reward or the journey? You can venture into new realms and tiers, finding your path, not knowing what the future holds. Still, when I reflect on this work and share the insights of that young woman learning her place and coming to see, I sit here, with her in spirit, laughing and joking, holding space for her, and that is what our Mother Earth ultimately teaches us. To carry where we have been, never letting it hold us back, but learning and morphing into what and who we will be [20:05 and knowing that it's going to be okay]. Morphing into the medicine of the land, the Ancestors and Elders of this territory - I wonder: what would fifty year-old Paulina tell us years down the road? Probably, to never give up being rank and rezzy. [20:33 Oh, Paulina, what I would tell you today.]

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Glossary

Maskwa - *Bear*

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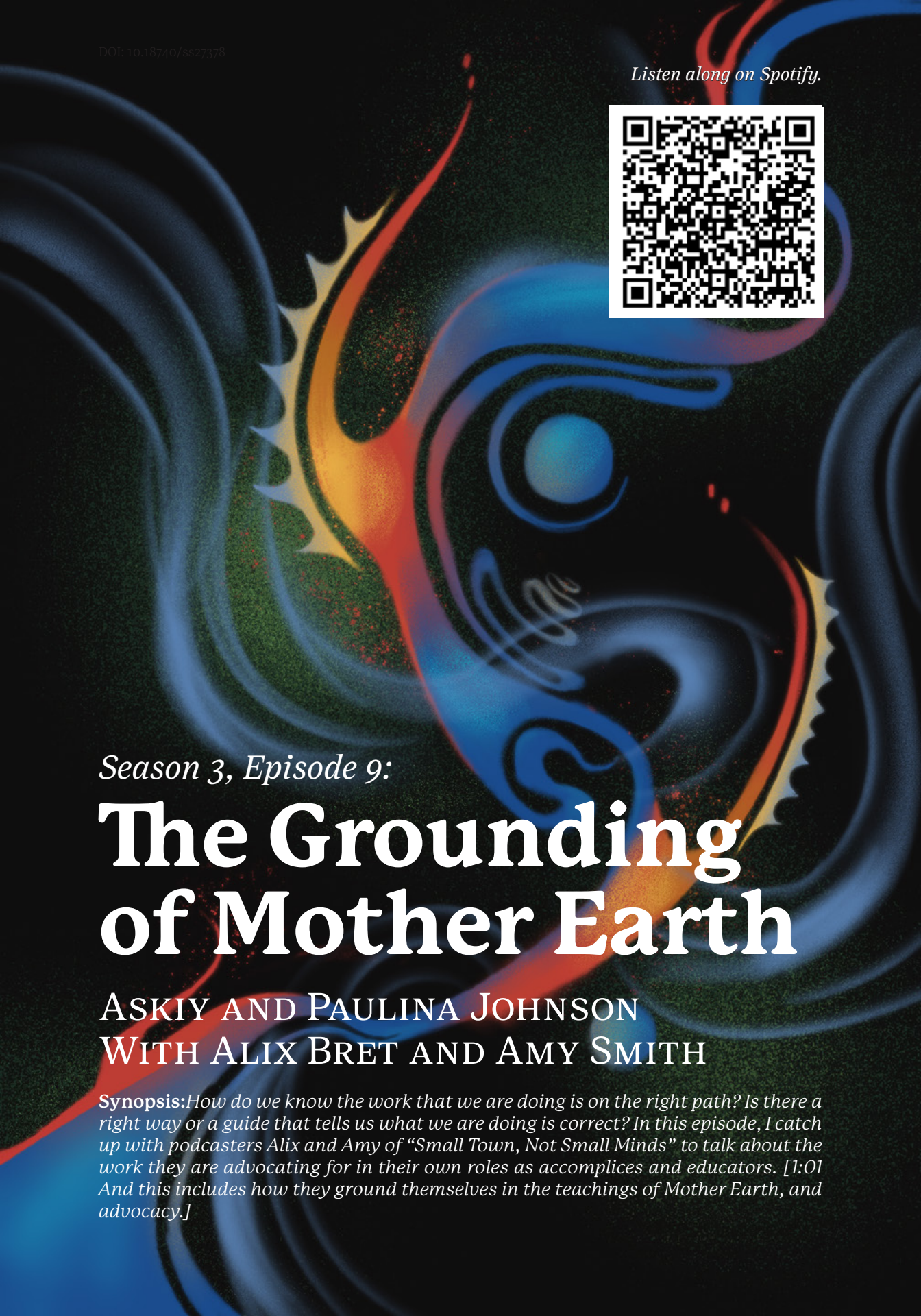

Season 3, Episode 9:

The Grounding of Mother Earth

Askiy and Paulina Johnson
With Alix Bret and Amy Smith

Synopsis:*How do we know the work that we are doing is on the right path? Is there a right way or a guide that tells us what we are doing is correct? In this episode, I catch up with podcasters Alix and Amy of "Small Town, Not Small Minds" to talk about the work they are advocating for in their own roles as accomplices and educators. [1:01 And this includes how they ground themselves in the teachings of Mother Earth, and advocacy.]*

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Part One:
A Small Town Grounding

I grew up in Maskwacîs but frequented Ponoka quite a bit. I went to school off reserve and had many non-Indigenous [1:29 or white] friends and that's how you know I am not racist. [1:32 I mean I can't be anyways; it's actually prejudice. So, really, I'm not prejudiced!] But amongst them was a baddie I know today, Amy Smith. She and her good friend Alix invited me to be on their podcast a while ago, way before my auntie days, and that's where I first got to share my truths. Amongst our discussions since then, all three of us have talked about what true allyship means and what it means to ground oneself in a world that is not your own. Alix and Amy are not Indigenous, but they are very much part of my work and the work I pursue. Let us catch up with them and learn more about how they have learned to ground themselves in Mother Earth.

Part Two:
Small Town, Tough Aunties

[2:29] Dr. J: Actually, do you guys want to introduce yourselves?

[2:32] Amy: Yeah!

[2:33] Alix: Yeah, for sure!

[2:34] Amy: Well, my name's Amy. I am very blessed to be with you again, Paulina. And now on your show; I think when we first met ages ago, we got to feature you on our podcast "Small Town, Not Small Minds." Um, my amazing co-host is with us as well.

[2:55] Alix: Hi, I'm Alix, the other half of "Small Town, Not Small Minds" and that's how I met Dr. Paulina Johnson. But Amy and PJ go way back!

[3:05] Amy: Yeah! Hometown friends from Ponoka at St. Augustine school, and then our families have known each other; we've been able to grow up together, and it's so nice. And like, whenever I get an opportunity to see all your family members; what a joy! [It] just is, like, so nostalgic for me - I have all these great memories of growing up and sharing that time with your family. It's beautiful.

[3:30] Dr. J: I think what's really great about that, too, is like, you don't get to see a lot of long-standing friendships, I feel. And one of the biggest things of why I wanted to have you on this specific season, and in this context of Earth, was that- because we get to have that cross-cultural conversation. But also one of where we come from in our roles as educators, but also friends and confidants; we get to talk about stuff that is, like, a little bit - you know - I feel like we don't beat around the bush about.

[4:03] Amy and Alix (overlapping): Mhm!

[4:04] Dr. J: And so I wanted to talk with you and Alix to, more or less, have a

conversation about what grounding means; especially in the context of the work we do and- I really want to say advocacy. Especially for, like, not only Indigenous Peoples and culture, but like, seeing the world through a different lens.

[4:24] Amy: Yeah. And, I would say - I just want to point out, because I feel like it's taken me a long time to really find my voice as a biracial female, existing in the world. For those of you who aren't aware; I'm half Asian, but growing up in our small town community of Ponoka, I think I've always looked way more Indigenous than anything. And I never falsify my culture by any means, because I don't want to interfere. But, in a way, it's allowed me to connect with my Indigenous folks and friends a lot more on a different level of, like, kind of enduring some of the racism that was present in our community. And so, [it's] really interesting to be able to sit with you years later, and kind of dissect this. But also, I just want to point to Alix, because Alix and I didn't become friends until about [two thousand and fifteen]. And Alix has really activated my voice of speaking up, and holding space for it; and, Alix is, you know, she has Portuguese descendants, presents as caucasian.

[5:41] Alix: I mean we can say what we are; I came from colonizers. [all laugh] Yeah there's a smidge of Portuguese, but that's still white! They still colonized!

[5:53] Amy: Which is like- see and I love that she can be real with it, like; I would say, to me, meeting people like, as brave as Alix, who confront a lot of, you know, inequity - and just says it like it is - has really resonated with me. So, I think I'm just fortunate to be in a position where I've been able to walk both lines. You know, I see I have my white culture that I identify with, and then I'm able to mix with my coloured friends along the way, and I'm accepted, and sometimes not accepted at the same time. And so, I just want to shout out to Alix even though she's our token white friend on this show. [all laugh] But like, the power of even just holding space, and Alix has just done such a great job of that - and almost, like, it's really lit a fire under me to be like: I have even more of a special power to be able to connect this world, these stories together, because of the mask I wear, and the body I wear. You know what I mean? So, yeah. I guess when we think about grounding, so.

[7:03] Alix: Okay. I mean, yeah, like I appreciate- I know like, you and I have the relationship where like, I'm like a grounding force for you, you say. What I think, just talking about myself as well, and my background; I think when you have experienced some forms of marginalization, then you can have more empathy for others. And so, as women, first of all, we've probably experienced some form of misogyny. As well, I'm part of the LGBTQ community. And so, no, I do not know what it's like to be Indigenous in Canada, and because I am coming from not only my ancestry as colonizers, but being raised in a Catholic school, our public school system is very much from the colonizers' lens, right? But when you come with a bit of marginalization already, you can hear - if someone else is saying: hey, me too! I think you have like, an ear for it more when you're like: okay, tell me your story then. Because I've experienced a piece [of] some form of marginalization as well.

[8:10] Dr. J: Mhm. And I think it's, like, that ability to understand, and see, and hear. Like, it's to see between the lines to say: actually, okay, this person's uncomfortable, or this person needs someone to stand with them. I think that's really hard for a lot of people, especially to become aware of. Or like, I had this one individual- we had

a server who was more-or-less racist.

[8:35] Amy: A server?

[8:36] Dr. J: A server, yeah. We were at a bar, and I ordered a drink, and it was like, you know: oh, you know, maybe you should limit yourself. And I was like: I've only had one! You know? And it was like, in that moment they were like, that was racist, but they didn't know how to act. They didn't know if it was appropriate for them to say anything, and I was like: yeah! It is appropriate for you! They're a white individual who had never really actually done any kind of like- they said they had done racism work but, you know, in that moment I really was like: but have you? Because you could always make that choice for yourself, right? And I feel like many people – they'd rather, like, turn a blind eye? While individuals, such as Alix, and other individuals who are non-Indigenous, they tackle that head-on! You know? And sometimes like, you know, I'm really grateful I have all my research assistants, and like, if they're in a classroom with me, and someone says something inappropriate, like, they -

[9:37] Amy: They're on it!

[9:38] Dr. J: Yeah - oh yeah! They- they're like-

[9:39] Amy: They're quicker, probably, almost, to react.

[9:43] Dr. J: Yeah, and-

[9:43] Amy: Isn't that the power of- sorry

[9:46] Dr. J: Yep.

[9:47] Amy: Well, you were going to say this - because I remember we had this conversation- yeah! Sorry, go on! I interrupted you because I knew where you were going here!

[9:54] Dr. J: Right? And that's like- well, that's the work that we're trying to do, right? Making it comfortable - not comfortable to be like, you're going to go out and call everyone racist – but, you know, being able to say: you know, that's my privilege; that's my role, and that's actually my advocacy work. Especially in the relationships that we're establishing and building. And I feel like, for a lot of people who are uncomfortable with Indigenous issues, or just realities, are uncomfortable with learning how to occupy or fill that space – or be okay with the fact that there's silence; I feel like a lot of people can't deal with the silence. And for them, that's like unrecognizable territory. And so, I feel like within our grounding and understanding of each other, and in our work, we have that ability to kind of, like, pick up. And I feel like we also can pick up like, facial cues.

[10:48] Amy: Yeah.

[10:48] Dr. J: Right? Like, people talk about the microaggressions; well, we can pick up on those micro, you know, frustrations – or, you know, that's not okay.

[10:57] Amy: Yeah.

[10:57] Dr. J: Yeah.

[10:58] Amy: Like you can kind of sense it. And I remember, you and I had a conversation, and this is where I was like: so, I think one of the things as educators is we are trying to preserve and hold space for everyone at the table. And I know sometimes we're met with like, discomfort, or conversations that the kids have heard, and then we get that opportunity to teach and learn in that moment. Like, oh, I want to know why we said that, and like, what's this reason? But then, you - I remember you said to me, you know, there's a difference - and Alix, help me with the wording - it goes, like, allyship-

[11:39] Dr. J: Mhm.

[11:39] Amy: So you're like, a supportive ally, but then the level up is-

[11:43] Dr. J: Oh, an accomplice!

[11:44] Amy: An accomplice! That's it! An accomplice. And I remember the greatest compliment - because [I'm] doing a lot of Indigenous education work with teachers - and you came onto my social media page, and you were like: I'm so glad to have you as a friend who's an accomplice, who is already just fighting for the work constantly-

[12:07] Alix: Mhm!

[12:07] Amy: And just putting it out there, because it's lightening on the back-end for all these Indigenous folks. And I was like- I remember getting like, chills, thinking: yes! [all laugh] Because I was like: I'm on track! I'm doing the right things! Because like, at the time it just felt right, and I was doing all these things - but we don't realize who [it's] really helping! Like your work! And you're one person! And so when we have these allies and accomplices, even better, who are like, just like your team where they're like, full-on tackling, you know, people, before you even get there! Because they're already like, jumping on it! It's amazing.

[12:47] Alix: And like, I think that especially with social media, there's such a culture of like, performative allyship, where when you're saying - in your scenario, with your friend - when there's this uncomfortable, in real life, racist situation, not always speaking up. And I think that's where it's like, okay, if you're posting about it on social media, and you're reading about it; now it's time to almost walk that walk and put that into action. What are you actually doing, in real life, that's reflecting your beliefs? Because I do believe a lot of people are trying, and - but that performative piece; that needs to follow with action. And I think that's when we see more change.

[13:32] Dr. J: Mhm. So like, a side note for you both; as I started to look into, like, the Plains Cree language - Nêhiyawen - to see; well, what's a word for accomplice? Because I wanted to put that in the context. And so there's not actually in a word per se, but actually what was closest, was a fighting partner. So, you're fighting this fight with like, someone you trust, someone you've built this repertoire and relationship

with, and the fight is, obviously, right now, racism. You know, the colonial structures that is embedded in whiteness - white supremacy - that is Canada, right? But it was really like - for me it was like another 'aha' moment as like - these are people that are willing to, you know, fight when I don't have it anymore, or I'm not in the room, or I'm not in those spaces. And I think that's something that's really, like, profound in that work - because I feel like a lot of people, they don't see that. They think about the ally-ship which, 'oh, I'm an ally,' and it's like: you're not really an ally. Right? And then an accomplice puts [in] that work; that constant, you know, motivating factor. But I think the "fighting partner" - [that's] really key, right? Because you're fighting. Which, as you're saying as well, is not only for, like, us in this conversation - but everyone that's around us. Everyone that, you know, comes after us, too. Right?

[14:56] Amy: Yeah! Comes after us and like, you know - I know Alix - I'm going to use our story again, too - is like; Alix has been through it! With like, you know, people giving her a lot of push-back for [LGBTQ] rights, and being able to preserve that in her community. And I can see when it's like, my turn to pick up the backpack. And I'm like: tell me when. Like, I'm ready! You tell me when! [Because] like, at this point like, you know, even the distance away like, you know, I get defensive. Because I'm like, you know, it's hurting to watch someone struggle through things like that. And so "fighting partner"; I like that. I also think of, like - you know, Alix and I were on a hike once, and this is a real physical moment of a test of endurance. We're on what I like to call "struggle puff," one of the hardest hikes we've ever done, in Nordegg, and Alix starts crying, like: I can't do this! And everything because-

[15:54] Alix: Calling me out! [laughter]

[15:56] Amy: Yeah. But I'm there, and like, the physical story of me being behind you, saying all these motivational quotes to push you; that fighting partner needs to know when it's their turn to pick up the backpack and carry on. Whether it's picking it up for Indigenous rights, picking it up for LGBTQ+, picking it up for other seats at the table - conversations. And like, I think that's like - I'm happy to be that partner, because it is tough when it's just one person. So, even though people are always are saying, like: oh, you're so passionate about LGBTQ! And I'm like: it's because I have so many family and friends that are aligned with that. And like, it's not their job to educate you anymore at this point. You need to know this. So get on board - right - or get out of the way! Like, really. So-

[16:45] Alix: And I [think] that's a great point where, like [Paulina] was saying: who's going to be defending me when I'm not in the room? Because [it is] hard! It's hard work to stick up for yourself all of the time! And so you need those fighting partners to stick up for you when you're there, and when you're not in the room. And I think - as you were saying - we're educators, and I really try to lay that groundwork with them as well. Because I come from quite a white community, and so sometimes when we talk about race - and they're young; I teach young elementary - they don't understand the history behind it, and they're not always seeing it in the everyday, because everyone is just white in the room. But I try to tell them: I hope this gives you the strength that, one day, if you see someone else being picked on for these reasons, then you stand up for them. Like, hopefully you're brave enough to be that voice when it needs to happen. That's always my message when I talk about any sort of marginalization.

[17:49] Dr. J: Mhm.

[17:51] Amy: And right now, in my school community, we actually have a high diverse population, but zero Indigenous kids. And I know it's been like- it feels a bit like, I remember asking that question at the beginning, was like; how many Indigenous kids are in this school? And they were like: none. And I found it really hard to accept that role to be honest, just because I- my work; I wanted it to be really reflective. And you know, I sat with a stat off of your podcast, and how it took three months for immigrant families - or people who are new to the country of Canada - to learn about how people perceive Indigenous folks here in Canada. And I thought- after hearing that stat, I was like; any of the work I do right now, in front of these students, with these students, it still not work wasted.

[18:49] Alix: Mhm.

[18:50] Amy: Because they're all newcomers - a lot of them are new to the community, new. And like, they get it; they get the work. The kids, if anything, have started to ask, like, why aren't we seeing our culture - why aren't we celebrating our culture, and reflective. And it's such a perfect moment for me to be like: the reason you haven't is because, historically, there's been all of these things that have happened to the Indigenous People - and this is their land! But, you're absolutely right; we also want to celebrate your culture, so pull up a chair and let's do that too! Like, we don't want to shut away, but at the same time we want you to know this history; that's really fundamental so this doesn't repeat for your culture group, or anybody else's in this country. So, that's powerful.

[19:37] Dr. J: Yeah. And I think like, even too, like - especially when I have non-Indigenous students, and students of colour, or black students, and they're learning about all these aspects. Like, I always tell them: we're not trying to make, like, what we call the oppression-olympics - we're not trying to say: they've had it worse. But, what we're trying to say is: we have to look at the history of this country to understand how brutal it has been. And when you haven't acknowledged it, right, you can't move past it. And everyone's always like: oh you need to get over it. But it's- you can't do that if you're not acknowledging it, right? You have to bring out the truth before you can actually heal. And a lot of it, too, is deconstructing that narrative - and also a lot of the stereotypes. And I think in the work that we're doing - right - it's grounding those people back into, like, the energy of the land, and that's a [form of] healing itself. Because you're pulling them, not only like, their ancestors and their spirits, but you're showing them, what we always call blood-memory in the land - so that they can understand: okay, this is what has happened here. These are the, you know, the memories that still live today. You know, even if it's past, or historical per se. And so like, you're giving them that ability to have one of their senses open. And I think that's really hard sometimes, because sometimes the education system - it kind of limits those senses, so that you're thinking a very specific way, and you're not actually saying: actually, no, it should be something different. Right? And so, within that aspect too, right, is not to say we've always had it hard, too. I think when a lot of what you do in your work is also to show: this is the strength of the culture, this is the beauty of the culture, this is the actual humanity of the culture. Right? And like, it's even the humanity of individuals who have been marginalized, or oppressed, right? Bringing back that they have that spirit, they have that voice, they have that

energy, that kindness. And I think a lot of times in our society we get so dehumanized, whether it's being Indigenous, whether it's being LGBTQ - right - whether it's being a woman of colour, or just [a] woman in general, as you mentioned. And I think too, a lot of people too - even like, I think for us; ageism. Like, what do you guys really know? You know, it's like, well, you know, our whole lives! Right?

[22:13] Amy: My lived experience!

[22:14] Dr. J: Right? And some people don't even hear the lived experience aspect. Like they - I remember - -I'm just going to share this, but it was like, in one of my teaching evaluations last semester, was like: Dr. Johnson doesn't hold space for non-Indigenous peoples. It's not that I don't hold space; it's that I say: this is the context from an Indigenous point of view. If you're non-Indigenous, this is not me trying to pull you down, make you feel bad; it's to give you the context so that you're aware. And like, there's so many people that just want to resist it. But it was really a moment [when] they were like: I felt unsafe. And I was like: you felt unsafe in my class, which is three hours a week? Imagine me feeling unsafe everyday. Like, you know? And I thought that I had - well, of course this student didn't show up, so, they missed all of those key factors - but they were still bold enough to make it feel like I wasn't doing my job; I wasn't actually giving them, you know, that hand to like, come on this journey with me. Learn with me.

[23:18] Amy: Yeah.

[23:18] Dr. J: Yeah. It's that problem too, right?

[23:21] Alix: I also wonder the difference between unsafe and uncomfortable.

[23:26] Dr. J: Mhm.

[23:26] Alix: Because there is [discomfort] sitting in knowing not only that our history is what it is, but it's also happening in the present. And I think that's the part that is hard to, almost, admit as a white person is- if it was in the past and it was, like, it was all over in the eighteen hundreds, we could be like: well this is our history! But I think it's really hard to acknowledge the history when the history is our present, and we're still actively oppressing Indigenous People in Canada. And I think that's- I don't know about the unsafe as much as it's uncomfortable.

[24:12] Dr. J: Yeah.

[24:14] Amy: Mhm. That's such a good point, Alix. I was like: go off! That's [all laugh] But- oh, sorry, go ahead!

[24:22] Dr. J: No- I was just going to say: and that's just what we need! Right?

[24:24] Amy: Exactly!

[24:27] Dr. J: It's like - it goes back to your point, too, of like - or Amy's - of having to carry that, or when to pass that. Because it's the exhaustion! Right? Because then I have to go and defend: oh did you make this unsafe? And I was like: no! This is what happened.

[24:40] Amy: Right.

[24:41] Dr. J: You know, but I have to be on that edge for my job to be [like], always having to give the context!

[24:47] Amy: Yeah.

[24:48] Alix: So, I had this incredible speaker come, and his name is White Horse, and he is a Métis man from East Prairie Métis Settlement. And two things really stood out to me. One: as an educator - and if you are a teacher in the system right now, you need to look up Indigenous culture-based learning, because he was a teacher for many years. And he has really taught how to teach more from the Cree and Métis way, and one thing he did say was [that] he was raised by his grandparents - his kôkom and mósom - and he said- but then [when] he was school-age, he went to a Catholic school, and he learned English, and a lot of his stories and upbringing got lost. And then he needed to remember them, and he finally like, went back into his mind, and he remembered those stories; and what he did was he took us out, as teachers, outside and he told us one of the stories that he remembered, and then after, he told us: and now, you are a knowledge-carrier of this story. And so, a big part of him creating this website for teachers was because, he's like: one day I will pass away, and these stories will end with me if I don't spread the word. And he said: I want you, when you tell this story to your students, I want you to tell them, too: you now have this precious gift - you carry this knowledge on to the next people. And honestly that struck me so much, and I realized that's where a big portion of where you're saying: yes, we need reconciliation, but we need truth as well. And so, us as colonizers, or as non-Indigenous people, we do need to carry some of this weight, and make sure [languages aren't] dying, making sure stories aren't dying. Because it is part of Canada, and we should be proud that these beautiful stories exist, and we should be carrying that on as part of our heritage.

[27:00] Dr. J: Mhm.

[27:01] Amy: And now I'm starting to realize why Paulina asked us, Alix - because originally I was like: Paulina is our - my - go-to. Like, I ask her so many reference questions, dialoguing a lot of, like, scenarios through the education. And now I'm realizing - hearing you speak; hearing myself - even to say these things out loud is like; we're on Earth. We're grounded in the work, and we're walking the walk right now. You know? I think about everything that you're doing - I know that you're part of your Indigenous Actions Committee for your teachers; same with me - I've been so fortunate. I'm so proud of the work that the teachers have done that I get to work with - and hearing you talk about, you know, your experiences, like, I have so many, too, to like, bank from. But we're in the trenches; we're really putting in that work to make sure. And I know, from everything that I've learned from Elders, and Story Keepers too, is just like - that's exactly it. And I always come back to the one quote from honorable justice Murray Sinclair, saying: education got us into this mess, and it's education that's going to get us out of it. And he believed so deeply in educators being the ones to provide that narrative, and support that work, that I like - that's the one quote I always end with teachers, it's like, we're the ones who are going to change it. Like, we have to! Because we've got this next group of kids, and at every time we get that same opportunity to grow that with the kids, and it's such a blessing. And it's not -

speaking from my experience - it's not our Indigenous kids that we are just focusing on; it's everyone. It's all your white kids, it's all my immigrant kids coming in; it's all of them. And if they can all grow it, we've done it. So, field of flowers - here on Earth!

[29:05] Dr. J: And so- yeah! No - and that's why I think, like, I wanted to like, let you think about that. I didn't want- I can lead you to the water, but I need you to drink it. [all laugh] You know? Like, you got to be thirsty, Amy! And I think that's, like, why it's so like, significant, too; it's that, you know, in that little bit of our interactions; how do you carry that? How do you carry [that] fire, that heart, that connection to the next step; to the next individual, to the next story, to the next battle, more-or-less? And that's really what grounding is; you understand that role, you understand your responsibilities. And that's something that's really significant, especially in the teachings of the land - of the Earth.

[29:52] Amy: Of the people, of the culture; so much.

[29:55] Dr. J: Mhm.

[29:56] Amy: Yeah. Well, that's beautiful. Thank you. [She] didn't lead on a lot about why she wanted to talk to us, so-

[30:03] Alix: No, we jumped right in!

[30:05] Amy: Yeah! For the listeners - it's mostly like - I was like: what do you want to talk about lie, Paulina? [Like], give me some vibes! Like, you know?

[30:14] Alix: You're like: let me write notes! I need a lesson plan!

[30:16] Amy: Yeah! Like-

[30:18] Alix: And lo-and-behold, that's the colonizer way! [all laugh]

[30:24 overlapping] Amy: You dismantled some Western education! Yeah.

[30:24 overlapping] Alix: [unsure] and Paulina's like-

[30:28] Dr. J: I was super vague, too. I was like: well, it's like this.

[30:32] Amy: Yeah. But I understand now from, like, the Earth perspective. And sometimes I actually catch my own team, too, and the one thing I say, too, is like: I want us not to think like teachers right now, when we go for like, you know- we do sit-spots with the kids right now. We've been like, sitting, storytelling, and I'm- but they're like: oh, we should have a worksheet with that! And I'm like: I actually want us to like, not think like a teacher for a second. And so like you just said, Alix, like; we think like Westernized, colonized ways. And sometimes you have to like, you know, pull that apart and like, really just sit with it, and be present, and not take notes. [So], that's good.

[31:16] Dr. J: And I think when you do it that way, you speak with your heart, and you speak with that intention.

[31:22] Amy: Mhm.

[31:23] Dr. J: And that's what's really significant.

[31:25] Amy: Yeah.

[31:25] Dr. J: So, I want to thank you guys for being on this episode. Do you have any, actually, final comments?

[31:33] Amy: Well, I just want to say: I'm so grateful. You know when you're a child, and you never really know who you're going to stay in touch with? Like, I have best friends and, at the time, as a kid, I had best friends, and like, you know, you never really know. And I think, like, it's been interesting when I get to re-meet some of my old friends, and just see where we're at in life, and how that aligns. And that's like, I think, a big part. Because there was a gap where I didn't stay in-touch with you, when you went out East-

[32:03] Dr. J: Yeah.

[32:04] Amy: -and things like that. And then to be able to just, like, be back in Alberta together, and just reunited. I'm like: oh, it's on! It's full force! I'm like: you can't keep us apart!

[32:16] Alix: And I think you can feel that authenticity, though. Like, for example, Paulina and I had met online, on a recording. Like, three or four years ago. And we hadn't actually met in real life, and it just so happened that, about a month ago, we met for the first time in the flesh. And it felt [like], that was incredible to me. I was like: I felt like I've known you this whole time. And so your, like, authenticity, you can feel through the screen. And so, yeah; I was just shocked that we hadn't met in real life. That's how well - yeah - you can feel your-

[32:51 overlapping] Dr. J: Covid.

[32:51 overlapping] Alix: Yeah, covid!

[32:53 overlapping] Amy: It was covid, actually, yeah!

[32:54 overlapping] Alix: And also-

[32:55] Amy: Yeah! Yeah.

[32:57] Dr. J: But I do want to give you props, Alix. I just love how you were just like: I'm a colonizer! [laughter]

[33:02] Alix: Well, am I wrong? [laughter]

[33:08] Amy: From the lines! She's converted though, don't worry everyone. [laughter]

[33:14] Dr. J: She knows what's up!

[33:15] Amy: She does.

[33:16] Dr. J: Mhm.

[33:17] Alix: I just- I appreciate you for having us on. I think it's interesting we all have different roles in education, but we all have this kind of, as you say, grounding. And we're all carrying a piece of this backpack.

Part Five:
Conclusion

When people say anti-racism or decolonial work is hard - it is. But, with the right people, we can go a long way together - and that includes colonizers - as Alix says. [33:56 And I just want to make a final note, that I am so proud of Alix and Amy, and all that they do, and continue to do. That is what a fighting partner is.]

Keywords: *Accomplices, Allyship, Education/Western Education, Earth, Fighting Partner, Grounding, LGBTQ+, Maskwacîs, Ponoka, Story Keepers*

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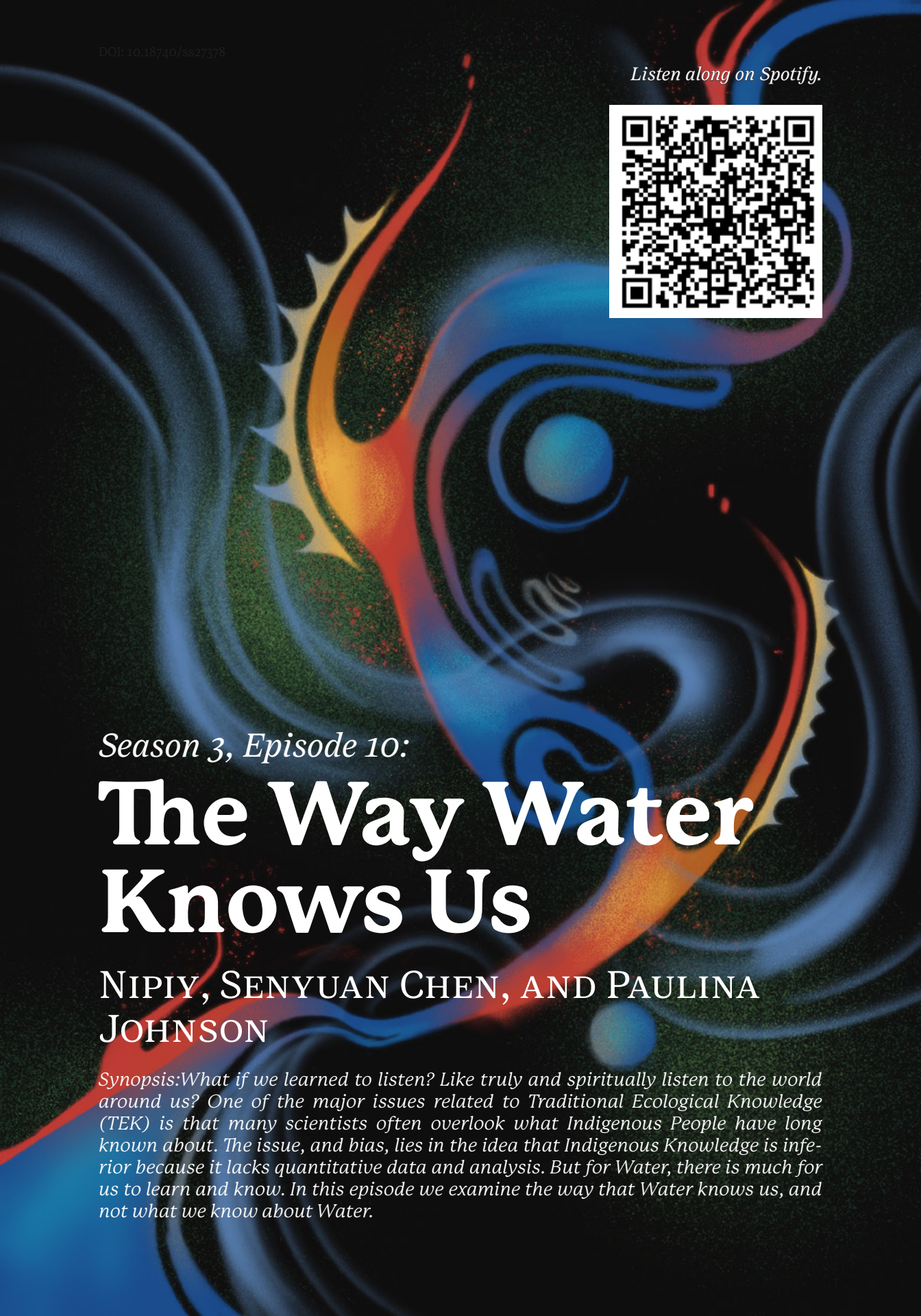

Season 3, Episode 10:

The Way Water Knows Us

Nipiy, Senyuan Chen, and Paulina Johnson

Synopsis:What if we learned to listen? Like truly and spiritually listen to the world around us? One of the major issues related to Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) is that many scientists often overlook what Indigenous People have long known about. The issue, and bias, lies in the idea that Indigenous Knowledge is inferior because it lacks quantitative data and analysis. But for Water, there is much for us to learn and know. In this episode we examine the way that Water knows us, and not what we know about Water.

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Part One:
Introduction

When settlers think about Indigenous Knowledge, the concept of stories often come to mind. But what if I told you that Indigenous Knowledge covers much more than stories and teachings? What if I told you that Traditional Ecological Knowledge, or TEK for short, covers areas of knowledge that Western academia hasn't fully considered? [1:47 So listeners,] let's dive deep into TEK, specifically the way water knows us.

Part Two:
Rez-pect The Water

We can all agree that water is vital to life, as well as an important part of any culture. However, the reasons may differ depending on the knowledge system of that culture. While the West may only consider the physical aspects of water, TEK of Indigenous communities recognizes water's spiritual, scientific, and sociocultural aspects as well as the intricate links between them (Baijius & Patrick, 2019; Wilson, 2014). Of course, exactly how water is interpreted varies between communities, one consistent similarity is that we're equals; water will care for us, knows us better than we know ourselves, and will help us so long as we help in return (Cave & McKay, 2016; Chiblow, 2019; Danard, 2015).

As we dive into what water is trying to tell us, to quote Ms. Olivia Newton-John (1981) herself, "let's get physical." Physically, people have actively practiced the traditional knowledge taught to them by previous generations everyday (Cave & McKay, 2016). Take the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in from the Yukon River region for example. They can locate and determine whether a traditional water source, such as a creek or river, is safe to drink from. When asked about their methods of determining safe drinking water, they stated that water quality could be determined by its color, odor, and location (Wilson et al., 2019). Water can also be used as an ingredient for cultural practices, such as its usage in mixing medicines or crucial roles in performing ceremony (Awune et al., 2020). While acting as a physical component, the water is also operating in its spiritual aspect.

Allow me to put on my monocle and kick back in my leather armchair to discuss the sociocultural nature of water. Just kidding, I may have an anthropology degree but I am no armchair anthropologist. From a sociocultural perspective, the locations and activities within Indigenous communities provide social value and cultural meaning to water (Wilson, 2014). Whether it be ceremonies that include water or using it for healing and medicine, water is deeply connected to the sociocultural contexts of community (Awume et al., 2020; Danard, 2015). Given its importance, water is held in high regard and therefore deserving of utmost respect and protection (Chiblow, 2019; LaBoucane-Benson et al., 2012). To honour water and ensure its health and safety, we must acknowledge and protect its spirit.

Now, a settler may associate clear liquids and the word spirit with an entirely different conversation, so let's illuminate what is meant by the spirit of water. From a

spiritual perspective, water is alive; it has a spirit which we depend on for our own physical and spiritual needs (Lucier et al., 2023). Many Indigenous Peoples regard water for its spiritual importance; it is an entity that is deeply interconnected with life (Wilson et al., 2019). In fact, water is often personified through its connection to womanhood and femininity, highlighting women protectors of water, as well as illustrating their shared gift in granting life. As water protectors, women are responsible for the protection of all aspects of water (Awume et al., 2020; Danard, 2015). With the Anishinaabe, this is done via songs and ceremonies performed to pay respects to water. Whether water is used during ceremony, producing medicines, or cleansing and renewal, water holds an essential role in Indigenous communities across all aspects of life (Cave & McKay, 2016).

The respect for water and responsibility to protect it stems from the fact that water will do the same for the community. Our relationship to water is marked by reciprocity. When the water is clean, the community is able to proceed with their practices and persevere. In turn, when the community continues to practice respect and upkeep their responsibilities to water, watersheds remain healthy. In this way, our relation to water is symbiotic, where one must uphold the other's health so that both may flourish (Wilson et al., 2019). To quote Anishinabe author Debby Wilson Danard (2015), "What we do to the water, we do to ourselves" (p.116). Therefore, several communities place a great amount of importance on water ethics. It is because water is crucial to the survival of both body and soul that Indigenous [P]eoples place higher priorities on the health and safety of water (Awume et al., 2020).

If water is held in such high reverence, how do communities respect and protect their watersheds and water sources? Questions such as these can be answered using TEK, which follows a cycle in which knowledge flows between phases of acquiring and transferring Traditional Ecological Knowledge. To withstand the tests of time means this knowledge was adapted, challenged, and revised based on new information and changing environments (Chiblow, 2019). Rather than the passage of time making these Knowledges obsolete, a millennia of time has matured these paradigms into a fine wine (Wilson et al., 2019).

Part Three:
Slamming Squares into Circles (The Lake is Round, You Blockhead!)

Are you familiar with wooden shape puzzles? The ones where children are given blocks like circles and squares with corresponding holes to fit them in? Seems like settler society has yet to figure them out. The main problem with Indigenous water issues is that Western science attempts to slam square pieces into circular holes [7:37 no pun intended]. Even when a square finally "fits", it's only because the shape leaves several gaps due its size. Rather than reassessing and questioning why their methods can't solve water issues, they'll continue to slam different-sized squares into the same circular hole. Over and over and over. You think they would've figured it out, but they aren't able to understand the nuances required to produce effective solutions (Baijius & Patrick, 2019; Popken et al., 2023). In truth, the answers to several of these problems, such as poor water quality and water governance, lie in TEK–where these questions have been answered time and time again (Danard, 2015). If the lake is next to us,

then why are we digging wells to put out our fires? Unfortunately, there's a lot of barriers that prevent TEK's implementation, most of which are settler-imposed. We can divide these barriers into three interconnected categories: knowledge exclusion, ontological fallacies, and institutional incompetence, and don't worry, I'll define them.

It should be no surprise to you at this point that many differences exist between Indigenous and Western knowledge systems. While calling upon both systems would lead to better outcomes, it's clear that the Western sciences have a clear bias towards their own methods (Mora et al., 2022). For example: when faced with food shortages due to an overabundance of otters, the Nuu-chah-nulth in the Pacific Northwest requested that the state allow them to use TEK through reducing the otter populations. This offer for collaboration with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans was rejected; their suggestions disregarded in favor of the state's own western science. In turn, this bias has led to the unfounded assumption that Western methods must be better than their Indigenous counterparts, because Indigenous methods were not used in the first place. The final conclusion: Western science both prevents and excludes TEK from being used in water governance and water-related decision making. Since time immemorial upon Turtle Island, TEK has kept generations and cultures alive (Jackson, 2018; Popken et al., 2023). By imparting knowledge, it ensures the next generation can continue to thrive. Yet, these forms of TEK are ignored and disregarded by Western sciences and constrained from flourishing (Cave & McKay, 2016). Through the dominating force of settler colonialism, there has been a severance in the transfer of TEK; a thread has been cut by the scalpel of Western science (Baijius & Patrick, 2019; LaBoucane-Benson et al., 2012). When traditions are banned or lost, the crucial knowledge and the identity of a people risks being lost to time (Chiblow, 2019; Danard, 2015). These traditions and ceremonies *must* [10:25 and I absolutely state this, must] be passed down, but when governments enforce their practices without fully understanding TEK, the past can be forgotten, and solutions must be created from scratch, a scratch often consisting of only Western solutions.

The exclusion of TEK results in ontological fallacies which are incomplete, biased knowledge on how best to solve Indigenous water issues. In short, knowledge that is unable to perceive the forest for the trees. These ontological fallacies stem from Western science's tunnel vision on the technical aspects of water (Baijius, & Patrick, 2019). Water is more than just two hydrogen atoms and one oxygen atom; although true, this only tells us *what* water is, not *how* water is. By seeing water through the lens of efficiency and objectives, Western science considers water as a natural resource to be extracted, processed, and sold; it loses its spirit (Chiblow, 2019; Mora et al., 2022; Wilson, 2014). At its core, these Indigenous water problems are a product of both ongoing and historical colonialism (Baijius & Patrick, 2019; Lucier et al., 2023; Wilson, 2014). Therefore, it is important to see water as it truly is. To adopt a holistic approach, to understand the antecedents of colonialism, the disregardment of our people's knowledge, and the consequences of ignorance would allow Western science and governments to see both the forest *and* the trees.

Yet, bias and ignorance has led to Indigenous water issues being exacerbated, as these knowledge gaps steer efforts towards the physical aspects rather than a holistic approach (Baijius, & Patrick, 2019). What's worse is that we'll continue to see Western science slam square pegs into round holes until something breaks! So long as the values, the history, and the context of Indigenous water issues are ignored, the knowl-

edge gaps within Western science will continue to lead to fundamental misunderstandings of the problems at hand (Wilson, 2014).

Even when Indigenous communities do reach out to government institutions and offer their expertise and knowledge, rather than considering us as knowledge keepers of the land with vital and important information and perspectives to consider, Western science has treated us as stakeholders to be convinced (Jackson, 2018). Our lands, our waters, and our communities are not products to be bartered. Yet TEK gets passed over, overlooked, disregarded, and underrepresented in all stages of the decision making process (Jackson, 2018). And so a domino chain begins. Ignoring TEK creates major knowledge gaps; these knowledge gaps lead to institutions making incompetent decisions (Mora et al., 2022).

The lack of Indigenous Knowledge leads to inaccurate data, government institutions remaining disconnected with community needs, and the degradation of water quality within Indigenous communities (Mora et al., 2022). Overall, the well-being of Indigenous communities suffers across physical, mental, and spiritual realms (Lucier et al., 2023). Several communities are under boil water advisories, meaning water must be boiled in order to prevent water-borne diseases. (Baijius & Patrick, 2019; Danard, 2015). Activities and traditions, like hunting and ceremonies, aren't able to occur if the water's quality poses a threat (Awume et al., 2020; Lucier et al., 2023). This disconnection due to flawed water policies leads to pomewin, *despair*, as communities suffer a loss of hope, power, and voice (LaBoucane-Benson et al., 2012). *But* [14:13 *for the love of God*] *it doesn't have to be this way.* [14:17 Sorry, Creator.] The answers we seek are right in front of us, offered by Indigenous Peoples who have known the land better than any western research article could hope to. All one needs to do is ask for help and to seek first to understand, then to be understood. It is time to unmake these mountains back into molehills.

Part Four:
Seek First to Understand

While resolving Indigenous water-related issues may seem insurmountable, all solutions require us to take that first step. In this context, that first step will require communication, and a good dose of humility - however not on our part. It will require Western science to break down its assumptions and learn to check itself before it wrecks itself - once again. The thing is, discussions about TEK and Western science should *not* be about which is better or who should have more space. Each has their own strengths and perspectives. The takeaway should be that both are crucial and necessary to ensure a better future (Mora et al., 2022). It's possible to design a system that supports Indigenous communities by guaranteeing water access, quality, and not only allows but supports access to water for ceremony and traditions. By bringing together knowledge, both Western and Indigenous, we can find a starting point that will allow us to both progress technology and protect the environment. Should these two worldviews coexist, we'll need to collaborate, create space, and most importantly keep our commitments to one another, much like we keep our commitments to water itself.

What does it mean to collaborate in this context? Simply put, collaboration requires dedicated inclusion. Dedication referring to inclusion of Indigenous TEK, people, and suggestions across all steps of decision making. Through the use of decolonized methods, such as including non-state members, and Indigenous Peoples and knowledge in decision-making, Western science must first seek to understand before it asks to be understood. Remember when I said that our connections to water depends on who you talk to? The same applies to our knowledge; there is no one-size-fits-all solution for Indigenous water issues (Jackson, 2018; Mora et al., 2022). To truly understand what is being said will require genuine dialogues that include the advice, the TEK, *and* the criticisms specific to the Indigenous communities. The end goal of collaboration should be to build good relations as a result of working towards the best outcomes (Chiblow, 2019; LaBoucane-Benson et al., 2012). This means the relation between settlers and Indigenous Peoples isn't equivalent to business partners - water is not a commodity. Rather, the relation should be one of equal collaborators, both of whom are invested in maintenance and respect (Baijius & Patrick, 2019; Mora et al., 2022; Wilson et al., 2014).

Creating space refers to providing opportunities for leadership, communication, and engagement (Cave & McKay, 2016). Given the state's power to decide which knowledge systems are implemented, Indigenous People must pursue recognition in order to be heard (Jackson, 2018). However, this is often easier said than done. The imbalance of power puts TEK and Indigenous communities in a catch-22. To be given space requires one's TEK and community to be recognized. To be recognized requires that a community has space to demonstrate their TEK's effectiveness. Indigenous communities have the best understanding of their problems and what they need, given that they directly encounter them on a day by day basis. For example, when interviewed about water security, Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in knowledge-holders had an in-depth understanding of land stewardship and water monitoring to ensure safe drinking water (Awume et al., 2020). Furthermore, Indigenous alternatives, such as community-based water monitoring, have been suggested to reduce water contamination. Creating space will allow Indigenous communities to explain, teach, and apply their TEK to their water-related issues (Chiblow, 2019). Logistically, this will require governments to provide self-determination, autonomy, and sovereignty over their watersheds so that Indigenous communities possess more control over their water governance (Baijius & Patrick, 2019; Jackson, 2018; Wilson et al., 2014)

Commitment is about keeping your word, putting effort into your promises, and being accountable for your actions [19:18 in essence, being genuine and honest]. In this sense, commitments intersect deeply with the ethics related to water governance, decision making, and communication. Several cultures, including us Nêhyiwak, aim to seek Pimatisiwin, *the good life*, which drives our decision towards an ethical future. Communications between the state and Indigenous communities will need to adapt to the protocols and acknowledge the values of the given Indigenous community, offering its knowledge. For example, Nêhiyaw methodologies produce knowledge based on respect and reciprocity whilst following core principles of holism, experience, and relationality. Protocols will include being accountable, providing gifts, and demonstrating Kihceyihtakosowin, *protocol and respect*; values will involve focusing on the interconnectedness of our environment, long-term observations, and acknowledging the sacred relationship between us and the natural world (LaBoucane-Benson et al., 2012). Once more, the state must recognize that different

Indigenous systems will require commitment towards fully understanding the protocols and values at play. It is essential that this recognition does not end with words but will continue with actions. The state must recognize the bias they have for Western methods, and learn to share water governance by allowing for multiple methods to coexist (Wilson, 2014). The inclusion of all aspects of water- physical, sociocultural, communal, spiritual- must be accounted for (Jackson, 2018; Mora et al., 2022)

There are no corners to cut, no excuses to make, and no escape from responsibilities. Settler colonialism has procrastinated on Indigenous water-related issues long enough. The answers they seek have been ignored far too many times. So it's time for Western science to wake up and get ready for a field trip! This time, put down your pencils and notebooks, get out of the classroom and onto the land. Get ready to learn, get ready to ask questions, and [21:31 for the love of God] get ready to listen.

Part Five:
Conclusion

Since time immemorial, we know that TEK has worked, still works, and will work for future generations. However, settler colonialism ensured a blind eye had been turned to TEK for far too long. Instead, Western logic has tried to create new solutions to old problems and ignore tradition. Unfortunately, these new research and development efforts are time-consuming and costly, especially considering that TEK has solved many of our current problems. To address Indigenous water-related issues, TEK needs to be implemented and settlers must *listen before they act*. This won't fix every problem instantly, but it's a starting point for the future. When collaborations are had, when space for communication is created, and when commitments are followed through, we'll see progress made by filling one circle at a time. Implementing TEK will become easier as time progresses. You can either choose the hard way, ignoring the answers that lie right in front of you and continuing to slam squares into circles. Or you can choose the right way, beginning to create dialogues and good relations, and finally learn the importance of shapes and reciprocity. So listeners, I ask once more: The lake is next to us, why are we digging wells to put out our fires?

Research Assistant(s): Sharaya Hill, Marieliv Flores Villalobos, Darian McCullough

Keywords: *Traditional Ecological Knowledge, Water security, Water governance, Hydropolitics*

Glossary

Nipiy – *the element of water in Nêhiyawêwin*

Kihceyihtakosowin – *protocol and respect*

Pimatisiwin – *the good life*

Pomewin– *despair*

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Listen along on Spotify.

Season 3, Episode 11:

Heart Work

Nipiy, Darian McCullough, and Paulina Johnson

Synopsis: In our hearts, we learn what value, friendship, relationships, and connection are. It is not the colonial way of love but the one deeply rooted in our spiritual and emotional connection to understanding and being. In this episode, Dr. Johnson shares how Indigenous Nations come to heal and let go of the world that is not made for them, but in doing so, there is also an exhaustion of resisting the colonial world. We examine love from an Indigenous perspective and highlight the "heart" at work to create a decolonial future.

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Part One:
Pain Passes Like Water

We are all connected to the earth; she is within us through our feet on the ground and the water rushing through our bodies. Mother Earth remembers all, and so do our bodies, holding stories within every cell. We both remember the times, before who we were was denied, before destructive laws, before colonization. Our way of life has been disrupted, and the earth has been disturbed by the lie of "commercialization, commodification, and privatization of waters [and lands] across the globe" (Hill, 2024, para. 2). Powers have tried to force us away from where we come from and sever us from what we are made of. The land is part of us. To be separated is to lose part of your identity. We are made of "about 60% water" (Hill, 2024, para. 2), water which gives us the ability to function "physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually" (Hill, 2024, para. 2). When access to fresh clean water is restricted, how our bodies function becomes restricted as well. We must recognize this relationship and nurture it, because it is our substance.

However, what's passed down is both the good, the bad, and the in-between. What if the generations of memories embedded in the water passed down to you are too much to handle? What if you feel like you're overflowing, and the years of water poisoned by colonization is taking you with it? How can one person handle all that has been passed down to them? Within Indigenous communities, many have to learn and heal from not just what has happened to them but what has been handed down to them to survive. We have learned to "deny, suppress and hide" (Ross, 2014, p. 129); it is a struggle to let that pain out, and to cry wholeheartedly with no hesitation. Generational pain is too heavy to hold alone. It threatens to drown you if you let it. When the Western world looks at this pain, instead of learning from the past and embracing Indigeneity, they look for a solution from the same system that caused it. How does that make sense? Western Academia has an obsession with Indigenous pain; when searching through libraries, you are bombarded with paper after paper on the trauma inflicted upon us because of colonization. More concerning is that they are equally obsessed with using colonial frameworks of healing to address Indigenous pain, fixated on their own logics. They are blind to any other ways of knowing. These two things do not go together. It is counter-intuitive to situate Indigenous Peoples back within the institutions that had and continue to bring us harm; the pieces just don't fit - no matter how hard they try.

To heal, we have to break through the colonial ceiling and place ourselves back within community and culture, and it cannot be done alone. Healing is not a process done through "self-interest alone" (Charlton et al., 2020, p. 195). It is just as much tied to the needs of the community and the land you come from. We reject the notion of "mental health … [lying solely] within the individual" (Charlton et al., 2020, p. 195); our mental wellbeing is just as much tied to the needs of the community and the land we come from. Western healing and therapies constantly ignore the importance of culture and community throughout the path of recovery. It's all about the individual, but we cannot heal alone; we are tied together. However, to clarify, this "does not equal [a] lack of agency" (Charlton et al., 2020, p. 195). Our spirits are tied together, and the water that flows within us is tied together; so we must work together to heal.

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Part Two:
Female Healing

"Water is the life blood of Mother Earth" (Hill, 2024, para. 1). This water cleanses and nourishes us "represent[ing] the interconnection between all living beings" (Hill, 2024, para. 1). Recognizing how this ties us together, how everything is interconnected, gives us a deeper understanding of our place in the world. My people feel the joy and pain of the earth and all its relatives, we feel the reciprocal connection that has sustained us since time immemorial. We are like the rushing rivers and steady ponds in so many ways, existing within circular relations through our bodies and spirits; so "we are not living well as human beings … unless we care for the water that sustains us" (Bédard, 2021, p. 110). Women have a powerful bond to the earth and the water that connects us, it is our "traditional and sacred duty to as water protectors" (Bédard, 2021, p. 116) . We have always had significant roles in our communities, with roles such as leaders, Knowledge Keepers, protectors, storytellers, and mothers. We were and still are the backbone of communities. But unfortunately, like many parts of our culture, this has been continuously threatened by colonialism.

Taking women out of their "positions of power and authority was an important step in colonization" (Ross, 2014, p. 77), just as the privatization and ecological damage done to our waterways has been for the land. Both acts have decentralized us from an important part of ourselves. Healing begins with reclamation, with standing tall and declaring that we have always been here, and will stay here, doing the work that's needed. It takes effort, resilience, and collective strength to restore the wholeness of our communities. For Indigenous Women, healing is not a single path but a layered process that requires time, reflection, and care. Rooted in our connection to Mother Earth, we carry Her lifeblood within us; we feel - deep in our bones - the pain and grief that ripples across generations.

Women, we have never stopped being important; we take on work and emotions that others can be blind to. Women are open to taking on the weight of what others feel; we can take on and relieve "another person's negative energy" (Stevenson, 1999, p. 13). However, to move forward in our healing journey, we have to be careful to protect ourselves and our energy. Carrying all the pain and emotional weight for those we love inhibits our ability to come together on equal footing. This causes the distribution of work for healing to become skewed and broken, and boundaries are integral to the healing journey. We cannot take on enormous amounts of pressure and expect to come out the other side better off. Often we can take on too much because we want those around us to feel okay; but that is not healing, not for them or yourself, at least not true healing. Like the airplane safety guide says, you can't put the oxygen mask on someone else if you don't put yours on first. We so easily focus on the well-being of those around us without drawing a line, a line that is critical for our own healing journey. As women, we need to put the oxygen mask on, take a deep breath for ourselves and then go out and gift others the chance to do the same. If not, we might end up with the oxygen mask haphazardly put around our eyes instead of our mouth. When we become equals in our relationships, when there is a respectful give and take, the healing process has steady ground to be built from, instead of festering within women's hearts and souls with no place to go.

Indigenous Women are powerful, we have multitudes of abilities and skills which have served us and our communities since [10:01 Grandmother Spider lowered us down onto this Earth, that we now call Turtle Island]. Still, I would be remiss not to acknowledge the deep exhaustion I feel from having to remind others of women's inherent worth and strength. It's not that we ever lost it; our power didn't simply go "poof". But somehow, it seemed to disappear in the eyes of others. With the imposition of colonial patriarchal systems and cultures where women were often viewed as lesser or secondary, something was lost along the way for us. That way of thinking has seeped into our communities, but it was never ours to begin with. To truly move forward, we must release these toxic lies. They are not our truth; they will not be the path to our healing.

Part Three:
Heartwork

Tanaya Winder, an Indigenous educator and writer, created the concept of *Heartwork*, which builds on what we have already discussed in connection with Indigenous healing; the energy, the emotions, and what it means to start putting the work in. Winder takes these concepts - these feelings - and applies them to Heartwork. You might find yourself asking what is Heartwork, and how is it important to the concept of Indigenous healing? Creator made us of "light and breathed life" into us (Winder, n.d., para. 1); with that, each and every one of us is born with a purpose, one that we and we alone are in charge of. This "light and breath of life" that Creator gave us is our heartwork. We are constantly working on our heartwork; it's a lifetime practice of our heart and soul connection. Mending this connection and strengthening it takes hard work and persistence. It requires an understanding of yourself and what your spiritual being needs. Heartwork is a constant ceremony of self-reflection and personal betterment. Winder states that it's an act of remembering, "put[ting] ourselves back together, and transform[ing] beyond the spiritual scars that try to keep us bound in darkness" (Winder, n.d., para. 3).

Light comes from within us, and throughout colonialism and the creation of the Canadian state, it has been dimmed. Many have tried to dim my light, but they have never succeeded, and never will. We are still here, putting in the work that needs to be done. It's not easy to protect yourself and to cherish what Creator has given you. At times it's hard to feel the spirit inside of you, but it is always with us, with every breath we take. When we move away from where we come from, and drift from Creator, the two become disconnected. Practicing heartwork "is a commitment to healing yourself, your family, your loved ones, your community, and your [A]ncestors" (Winder, n.d., para. 5). Mending the relationship between your heart and soul can "be hard work" (Winder, n.d., para. 4), but this work, this self-reflection and healing, is always worth it. Practicing this is done by surrounding ourselves within ceremony, which "brings us back to that original breath of life and light of spirit" (Winder, n.d., para 3).

We are constantly torn between logic and the soul, between what the heart *wants* and what it *needs*. There is a disconnect between the two. We know there are obliga-

tions out there waiting for us that we need to fulfill - logically. We know we need to do things like boring paperwork or filing our taxes, mundane tasks that take up so much time and effort that they leave very little time for ourselves and our healing journey. Wait a minute these are all products of colonialism. Hmm, lots to think about. Logically, we cannot devote all our time to healing when there are things we need to do to survive. In relationships, there are times when we don't want to rock the boat, so we bite our tongue-and logically, this makes sense. Sometimes, it feels easier to drift through life passively, or more often, to drag ourselves forward despite feeling like bricks are tied to our ankles. We've been taught that enduring this weight is simpler than pausing, listening to our hearts and spirits, and asking the hard questions: why are we still carrying these burdens; what would it take to break from them and run free?

An aspect that makes heartwork so difficult is the society we live in - even the ways we have been told to heal have been colonized. The colonial model is rigidly individual and ignores most community models, which are essential for Indigenous healing. Plus, how do you heal in a society when they are still arguing if the pain they have put you through was [15:24 even] real? Our healing lies its roots in the land; it follows the streams, listens to the winds, immerses itself in community, and finds solace within the embrace of others. It is there that you will find healing - "healthy land heals" (Ross, 2014, p. 260), community heals. This kind of healing - Indigenous healing - can't be learned "within the confines of a classroom or from books alone" (Charlton et al., 2020, p. 74). You need to connect with the land; that is where you can learn, away from the grasp of colonialism, where the heart and soul can connect, where heartwork can be done away from the prying eyes of those saying you're not doing it white... I mean right. Our identity of self is constructed not through isolation - but by Creator, by the land, and by everyone in our lives, past and present. We have to let go of obsessive individualism; that's not who we are. That's who we have been told to be. How are we supposed to disconnect ourselves when we are all connected? We share the same lifeblood and the same history, though perspectives may vary. Denying the importance of these relationships is a step backward, and frankly, exhausting. We have all been affected by the consequences of colonialism and the hate that it has spread. How could I then decide to heal outside of my community when they are all around me? How do you heal if others are still hurting? It is not your job to fix everyone or heal everyone, but the community does have to stick together.

Take a look at the Sweat Lodge. We go into the sweat to perform ceremony and cleanse ourselves, both physically and spiritually. A sweat is not something you can do alone, it's a group effort. Taking in the stones, dousing them with water, putting down the flap, shaking the rattles - it takes everyone. The food gets passed along in a circle; if one decides to do it alone and keep it to themselves, the next person doesn't eat, and it creates a domino effect. If one eats, we all eat. It's just how it is. Sharing laughter and love is an incredible healing technique. Coming together and becoming one in the sweat gives us the opportunity to be vulnerable, and we can learn from each other. Being able to acknowledge "that the pain, laughter and love we experience can bring us closer" negates the colonial ideal of hyper-individuality (Stevenson, 1999, p. 9). We know life forms are interdependent, just look at the medicine wheel; to us, "the circle is a key symbol" (Stevenson, 1999, p. 9). This represents the elements, land, fire, water, and air, but it also represents spirituality, community, and love. And Creator is always at the center. Everything is interconnected. It involves all elements of

oneself, all elements that colonialism has told us to forget. Our spirituality has been under attack, our communities broken up, and our personhood questioned, but healing, Indigenous healing - centred around ceremony and community - connects those pieces back together.

Part Four:
Together we push forward

There is no singular way of healing, as Winder's heartwork states. We are all born with different purposes, different light, and different breaths, but we all walk the same earth. Healing is hard, and at times, unfair work. Why should we have to put in the hard work - the heart work - on generational issues we did not create? Why should we spend hours, years, and generations trying to make things alright in our spirit because of someone else's actions? Did I mention it's exhausting? This frustration can linger, fester, and make healing harder. Why put in all that effort when you were the one wronged? It's hard to start. And then it's frustrating that it doesn't go quicker than it does. There is no special elixir, no band-aid to fix the "extensive damages that have been perpetuated for so many years" (Wesley-Esquimaux & Smolewski, 2004, p. 79). Still, we always come back to what Creator has given us.

Our Ancestors teach us a great deal: you are who you are because of the people who came before you; their pain, happiness, the good and the bad all came together to create something perfect. Everything within us gives us the ability to heal and do great things. But we can stray from that and forget what we are made of. Putting in heartwork is also a way of remembering where and who we came from and ways to show our commitment to them. You feel their pain, but you also feel their joy. Hold onto that feeling, that's what's important - that is what we are healing for, for all the joy that came before and has trickled down to us. We carry on the images of "men and women we have never known and shall never meet" (Wesley-Esquimaux & Smolewski, 2004, p. 71). However, their lifeblood is connected to us, just as they are still connected to the community, which is why it is so important to come together, share stories, sing, dance, and perform ceremony together. We have to push past the barriers of colonization to reconnect with our culture. Just because something has been washed away doesn't mean it's missing forever; it is with us from the moment we are born.

There is a pain in isolation. Participating in ceremonies such as healing circles "helps to break the cycle of isolation, shame and blame" (Stevenson, 1999, p. 10). Colonization has worked to separate us, which is why things like healing circles are important and bring us closer to community and spirit. It is easier to grow when you have support around you, where you can cry and do it in comfort with those who understand your tears. Coming back to culture and embracing it brings us back to the land. When it comes to emotions, healing, and heartwork, it always circles back to what enables those gifts in the first place: water. As I talked about earlier, water is immensely important spiritually. It is not only within us connecting us to the land, but it acts as a reminder about our responsibilities. Water gives life not only to us but to everything we live with, and there is a duty to preserve that. We need to nurture that natural resource just as we nurture ourselves because, once again, it takes more than an individual. It's a ripple effect.

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Decolonizing Mental Health by John E. Charlton, Herman J. Michell, and Sharon L. Acoose outline three main themes of healing which are important to our discussion: "spirit is the core of all things … relationships are the root of wellness …[and] the very act of living is ceremony" (2020, p. 235), these things can live in harmony within us, we are resistance. The Western world ignores our ways of knowing, which have been a part of the world order longer than the colonial state, and despite years of trying and the years of telling us how to get over it and heal, that will never be shaken from our bodies; the breath of air Creator puts into everyone will never leave us. How can we be told to heal as individuals when we have never been that? As soon as we are put into this world, we are connected through the water, spirit, and the winds that carry our words and hopes. The spirit goes into "the deepest ravines of your being, touching unknown places of hurt, pain, and grief" (Charlton et al., 2020, p. 71). Following the spirit allows for self-reflection, and silence lets us listen to the sprinkle of rain or rushing rivers, "reminding us it is okay to weep" (Charlton et al., 2020, p. 71). It is okay to weep together, which is why ceremony is meant to be done together. We all have a reason, and we all have an important light inside of us coming together. [15:05 And] we can become so much brighter.

Part Five:
Conclusion

When we enter a sweat, we are healing; when we dance, we are healing; when we are together, we are healing. As long as the water has flowed, the wind has blown, and the trees have stood, we have been here. Ceremony is our connector; when we are lost, sad or exhausted, there is always a place for us to come and catch our breath. It ties us back as a community and brings us back to the land, all of which mean so much - all of which Creator has made. Pushing past the noise and the bindings that colonization has created, we can find the love we share, and that is what healing is - [26:02 healing, not only for ourselves, but for each other; a collective unit inspired by what we can do together.]

Research Assistant(s): Senyuan Chen, Sharaya Hill, Drake Worth

Keywords: *Heartwork, Water, Healing, Women, Community*

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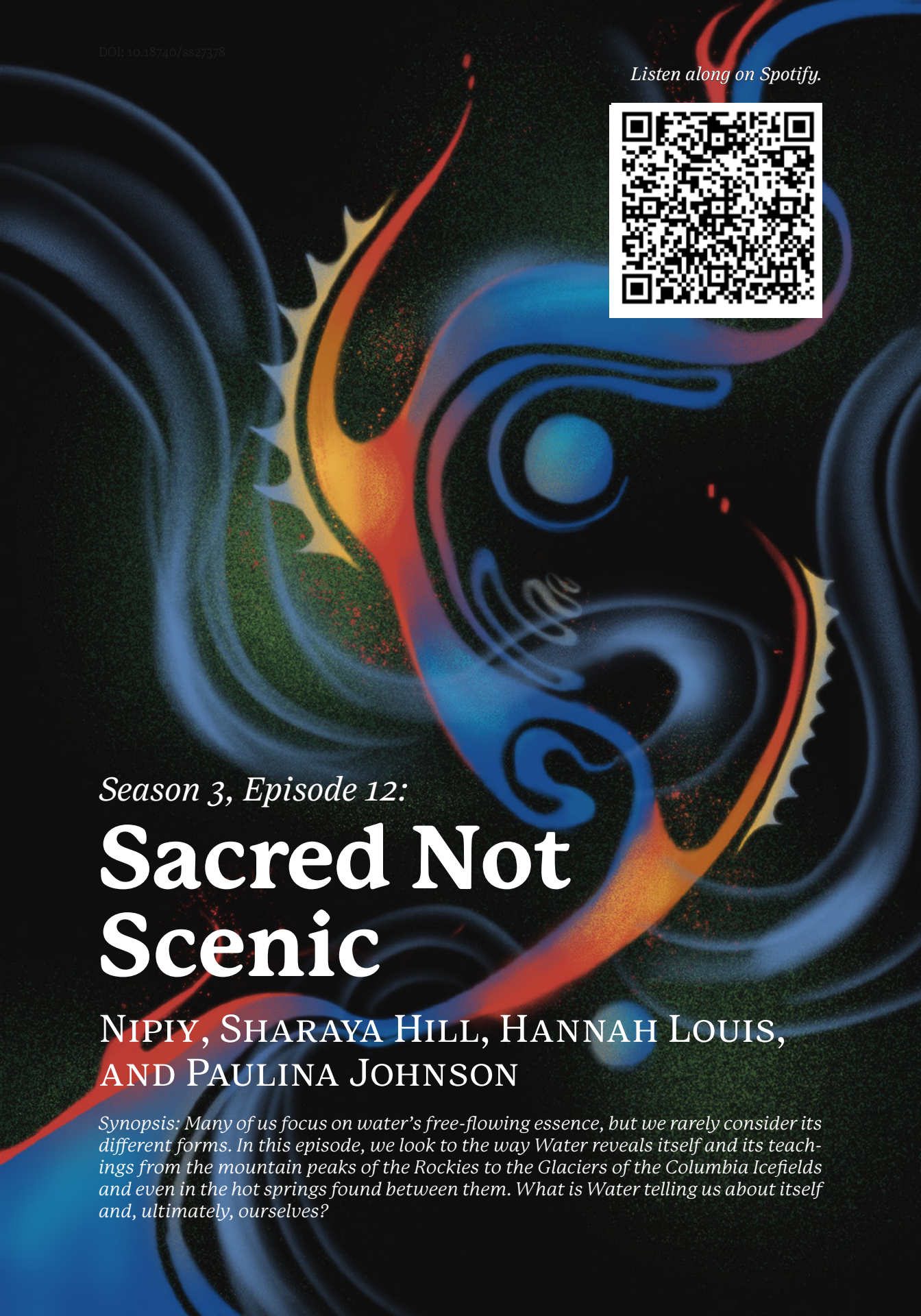

Season 3, Episode 12:

Sacred Not Scenic

Nipiy, Sharaya Hill, Hannah Louis, and Paulina Johnson

Synopsis: Many of us focus on water's free-flowing essence, but we rarely consider its different forms. In this episode, we look to the way Water reveals itself and its teachings from the mountain peaks of the Rockies to the Glaciers of the Columbia Icefields and even in the hot springs found between them. What is Water telling us about itself and, ultimately, ourselves?

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Socialist Studies/Études Socialistes *Vol. 19, no 2 (2025) — Special Issue: The Auntie Dialogues, Volume 3*

Part One:
Children Of The Ice

Dr. J

So often, we only talk about liquid water - the type in rivers and lakes - but water exists in so many diverse forms that deserve their moments too. Whether hot or cold, [1:14 flowing or solid,] water always has a lot to say.

Narrator

> *She is 6 years old, bundled up from head to toe in the fur her mom made her. Her dad is a few feet in front of her, and with every step, the crunch of ice and snow echo across the tundra. The cold wind stings her eyes and bites at her cheeks where they poke through the fur. Her small boots step into his wide tracks, following along blindly.*
>
> *"Do you see that siku up ahead?" her dad asks. His voice is steady, even against the howl of the wind.*
>
> *Truthfully, the only thing she can see are sheets of white, but she doesn't need to see, she trusts him. He knows the land, it's in his spirit. He knows the way the ice moves, when it melts and what it all means. He can read the ice, the knowledge lives in his bones.*
>
> *"Yes," she lies, her voice fading into the wind.*
>
> *She looks up, squints her eyes real tight, and then she can see it. The great slab of ice, frozen like a perfect path laid out just for them across the water. The best hunting grounds wait for them on the other side.*
>
> *As they move closer, something settles in her chest, a quiet familiarity. The way the water laps at the sides of the ice, the soft groans it makes as it slowly begins to crack and change underfoot. The ice is the same as it always was at this time of year.*
>
> *Her feet find their way along the path without her needing to think and she begins the climb up the slight hill to the hunting grounds. The place she already knows.*

Part Two:
Banff is Haunted

Dr. J

You know, Banff is haunted, [3:34 and for my research assistants, Hannah and Shay,] yeah, I said it. Haunted. It's haunted by what has been taken. Sacredness that's been trampled. Now, people don't like to talk about that part. They like to go there and eat beaver tails and have fun riding the gondola. They're too busy posing with elk [3:55 trying not to be killed], or pretending they're in some kind of alpine fairy tale.

The hot springs, the mountains, the water? All [4:05 of that is] medicine. Long before anyone called it a "national park," our people were going there to heal. To pray. To give thanks. The spirits in those mountains are ancient. They never left. They're still there. They were here long before the highways and ski resorts. They remember, and they're still ready to fuck you up.

The Columbia Icefields are not *just* glaciers. They are Ancestors and Storytellers. They are the starting point of the many rivers that end up feeding into the Pacific, Arctic, and Atlantic oceans. These rivers supply millions of people with fresh water for drinking and agriculture, sustaining ecosystems (Parks Canada, 2024). They meander across the land like a living map. You can hear the pain in their voices within the melting and collapsing of the ice, desperate to be listened to. They take care of us all and give us so much, yet receive so little from us in return. The icefields once grounded us, connecting us to the land and one another, but now they're disappearing. Glaciers are melting. The crackle of the ice - the sacred ice - is going silent. The climate isn't just changing; the spirits themselves [5:31 many are saying] are fading.

There are also stories of the lakes nearby. In 1954, Ella Clark published Stoney-Nakoda Elder Enoch Baptiste's account of a story of Lake Minnewanka, which to the Stoney-Nakoda peoples means "Water of the Spirits." According to Elder Baptiste:

> *"Whenever they travelled in the neighborhood of the lake, they heard the voices of the spirits. As they passed by, they could see nothing that made sounds, but they could hear sounds. ... Many Indians are still afraid of the lake. A few years ago some Indian boys were working there, helping to build a dam ... one of the boys was killed in a strange accident. Some people say that the accident happened because the spirits did not like to have trees near the lake destroyed" (1960, pp. 97-98).*

Now listen - these stories aren't just ghost tales to scare tourists. These are teachings, too. Warnings. Reminders. Those places remember. The land holds memory, long after humans have forgotten. This is not a metaphor, this is natural law. If you disturb something sacred, it will respond. [6:49 Maybe not today, maybe not tomorrow, but for generations to come.]

Now, the hot springs. That water? That's [7:00 certainly] medicine. Always has been. Back in the day, our people would go there to heal, to pray and to give thanks. You didn't just splash around in there like some kind of tourist attraction, cosplaying as the hot bowl of human soup that we see today. Things changed when môniyâwak, *white people,* came. Ella Clark shares a teaching:

> *"They would bathe in the springs because of the medicine in them. Then they would drop something in the water as a sacrifice, as a thank you to the spirits for the use of their water. ... But since the white people came, the strength has gone out of the water. That mysterious power that comes from the spirits is there no more. Probably the white peoples do not pray to get well. In the old days, the Indians used to pray to the spirits to cure them of their sickness. Then they were healed by the mysterious strength of the waters" (1960, pp. 95–96).*

It's true, isn't it? The water still flows, but something is missing. I mean, Auntie used to drink straight out of the hose as a kid. Now? I wouldn't dare. The water has

changed. It got sick. The medicine feels harder to reach. You know what I mean? The prayers aren't there. And the spirits? Maybe they are tired of being ignored. But they aren't gone. You just have to know how to listen.

Tourists come and go, taking photos and buying made-in-China dreamcatchers from the gift shops. They say things like, "Banff is my mecca." But if I said that? Whew, the backlash I'd get. Let me be clear: I'm not trying to brainwash or convert anyone. I'm just saying this place is sacred, it's tired, and it's well past time we start listening. Water isn't just water. It holds things; memory, spirit, power. Whether it's whispering through springs, echoing across lakes, or rumbling across ice, it's all connected. Water doesn't just move, it changes, it adapts. Steam, rain, mist, snow. When it freezes or turns into a glacier, it is not the end of its story, it's a whole other way of speaking. A whole other way of holding knowledge; different, yet familiar.

To some people, glaciers are just frozen water. They may simply be a climate statistic or a tourism draw. But to us? They have spirit. They have memory. And they have existed beyond time. Glaciers move slow. They speak slow. We are so used to moving at the fast pace of a river, but maybe it's time we learn to listen and move with the glaciers. What they hold is sacred. Layers and layers of story held in the cold, compacted silence of generations. When they melt, we lose more than just the ice. We lose ceremony. We lose stories. We lose our ways of being. Banff has become 'Canada's brand' (Francis, 2014). A pretty postcard or a tagline on a souvenir magnet. But before it was commodified, it was a place of healing and connection. And what about the people who were there first? The land? Its memories and stories? What about the Nakoda who were pushed out, then "invited" back to perform for tourists during Banff Indian Days; a spectacle that turned culture into a tourist attraction (Clapperton, 2013)? What does it mean when your healing place becomes someone's Instagram post? Colonial histories taught in school and written on interpretive signs have often tried to erase our relations with glaciers and hotsprings by claiming these waters were "discovered" by early settlers. Or they've tried to downplay or discount these relations by saying things that are simply not true. For example, despite the fact that Indigenous Peoples were soaking in the medicine of the hotsprings long before settler "discovery" (Parks Canada Agency, 2017), historian and employee for Parks Canada [11:21 then Dominion Parks Branch], Mabel B. Williams wrote in 1929 that:

> *"The Cree Indians, who inhabited the Bow Valley up to the year 1845, when they are said to have been driven out by the more powerful Stonies, must have known of the springs, although they were apparently ignorant of their medicinal qualities, regarding them rather with superstitious dread" (1929, p.21.*

Capitalism doesn't see spirit, it sees a sales pitch. It takes a sacred place and views it through the eyes of a profit margin. What was once a site for prayer and gratitude became a ski hill and luxury resort [11:59 going for one thousand dollars a night]. Cultural significance becomes a marketing hook for investors and tourists. Capitalism doesn't just destroy land to extract resources. It destroys medicine to extract meaning.

Settlers turned the sacred waters of Banff into commodities. Something to own. Courtney Mason (2014), professor from Thompson Rivers University, describes how in the late nineteenth century, the Canadian Pacific Railway and the government

began to sell Banff as a health destination, a relaxing mountain "spa" getaway for city folk; as something "exotic" to experience. Meanwhile, historians at the time were working hard to erase the Indigenous presence from the park, positioning it as a place of European discovery and exploration that fit into the narrative of 'Canada's brand'. This marketing strategy was built on greedy lust for capitalistic gain. What they were really doing was selling their version of the truth, one where the rejuvenating value of the mountains and rivers wasn't natural but manufactured and profitable. Indeed, it was carefully crafted and framed as a way to soothe the ills of industrial capitalism's hustle and bustle (Mason, 2014). A nature-themed escape from modern living. However, that escape was a performance, too. The government, the Canadian Pacific Railway, and tourism promoters work hard to make Banff look like untouched wilderness. In order to sell this image, they had to hide a lot. They hide the evidence of resource extraction, mining, and hydro infrastructure.

Môniyâwak try to control the water. This doesn't work. There is often no meaningful engagement with Indigenous Peoples in developing such infrastructure or legislation. Bill C-61 (An Act Respecting Water, Source Water, Drinking Water, Wastewater and Related Infrastructure on First Nation Lands, 2023) is one of those cases. According to the federal government, this bill is their way of recognizing and affirming the water rights of First Nations people - whether it deals with drinking water, wastewater, or infrastructure, and minimum standards of quality. However, with less than 30% of First Nations being consulted by the Liberals prior to the bills draft (Needham, 2025), it really just seems like a way of offloading their responsibility for the waters that they have tarnished; a "dump and run" type scenario (Forester, 2024). [14:26 And this is the reality of the water; especially those in Banff].

Part Three:
Children Of The Ice

Narrator

> *She is 17 now. Her mother's old furs hang from her body as she stands in the doorway, lacing up the same ties her father once helped her with. She's going hunting for the first time alone since he died.*
>
> *The sky is starting to fade to grey as she steps out onto the snow; the weight of the furs feel heavier with every step. The land feels different, she doesn't recognize the ice or snow. It feels unfamiliar. It feels wrong, disorienting. She stands there, taking in the endless sea of white, looking for anything to guide her.*
>
> *Tears fill her eyes as she remembers the little girl she was, walking behind her father. He was always so sure of himself, of the land and his place upon it. He had always known the way. His voice doesn't dance along the wind anymore. It's gone. He's gone. And the siku is gone too.*
>
> *She is lost.*
>
> *By the time she sees the faint outline of home, her tears have frozen to her cheeks,*

and the sting of failure settles on her body, sharper than the howling wind. Her mom greets her at the door and begins to peel the furs off her daughter's freezing body.

"I couldn't find it," she whispers. Tears threatening to spill out again.

Her mom nods, not angry or surprised.

"Fishing season's starting," she says softly. "We'll go in the morning."

Part Four:
When The Spirits Go Quiet

Dr. J

Imagine there's no more water. The ice no longer groans, and the rivers no longer rush. No fish. No crops. No showers. No tea. No healing. No ceremony. Just dust and thirst and nothingness. A world where the water no longer remembers us. Where it doesn't recognize our touch or offerings. When you can't drink the water, it means the land is sick. It means something sacred has been broken. It means someone wasn't listening. When the land is sick, we will get sick soon after.

People are desperate for comfort. Desperate to forget the harm done to the water. But the water doesn't forget. Water is not just a resource, but a relative, and we are letting it die. That's what the end of the world looks like. Not fire. Not bombs. But thirst and nothingness. The spirits go quiet.

And when the spirits go quiet, we lose our way. Our mental health and our spirits suffer. We can't turn to our old ways of healing and ceremony to help us when the water no longer holds the healing and medicine it used to.

We know the waters and ice are changing. It can be scary to think about. When people get scared, they often tend to rationalize their thinking in ways they view as concrete, like Western science. Western science says the water is safe, but the community says otherwise. So, who do we believe?

Let's talk about what "safe" really means. Western science says that Banff is clean, safe, monitored - within *regulations.* Yet, people are still getting sick; cancer, boil advisories, air pollution. We're told to just "trust the science". And listen, I respect science. I *do* science. [18:34 I'm a fucking scientist!] It's a powerful tool, but it's not the *only* science.

Western science often assesses environments like Banff and the waters in the Rockies through the lens of safety, regulations, and cleanliness. On these standards, sure, things look okay. Yet, Indigenous communities may perceive these assessments as insufficient, because "safety" isn't just about numbers, metrics, or a data sheet. It's about spirit and relationship, how we give back to what heals us. When those things are out of balance, it shows - in our bodies, our minds and our communities. This raises questions about the definition of "safe", the definition of what is reality and

truth, and the validity of different knowledge systems. This inevitably creates this contention between two worldviews, what some call the *Contention of Incommensurability*. Now *that's* a five-dollar phrase. But it's the phenomenon of not being able to compare or judge things by the same measure or standard. Our knowledge and our Ways of Knowing often don't fit into Western categories. And they shouldn't have to.

Just because something can't be proven in a lab doesn't mean it's not true. Just because you can't put it in a spreadsheet or turn it into data doesn't mean it's not real. The Contention of Incommensurability highlights the challenges in comparing Indigenous Knowledge with Western scientific paradigms. Indigenous Ways of Knowing are holistic, relational, and noncategorical, often clashing with the empirical and reductionist approaches of Western science. Because the Western side tends to dominate the conversation [20:24 or, basically, the white voices dominate the conversation], and our voices are repeatedly drowned out.

It doesn't have to be that way. One example of Indigenous Peoples ensuring their voices are included is the Okanagan Nation Water Declaration. The document itself calls out the severe mismanagement of the water by external agents — people who don't even go here [20:50 as Damien says] — and the treatment leading to the degradation of the environment, water and increases in stress on the land (*Siwɬkw Water Declaration*, 2014). Through improper water uses, like "energy production, mining, dams, diversions, over allocation/exploitation" (*Siwɬkw Water Declaration*, 2014), just to name a few, the Western world has poisoned the water, and damaged the spirit of the place. And Indigenous Peoples? We've *been* knowing this [21:18 because we experience it first-hand].

Part Five:
Conclusion

Narrator

> *She is now 30. She hasn't been home in years. The water, ice, and snow are all so different than when she was a little girl. She stands at the top of the hill, her breath catching on the sharp edges of the bitter cold. The wind brushes her face and that sense of familiarity glimmers faintly inside her. It is not possible to travel safely on the ice, like the way she trusted her dad to know. They have to go by boat.*
>
> *The younger hunters talk quietly behind her, adjusting their gear and teasing one another in the ways they always have. She listens, their voices anchoring her in the present. She may not know what to do, but she has their help.*
>
> *"You will learn the new ways," one of the younger men says to her. He sounded much more confident than she felt.*
>
> *"I guess we will find out," she says back to him, hoping he's right. Up ahead, beyond the bend and the shifting ice, familiarity sets in, and she sees it. There in the tundra are the old hunting grounds, the place that provided for her. The routes she and her father once walked with ease no longer exist, but the spirit is the same.*

> *She glances back at the younger hunters, their faces bright red from the cold, but set with determination. Their gear is different; they use boats, and their ways of hunting are nothing like her father's.*
>
> *In the small boat, her gaze shifts across the water. Taking in the land and the way the water splits to make way for their boat. The churning of the waves makes it hard to get a clean shot, but after a long day, they managed to get enough seals to feed their families.*
>
> *But there she was, surrounded by new faces, new waters, and new ways. She no longer felt the need to chase the past. She lets it rest... for now.*
>
> *Change, she realizes, doesn't only mean loss – it means learning. And for the first time in years, she feels at home.*

Dr. J

Sometimes learning means letting go of what you thought you knew and trusting what's coming next. Be okay with change. But don't be okay with all change. Know the difference. Protect what matters. Pray to the water. Listen to the ice. Feel the snow. And when the land speaks, [23:52 I pray that you] learn to listen.

Keywords: *Change, Sacred Sites, Tourism, Glaciers, Snow, Ice*

Glossary

Môniyâwak – *White people*

Tuvaq* – *stable landfast sea ice*

Siku* – *ice, potentially seasonal, not as thick as tuvaq*

***Words in Inuktitut**

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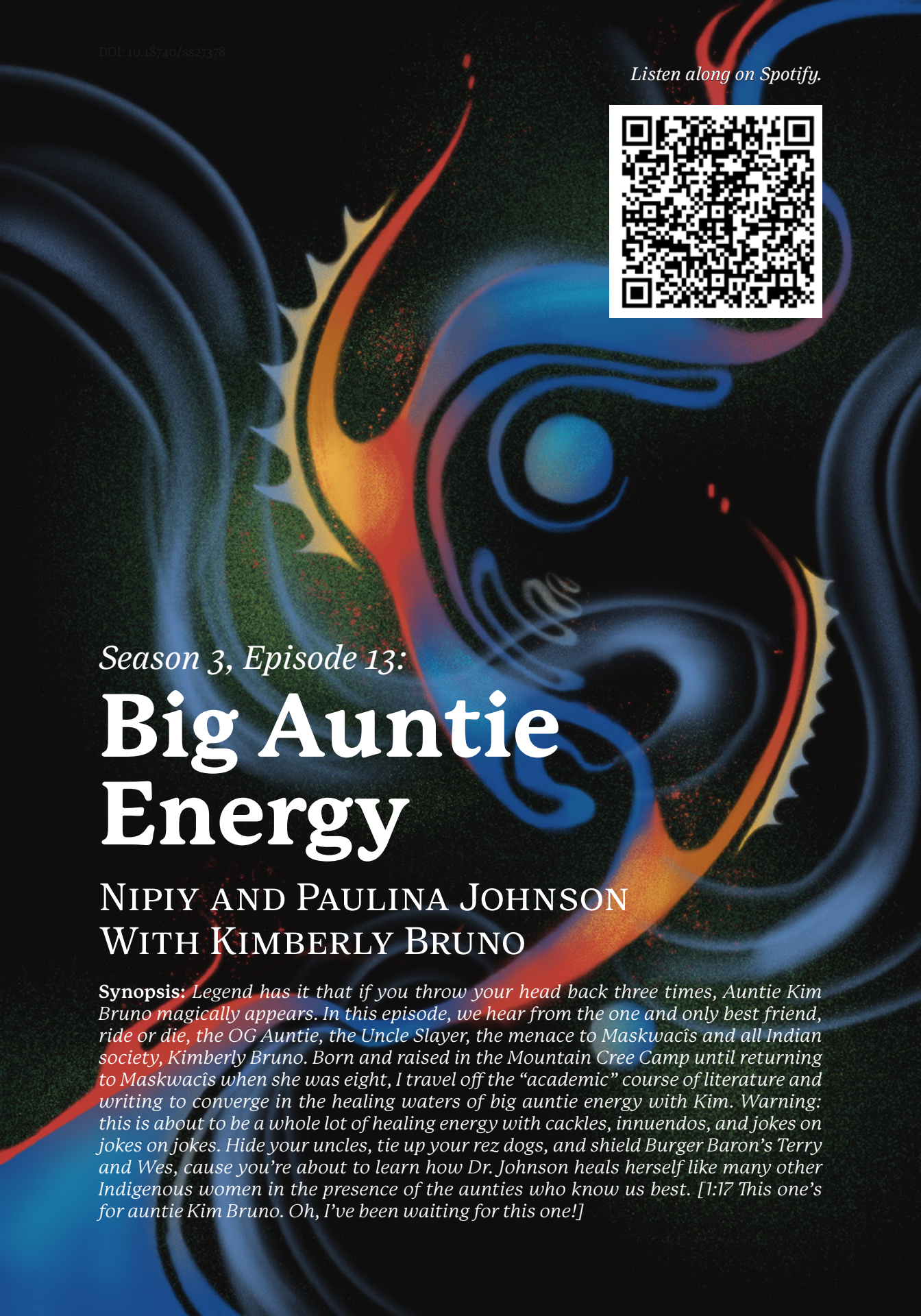

Season 3, Episode 13:

Big Auntie Energy

Nipiy and Paulina Johnson
With Kimberly Bruno

Synopsis: *Legend has it that if you throw your head back three times, Auntie Kim Bruno magically appears. In this episode, we hear from the one and only best friend, ride or die, the OG Auntie, the Uncle Slayer, the menace to Maskwacîs and all Indian society, Kimberly Bruno. Born and raised in the Mountain Cree Camp until returning to Maskwacîs when she was eight, I travel off the "academic" course of literature and writing to converge in the healing waters of big auntie energy with Kim. Warning: this is about to be a whole lot of healing energy with cackles, innuendos, and jokes on jokes on jokes. Hide your uncles, tie up your rez dogs, and shield Burger Baron's Terry and Wes, cause you're about to learn how Dr. Johnson heals herself like many other Indigenous women in the presence of the aunties who know us best. [1:17 This one's for auntie Kim Bruno. Oh, I've been waiting for this one!]*

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Part One

[1:35] Dr. J: Welcome to the show. Also, you should probably be The Auntie Is In. You're the OG auntie.

[1:41] Kim: Hello, hello. It's the only one and only.

[1:49] Dr. J: Maskwacîs' most.

[1:53] Kim: Dr. Paulina Johnson.

[1:59] Dr. J: This is my best friend!

[2:02] Kim: That's me.

[2:05] Dr. J: I was like, like, mom or dad, or your mom, were like, where's Paulina? Or- where's Kim? She's coming. We are a package deal.

[2:15] Kim: Right?

[2:18] Dr. J: Mom was talking about going to Disneyland because she wanted to take Bebe and I was like, well, Kim, obviously is going to have to come!

[2:24] Kim: Obviously I'm coming. So we're going to Disneyland! Oh my God.

[2:34] Dr. J: I'm like- oh, even when Becky had her wedding- she's like, Kim's your plus one, right? I was like, yup! Heaven forbid I have a boyfriend already. It's Kim!

[2:48] Kim: We are here. We're finally doing this.

[2:51] Dr. J: This is years in the making. Creator knew we'd too wicked-

[2:55] Kim: - to be sisters.

[3:00] Dr. J: He knew we'd be too ruthless. We already are! What was it when we were watching the Edmonton game? And who-

[3:09] Kim: Draisaitl?

[3:10] Dr. J: Yeah, Draisaitl was about to, like, square up, and Kane come right- just fucking busting in!

[3:15] Kim: That's you, you're Kane! Just swinging away. Nobody laughs at my best friend!

[3:22] Dr. J: Only I do that!

[3:23] Kim: Only I do that! Shoot.

[3:31] Dr. J: That's really the relationship we've made though.

[3:35] Kim: Right?

[3:36] Dr. J: All the time I was like, guess what happened! You're like, what? I'm-a square up! It really is that saying. It's like, whatever she's going through, I'm going through!

[3:50] Kim: Right?

[3:51] Dr. J: I remember when I was talking to you about what was happening at the university, and like, people didn't understand my research. And you were like, you want me to fuck them up!? You can take Kim out of the rez, but you can't take the rez out of Kim!

[4:08] Kim: Oh my god! It's crazy too, because I remember when I first met you - I don't remember what I was working on - but I remember sitting there and it was real quiet. And then, as you walk in, and we both looked at each other, we're like, hmm, is she okay? Give each other that auntie stare. And then I was like, can I help you? You're like, yes. You're like, I came to look at this store! I'm like, okay, well, there's skirts and there's beadwork. And I'll just be here sewing. That was freaking crazy though!

[4:47] Dr. J: Right?

[4:48] Kim: I always remember that day.

[4:50] Dr. J: You're like, that hoe, right there!

[4:52] Kim: Yeah! I was like, who knew when she walked in that was going to be my best friend? I was like, I never seen her around. I was like, what's up?

[5:06] Dr. J: I'm pretty sure you were the one who was like, that auntie look. I'm like, what's up? Hi, I'm Paulina! I was golden retriever; you were black cat. You're like, who are you?

[5:16] Kim: You're right! I was just like, hmm.

[5:23] Dr. J: Who would've known? Nine years as best friends.

[5:27] Kim: Right?

[5:28] Dr. J: When we went to- with mom and dad - because they got their 40th anniversary Vans. And I was like, obviously we need these ones!

[5:36] Kim: We're almost hitting double digits!

[5:40] Dr. J: And then Megan came in. She says: when Laverne and I get to our two year - we're like, that's cute.

[5:47] Kim: We're going to be hitting ten!

[5:52] Dr. J: And it all started from meeting at the store and graduating.

[5:55] Kim: For real!

[5:57] Dr. J: Yeah. When you made my, uh, my dress for my graduation-

[6:00] Kim: Oh my God!

[6:01] Dr. J: Yeah.

[6:01] Kim: I remember that!

[6:02] Dr. J: Right?

[6:03] Kim: I think it was bear, wolf, eagle, and something else.

[6:08] Dr. J: The four medicine - and bison.

[6:10] Kim: Yeah!

[6:11] Dr. J: Yeah.

[6:11] Kim: That was freaking crazy!

[6:12] Dr. J: I still have it. That's the first one that you ever made for me; it's still in my closet.

[6:17] Kim: That's so crazy.

[6:18] Dr. J: Right? And now I have, like, twenty thousand more of yours [both laugh]. She is a legit seamstress!

[6:26] Kim: I love to sew. I know my way around a sewing machine or two!

[6:33] Dr. J: Yeah! You taught me, too. You're like, you do it like this! And I was like, sir, I'm cross-eyed!

[6:40] Kim: Help me, I can't needle this. And I was like, maka mîna! You do it like this!

[6:58] Dr. J: It's backwards; just kidding! No, but the bobbin was the hardest part.

[7:04] Kim: For real! I think that's the hardest part on, like, all - like, teaching people-

[7:09] Dr. J: Yeah.

[7:10] Kim: -is when it runs out.

[7:11] Dr. J: It runs out. And [I think] a lot of people don't realize, like, for me as an

academic, one of the biggest things I have to do is like, I guess, debrief or let myself come down from all the stress - but also work. And so, like, you and I, like, we joke around a lot. We do a lot of dumb shit together!

[7:32] Kim: For real! But it's like - it's a good feeling. Like, having a hard day and then, we like, hang out. And it like, completely changes our whole vibe.

[7:43] Dr. J: Yeah.

[7:44] Kim: And it's like such a - like a mental relief, knowing that you have somebody that's always going to, like, be on your side, that's always going to uplift you. And that's really difficult to find nowadays.

[7:56] Dr. J: Yeah, and I think when we said, like, our challenges and burdens become each other's; it's like, we really do take that on.

[8:04] Kim: Yeah!

[8:05] Dr.J: And I think that Indigenous societies, and just the culture of the community - sometimes you don't get that. Because, like, you know, there's a lot of; *A*, lateral violence; *B*, you know, jealousy when there shouldn't be. And, you know, a lot of like, you know, side comments that we get - even just being together; being happy. Like, I know a lot of people sometimes make fun of us because we like to match. We like to alabaster stomp!

[8:37] Kim: With our white cowboy boots!

[8:41] Dr. J: That's what like, real - not only real friendship - but like, what Indigenous Women should be. You know, uplifting each other; holding each other up in support. And like, it hasn't been an easy journey for either of us, you know? We have our own battles, and our own struggles - but like, we were there for each other. You know? And I don't think people really understand how important that is. And I don't think that they realize like, you see a lot of what I go through, how, you know- I remember that one time you took me to Calgary, and like, I slept the whole ride. And you were just like - you were tired, but then you were like, well, this is what you were doing that week. And you were just exhausted. And like, I don't think that people realize how much you see in my work. And I do want to point out, like, one of the most surprising things, that I've kind of realized lately, was actually last Friday when I was talking about who writes syllabics. And this bitch - for nine years - didn't tell me she could write syllabics!

[9:47] Kim: That whole time [I] was holding on to that knowledge. Who can write- who can translate syllabics? I'm like, I can.

[10:00] Dr. J: I swear my head moved like, so slow, and looked at you. I'm like, you knew, the whole time, what I do for culture and community, and not once! Not once did you tell me!

[10:14] Kim: What did I say? I was like, why, do you want me to translate your Cree name into a tattoo?

[10:25] Dr. J: And I was like, God damn it, Kimberly! I like it when I call you Kimberly, when I'm frustrated.

[10:31] Kim: Oh my God.

[10:35] Dr. J: Kimberly Tiberius!

[10:36] Kim: Tiberius! What did we call each other? Perlene?

[10:40] Dr. J: Yeah, and Doraline!

[10:41] Kim: Perlene and Doraline; our kôkom names. What did we say when we get old? We're like, we're going to grow old together, and then we're going to become Jujus together!

[10:54] Dr. J: I was like, we gotta die at the same time! And we can haunt people together!

[11:02] Kim: Oh my god.

[11:04] Dr. J: It's definitely like - it's a Lenny and Carl relationship.

[11:11] Kim: Lenny and Carl! For real.

[11:20] Dr. J: I always liked that, yeah. And Dad was like, where's Kim? And I was like, I'm going to go see her later today - as if we don't each see each other every day.

[11:28] Kim: For real! It was like - yeah, my mom's like, oh, where's Paulina? I'm like, oh, she's going to come see me; we're going to go do this. She's like, you girls are always together. I'm like, at least we're making right choices together.

[11:42] Dr. J: Sometimes questionable, yes-

[11:44] Kim: But as long as we're together.

[11:47] Dr. J: And then one time my dad was like, where's the two blondes? And I was like, who? And he was like, you and Kim!

[11:53] Kim: Oh yeah! When we were walking into the room, when Bebe was sleeping, and he was like, shh! And we were both trying to get past the gate, and then you banged your knee! And then I almost fell over. And we just make so much noise! And all I hear was: dumb blondes. I think at least we did together; but, we cannot be ninjas!

[12:18] Dr. J: No skills right there - stealth right there. No stealth. We would not do well. I feel like in the most serious moments, we're like, huh. It was like the time - okay, this is really bad - but like, it was that time when that dude pulled the gun - not the gun - pulled the knife on us! We were like, was you calling that a knife?

[12:45] Kim: And he comes walking in - I'm like, did he really pull a knife on us?

I'm like, I just want to eat! We were going to brunch.

[12:56] Dr. J: What did I say to you? I was like, let's go do white people shit!

[13:01] Kim: Like, all right, let's go for brunch. My ass was hungry. And I literally got- when the cops were doing our statement, I'm like, I just wanted to kick his ass because I was hungry!

[13:20] Dr. J: And then we both got subpoenaed! Of course.

[13:27] Kim: I'm like- when was it? Seven o'clock in the morning?

[13:32] Dr. J: It was seven a.m. and we stayed there until like four p.m. and then they're like, you guys can go. And I was like, what?

[13:39] Kim: I was so grumpy! I was just looking at him - I'm like - are you- I was like, you damn shit ass! Making me get up early! I don't think I took it seriously. I'm like - first affecting my meal! Now my sleep! Just throw them in the jail! Oh my god.

[14:06] Dr. J: That's a good one. I mean. What was it out there - like, victims of crimes was like, do you need help? We're like, no!

[14:15] Kim: Do you need victim services? No, but we might need a hug from that one security guard. There was a security [guard] with a neck-tat that my friend really likes. And I'm really grateful that we don't have the same taste in men!

[14:30] Dr. J: Yes, yes that is very true. We both like Indian men. The only thing she likes are Indians.

[14:38] Kim: I like casino Indians!

[14:42] Dr. J: And mine just happened to be from a prod. What does my dad say? That real tasteless one: feather or dot? I'm like, oh my God, don't say that. But Kim's like, I'm definitely feather! And my mom's like, are you dot? I was like, that's so bad.

[15:03] Kim: I'm like, she likes what she likes, guys. We just got to accept it.

[15:10] Dr. J: They'll still be Indian!

[15:12] Kim: Babies will still be Indian. And I'll still be the auntie.

[15:18] Dr. J: He's damn right! Every family vacation, Kim's going to be there. That's my soulmate.

[15:22] Kim: I'm just that auntie.

[15:25] Dr. J: That's my husband!

[15:28] Kim: What was it that one time when we were like - what- I can't remember. And we were like, let's go - it's not even like- we had boyfriends! We had boy-

friends at the time. But we were like, we're going. Not like it was their choice.

[15:45] Dr. J: Actually, I don't even think we invited them. We're like, well, we're going. We really are packaged, you know.

[16:04] Dr. J: But I think - going back to being serious - we can be serious!

[16:11] Kim: And we can try to be serious.

[16:13] Dr. J: We try. Sometimes we're not successful. We try to be serious because we know, like, how important everything really is. And so, like, we use humor really to lighten the weight of that responsibility.

[16:30] Kim: Yeah.

[16:31] Dr. J: Because like, you coming from ceremony, me coming from the lens that I do, especially within, like, community. We see that importance. And like, we can get serious really fast. Like, when we know we need to step into those roles. And I think that's, like, the one good thing, is like, you and I can look at each other - and we're like, uh-uh.

[16:49] Kim: We read each other's faces.

[16:51] Dr. J: Yeah.

[16:53] Kim: Which is like a superpower, especially from across the room! But when we need to be serious and get down to business, we do it, and we do it a hundred and ten percent. We get the job done and we support each other. Not only mentally, like, physically. We make sure that each other's good. We make sure that- are you sure this is good enough? Or, you know, are we- even with my work, too. I always ask you; I always question myself. How does this look? We validate each other, and we never tear each other down, which is really great. I think that's one of the best aspects between us, is we never try to humiliate each other. We don't try to talk down on each other. Like, we joke around, but there's a point to where we know we won't hurt each other with our opinions. We always try to build up each other, which is another great aspect between us. And I feel like, nowadays, especially, like, in an Indigenous world. Like, a lot of women need to do that with each other instead of competing, is how I see it. Like, sometimes I see it as competing with each other. Like, I see a lot of, [like] you mentioned, like the jealousy, the- what else did you say?

[18:14] Dr. J: Like the lateral violence?

[18:15] Kim: Oh yeah, the lateral violence - that one too! But, that's the thing though. Like we've been through enough as Indigenous People! Like we need to push each other to get - to do better. But not to laugh at each other. Especially women, like-

[18:34] Dr. J: I think we see each other's strengths. Like one of the biggest things, like when I started my research project, right? Like, for those who don't know, I hired Kim as like an oskâpêwis, not only because of my best friend, but just of her cultural knowledge. And that was because I saw the strength in what she does, you know, not

only being like a seamstress and making ribbon shirts and skirts - which are gorgeous - but, like, in that spirit and the teachings that she's been gifted, you know, from her grandmothers and her family. You know, coming from a Small Boys camp, which is just a very traditional community. You have this understanding within the Cree world that is just so powerful. And the reason why, like, I really advocated to bring you on, was that I wanted to show that beauty - that strength. And I think for many academics, [they] would be like, oh, you know, hire another individual with, like, university [credentials]. Get as many PhDs as you can. And I was like, no, that's not who I am. And that's not who, like - where my heart lies. And I think, like, it is really [that] idea too; that, like, we uplift each other. Like, we've gone through a lot. Like, we've seen each other go through a lot, and you do - you know, you check on me. Like in November last year, I was going through a lot - and you were right there the whole time. You're like, come on, let's go to a movie. And I'm like, no!

[19:55] Kim: I think November was bad for both of us. But we're like, we're getting through it! We're trucking it along! I got you; you got me. But like, yeah, like we've been through a lot. Like, we've seen each other go through so much. Like, I've seen you go through heartbreak. You've seen me go through it. You've seen me go through so much, like, to where I was like, [devastated] sometimes. And I had you there; it made it feel easier. It made me feel like, you know, I had somebody there to listen; I had somebody there that cares. And [when] my puppy died, my dog Squirrel, I remember that one was so hard for me, and I was so choked. I think it was like a week [that] I felt like I cried. But you felt that pain for me. And I seen that, and I'm like, you know, this person really cares about me; she really cares how I feel. You know how some people are like, oh, it's just a dog. I'm like, no. You know? They're our babies - our fur babies. They chose to be with us, as we chose them. But like, we see each other go through so much - like, good and bad. And we're always there supporting each other. Like no matter the situation, like - just even little things. Like, we're always making sure that we're good; [we] are each other's good. And even like - like when we get thrown off - like, say we're out and about doing something, and then we run into like, people... kiimooches. But we feel each other's anxiety. And we'll be like, what do we do? And we're like, I don't know. But we try to get through that together.

[21:49] Dr. J: We really do; we're always together! What I liked, too, is like; all of sudden, like, I know when you get anxious, and all of sudden I'm like, oh no!

[22:02] Kim: For real!

[22:04] Dr. J: Or like - you're poppin' off; all of a sudden, I'm poppin' off!

[21:13] Kim: But it's having that support, like - [it's] not only like - yeah, like, traditionally we take each other as sisters. You know, like, [we're] distantly related. But it's like, one in a million [meeting] a best friend. You know? And I remember reading something recently, and it said if you're best friends more than eight years, then it's going to last a lifetime. And that's how it's been! Like, we've been up and down and, you know, sometimes we have our differences. But-

[22:52] Dr. J: I think what I like is that we talk it through.

[22:54] Kim: Yeah.

[22:55] Dr. J: We talk it through. We also know, like, when each other's hurting - [we'll] bring each other like, [I'll] bring you a coffee, or you'll buy me something with the moon on it. Because you know, [that's] my vibe.

[23:06] Kim: Right?

[23:06] Dr. J: We're always like, Kim would love this! Or: Paulina would love this! Or I'm at Costco - I'm like, obviously I need to get this matching for Kim and I!

[23:14] Kim: Matching ribbon skirts.

[23:17] Dr. J: Matching ribbon skirts; we have matching rings.

[23:19] Kim: Only thing that doesn't match is uncles.

[23:21] Dr. J: Yeah! Kim's into uncles; I'm into Uncle G's. It's so bad.

[23:37] Kim: But I think like, a great thing between us is like - like I want to challenge myself to do so much more. Like, I want to push myself, because I could see you do it. You know? I could see the drive; I could see, you know, the ability. [Like], I remember seeing another post that says like, I want to be that woman that's proven, [if] I could do it, you could do it. And that's how I see you. Like, I look up to you in that way. Because you did so much, especially like, at a young age. Like look, you're thirty -

[24:22] Dr. J: Be nice.

[24:22] Kim: -five?

[24:24] Dr. J: Twenty-nine for life.

[24:25] Kim: In bunny-years? Twenty-eight in bunny-years.

[24:30] Dr. J: I'm 19.

[24:33] Kim: But like - but I really do look up to you. Because like, you know - and I always tell you that. I'm like, let's do this. Like, you know, let's show our younger generations - our younger women - that we could, you know; the sky's the limit. And, you know, you just need that positive support, and that positive role model. And I feel like, you know, like that's you for me. Like, it [gives] me that drive to be better; to do better. And we do like, you know, we do so much together. And we always have so many crazy ideas, and crazy business ideas that we have! Yeah - we're like, let's open up a Car Wash! Let's do this! I don't know what - we were talking about a record label!

[25:28] Dr. J: Yeah! It's called WAR records. It's an acronym; when I was getting really mad, trying to swear, and all I could think of is wiener-ass!

[25:42] Kim: I remember just looking at you, being like, wait, what? And I'm like, wiener-ass records; proudly present. And then we - you were going - you were flying somewhere and you were like, I need you to take control. I need you to take - what was-

[26:04] Dr. J: -I need you to step in as CEO of WAR records.

[26:08] Kim: I was like, first thing I'm doing, I'm signing Ernest Monias. I feel like our conversations, like - even now - like, laughter is medicine!

[26:27] Dr. J: And I think - like, I need that. Because a lot of people often ask me, like, how do I do with like, a lot of the heaviness of my work? Or just like, you know, like the weight of it. And I'm like - it really is like - when I don't see you, I'm like, where are you?

[26:47] Kim: Right? We always have that little check-in.

[26:52] Dr. J: And [I] know that like, you say that you look up to me - but like, I think a lot of people don't realize like, there's a lot of people who support me in my role. And then like, you are definitely one of them. And you know, I think if I didn't have you guys, like, I don't think I would be going as far as I am or have been, you know? We met when I was - I had just started, I think, my PhD. Yeah, I just started. So, you saw me go through all that. And like, that was a struggle in its own. You saw me through the numerous heartbreaks. Some of them good, some of them bad.

[27:29] Kim: The heck with all of them!

[27:30] Dr. J: Right? And then, you know, like - I was just thinking too, like, you know when we had - you and I - we did the first Round Dance ever, together. You know, in February. February?

[27:46] Kim: I think it was March.

[27:47] Dr. J: March! Yeah, we did it in March. And like, I remember, everyone was like, let's do an honor song for Paulina. And all I could think about was like, no, like, I need Kimbo right beside me. I was going to tell Dylan, like, hold on! Hold on! Hold on! You get her up here! That's my best friend! We're in this!

[28:11] Kim: Yeah!

[28:13] Dr. J: And, you know, like, you give me that support, too. It's just - it's just important. You know? Like, you're always down to being like - I'm like, hey, you want to go do this? You're like, okay! You're like-

[28:26] Kim: -let's go! We're doing this!

[28:30] Dr. J: Right? And we do a lot of adventures! We do a lot of Costco runs.

[28:39] Kim: Or like, unnecessary shopping. Remember that one time we filled up the Volvo? We're like, let's go shopping!

[28:47] Dr. J: There's no need either! We're like, we're doing it!

[28:48] Kim: And we filled it up! And then you're like, can we fit my fridge in here? And I'm like, I don't know who's going to help you. I [have] like, no physical labor

strength. I don't have that kind of strength, but I have strength in other ways!

[29:10] Dr. J: I just had to get a mini fridge. And I'm like, do you think this will fit? There's no reason for me to even have a mini fridge.

[29:17] Kim: Who's going to help you put it in the vehicle? Oh my god!

[29:25] Dr. J: But I think this whole episode is just going to be us laughing. But people need to hear it!

[29:34] Kim: But like, straight up - down to like - like, you said, like - this episode is about empowering each other. Right?

[29:46] Dr. J: Mhm.

[29:47] Kim: And I think, like, nowadays it's becoming more, you know, more and more relevant; like, having a group of aunties laughing. You know? We're all there, joking about stuff, or laughing about the dumbest stuff. And having like, real high-pitched auntie laughs. But, it's medicine! Like, laughter is like medicine. And at the same time too, like, you know, like you said, we come across some negativity together. But I'm always going to be the type to be like, you know what? Let's just be positive about it. Let's not let it affect us. Let's not dwell on negative comments. [We] just have to get through it. Like we - like I said, [even] when I see you, like, struggling [with] your, you know, some issues with work. And when you're having your bad days; I'm telling you, I'm like, you know what? We're going to get through today. Or, we're going to get through this, and we're going to get through it now. And then we're going to be laughing about it three months - six months down the road. We're going to be like, yeah, we got through it! Because we've got each other. And just like you; like, you know, sometimes I go through my - calling you up, crying, telling you different situations, or whatever I'm going through. But just having that ear, and that person to talk to. And it reminds me of why we have each other. You know? It's such a great support system. And sometimes, like, for real, just being around each other just totally changes the mood. It's such a great feeling, because I could be having - like, I remember one time I was having a real horrible day, and then we went to go do something - I can't remember what it was - but it was just something in Wetaskiwin. Just something small, but it was this nonstop laughter, and it totally changed my day around. And I was like, why was I even mad? Why was I even upset? I'm like, here we are laughing in, like, [the] Dairy Queen parking lot - or, drive thru - about like, the dumbest stuff!

[32:16] Dr. J: I think, too, laughing about, like, the dumbest stuff; it really helps us get through a lot of what we go through. And then it also, like, gives us a lot of like - we have definitely a lot of inside jokes.

[32:31] Kim: Too many. I was like, one day I wish we could just record ourselves talking on a drive! You would really see the real us! I'm like - I feel like when we walk into a building, you're like, oh no.

[32:48] Dr. J: There's two of them!

[32:50] Kim: There they are. I like how we could be super serious, and then we completely – like, the complete opposite.

[33:03] Dr. J: You know; like how everyone that one day is like, where's Kimbo? And I'm like, Kimothy? Kimbo-tron?

[33:13] Kim: So many nicknames! It's like when you did my one birthday card; there was so many different names I could go by! And then like, in Chick-fil-A – [they] could not get my name right. Three little letters, and they had to say Kip. I was like, well, I guess I'm Kip today!

[33:30] Dr. J: That's Auntie Kip. Here she comes!

[33:44] Dr. J: And so, I think one of the biggest aspects of the work that I get to do, and be part of, is getting to have you by my side in that research – in that process. And also just making sure that I'm holding on to that community foundation, like, foremost. Not only as an auntie, but more-or-less as a human. Because I think, sometimes, a lot of people want me to be these representations that are not me. And I feel like you make sure that all of my emotions, frustrations, even my insecurities are acknowledged. And, like you say, we never play on the weaknesses; we only talk about the strengths. And I think, like, one of the biggest things you taught me – and also reaffirmed to me – was making sure that we didn't focus on the negatives all the time. Or like, the what-ifs. It's: no, this is what we're doing. We're going forward with it, and we're doing it!

[34:52] Kim: But that's like having that positive mindset. Like, you know? Because like, together we can accomplish so much! And having that ability to be like, I'm not in this alone. You know? And to be like, you know what? I'm here. You know? You conquer so much, and you put your mind to something, and you do it. And I'm there! Like, I'm like, yeah, we're going to – I'll be there when you need me. And just like you! Like, you're there when I need you. And we conquer each other – we set goals, and we know what goals we have. We don't even need to speak them out; we know. Like, even if it's just little small stuff, or big stuff. Like, we push each other to get there, and we support each other to get there. And then we always, like, have that little moment of celebration. Like, you know, we did this; we're going to go treat ourselves good! We can go eat! We're going to go celebrate life!

[36:01] Dr. J: I don't think a lot of people realize that, like, you have been at all of my like – all the podcast openings, my talks.

[36:10] Kim: Basketball games!

[36:11] Dr. J: Basketball games!

[36:12] Kim: Where your Jackie Moon is. I was there; I was like, I'm a cheerleader! Like, basketball wife!

[36:22] Dr. J: I played an alumni game, and here I was like, oh, I should be able to do it! Man, I had to run against 13- and 14-year-olds, and my old ass was like, I need a break, sir.

[36:37] Kim: I'm like, go bestie! I'm like, three point!

[36:43] Dr. J: I'm just giving her! But, you know, I've got to give myself props! I've got to give myself props. I did keep up! My legs felt it the next day, but I didn't give up!

[36:56] Kim: See? And like, even stuff like that, you know? I go support you, or – especially sometimes, I remember when I'd be like, oh my God, I've got an order to do, and I'm like, freaking out! And then you're there. Like, you're like, I'm going to come help you! I'm like, you know, right on!

[37:15] Dr. J: Tell me what to do!

[37:18] Kim: It's such a, like, you know – great feelings of like, having each other, and having that good friendship where we're not going to see – watch each other struggle. Because that's not in it for us. Like, one of us struggles, you know, you go and try [to] pick up your best friend. You go and try and help her as much as you can. You know? Sometimes we don't get each other. Like, sometimes I won't understand, like, what you're going through. But I try to be there just to be there.

[37:47] Dr. J: Mhm.

[37:48] Kim: Because when you care about somebody, or when you have like, you know, like that love for, you know, your friends, your family. You never want them to look sad. You don't ever want them to feel alone, because you never want that to happen to you. And then that's what I try to like, show you. You know? I try to give you that support. Even when like, you know, sometimes like – like my mom said, she's like, [sometimes] you have issues that you can't talk to your family about, or you can't talk to your partner about, or whatever. Like, it's good to have a friend; it's good to have an outside point of view. And it's good to have that, like you said, like a debrief with each other. And we do that! We – and we don't judge each other, which is such a, you know, key in our friendship; [we] don't judge each other no matter whatever situations we go through, or mistakes, or whatever. We don't judge each other too much, and we don't make each other feel bad about what we do. We learn our lessons, just like in previous relationships. We're like, how could you let me date that guy? I'm like, you know, [you've] just got to learn your lesson.

[39:16] Dr. J: But it really is! It really is that like – we've gone through so much together. Even though, like, nine years doesn't seem like it's a lot; it's a lot! Because, like, we're always doing something every day! Or like, we're up to like – some people say – most say no good. But like, you know? We're doing things that is like, important for us; important for the bigger picture. And yeah, you know, like we get to have these conversations where you really don't judge each other. I mean, we'll make fun of each other, but only we are allowed to make fun of each other!

[39:55] Kim: Like a recent incident at the Powwow. I made a joke and like – and then the servers like, laughed at us.

[40:09] Dr. J: So every time Ermineskin Powwow comes around, the RCMP give out free hot dogs.

[40:14] Kim: And my bestie started this tradition where she double barrels a hot dog. So double barrel means two hot dogs in one bun.

[40:26] Dr. J: Like a shotgun!

[40:29] Kim: She takes pride in that.

[40:32] Dr. J: It's gifted from the Ancestors.

[40:34] Kim: So she went [and] lined up, and she asked if they'd do it. And they're like, will it even fit? I'm like, oh it'll fit! She'll make it fit! And then - what did they say? They're like, that's two wieners.

[40:49] Dr. J: And you said: that's my cream!

[40:51] Kim: I was like, that's her cream! And they all laughed, and I'm like, hey, that's my best friend! You don't laugh at her, only I laugh at her! You were like, shut your fucking mouth! Nobody laughs at my best friend except me! Or how, before that, our journey was to go find a gift, and we went through-

[41:24] Dr. J: All the booths!

[41:25] Kim: - all of the booths. All of like, the pretty little stands there; with their earrings and - oh my god - necklaces, and it was so shiny! We're like magpies!

[41:43] Dr. J: We didn't even get what we were supposed to get! I was wandering - we got matching necklaces together instead!

[41:51] Kim: I feel like we do that a lot.

[41:55] Dr. J: You cannot give us a mission; we need someone to take care of us. Because we will sidetrack.

[42:03] Kim: They were like, oh, look at what we got!

[42:06] Dr. J: They're like, did you get the gift? I was like, oh.

[42:08] Kim: Oh, we didn't even get the gift! I was like, wait, what gift? I like how that term- we have magpie eyes - when we see something shiny. We're like, what's that?

[42:24] Dr. J: We're like, we always have to do that.

[42:26] Kim: We have to have it.

[42:27] Dr. J: Yeah. We don't know what it is, but we're going to have it!

[42:29] Kim: I was like, we're coming back fully decked out aunties!

[42:34] Dr. J: Yeah, we came back with necklaces, and then we had- I had the

ermine earrings. It was like, where'd you guys get that? I was like, over there!

[42:40] Kim: And my Creator's favorite ring.

[42:46] Dr. J: We had no business being given that task. I think like, for us to do, you know, this work - this important work - it really comes down to the support around you. And like, who's going to like stand by you through all of it? You know, thick and thin. Who can you call? You know, like - I think I've called you at like two a.m., three a.m. You call me at like, five a.m. We always answer.

[43:16] Kim: Five a.m., yup! Sounds about right! Cold winter day in December.

[43:24] Dr. J: And I was like, hello? Are you okay? I think you're the only one that I don't miss phone calls - unless I'm like, in the washroom or something. You're like, you pooping? I'm like, yup. But every now and I'm like, hmm, they could go to voicemail. But like, I'm not missing her phone call. She needs me! Right? We really have those conversations - or like that one day, you know, when I was going through some heavy stuff at like, work, personal; all of it hit, and then like, health hit. And I'm like, what is going to happen next, you know? I didn't know what to do in that circumstance. And like, you were like, let's go do this. Let's take care of you. Let's do this. Let's go out. Let's go eat. You know? Or you would be like, did you eat? Or come over, mommy. You know? Bannock.

[44:17] Kim: Got soup and bannock ready!

[44:21] Dr. J: Or you're like, I made a turkey! Get over here! I'm like, okay, I'm coming. I was like, I'm on my way! Or Ronnie's like, come get some cream pies.

[44:31] Kim: Right? Ronnie's [famous] cream pies.

[44:37] Dr. J: Yeah. And - I don't know. Like, uh-

[44:43] Kim: I think it's a support system. Like, we have a great support system with each other. We uplift each other so much, you know? To where [we] don't even focus on negative. And then when negative does occur, we like, challenge it! We're like, let's do this! We're going to get through this!

[45:04] Dr. J: And I think like, you're so good at - I think we're both so good at reading each other's faces. Like, I was like, uh-uh, she don't like that. Or like, that one time when we were - where were we? We were having fun. We were at the Rec Room, and then I got an email and like, it just took me. You could tell immediately that like, something had come through. And you're like, it's okay! Let's go do this! You know? And like, I let it just - to the back of my mind. Because, like, in that moment where I get to like, shed the weight of my work for a minute, you're like, we're not going to lose that. We're not going to lose that happiness. And I think if we didn't have the happiness, too, we really wouldn't get through a lot of like, what's been thrown at us. And like, we get thrown a lot. But we were like, you know, bracing that storm together, you know? Like, literally! When the teepees were going down, you and I were like, you know -

[45:58] Kim: I was like, nobody's getting hurt. I had the zoomies!

[46:05] Dr. J: Yeah - I saw Kim running with her camera. She was like, get your ass in the car!

[46:11] Kim: Making sure everybody was there.

[46:16] Dr. J: And that's what you need! Like, I knew that you were going to have my back, and I'm going to have your back. Like, you know, like, I was ready to square up with someone that one night; you were ready. I was like, we all- we knew what was going on!

[46:28] Kim: Right?

[46:29] Dr. J: I think that's what real friendship is about. It's like knowing each other through thick and thin, through the heavy and the highs. And- but always being there. Especially, you know, to celebrate each other. Because like, as I always say, as Indigenous People - and especially as Indigenous women - we don't celebrate each other enough. Whether it's like, the little wins, you know? You got your little - you got your grant. You know, that's significant; that's profound! You know? And then it's making sure, too, that both of us feel not only that validation, but that connection. That like, at the end of the day, even though we know things are hard, we get to go home. We don't go home to each other - but like, we're there for each other.

[47:18] Kim: Exactly!

[47:21] Dr. J: Right?

[47:22] Kim: It is crazy because like, we're setting ourselves up for so much success, and not only talking like, [not] big headed, but we're setting a path. Not just like, just to be like, oh, hey, we're wild aunties! But like, getting down to it. Like, we're going to be the next generation of like, you know, you girls could do this! Like, you know? Or, this is how it feels to have, like, a positive friendship.

[47:53] Dr. J: Yeah.

[47:53] Kim: You know? Setting examples of like, the do's and don'ts, you know? There's- of course there's boundaries we have with each other. Like we don't ever, you know, step over - step on each other's feet! Because we know each other too well. [We] know the do's and don'ts, and that's just- like, [when] you have a best friend, like, you know; you know what to do, and what not to do in situations. Or when to talk and not to talk. How many times like, we'll be like, should we pop off? No, bro, we're good. We're better than this. But when we're older, I feel like we're going to be the next, you know - I don't want to say too early, but, Elders.

[48:40] Dr. J: Well like, we already have that saying, remember; in the future, the next check signers is going to be Paulina Johnson and Kim Bruno. Because right now it says Victor Bruno and Chris Johnson. That's going to be us!

[48:56] Kim: Right? And like, we're supporting each other through everything!

Like, you know, as we're getting older, like we're- we have goals that are, you know - we're going to get there. We're going to eventually, like, do all the things we always talk about and plan. But like, we give each other knowledge, too. Like, you know - that's what we do. Like- just besides like, you know, all the laughter and all the craziness; we feed each other knowledge. You know? Like I give her traditional knowledge; she gives me like, you know-

[49:34] Dr. J: Street-sense! Just kidding.

[49:37] Kim: Street-smarts! But we-

[49:44] Dr. J: It's definitely knowledges being exchanged.

[49:47] Kim: Yeah.

[49:48] Dr. J: I don't want to say like, what specifically.

[49:54] Kim: But we do that! And we- I see it as a form of keeping our traditions alive. Because, you know, a lot of this is new to us. Like, look, we did a Round Dance! We did sweats before. We're going to be doing so much more feasts; we're going to be picking berries, you know, getting to pick medicine. Like, we're keeping that tradition alive! And we're doing it together because yeah, sometimes it's scary. Sometimes we're - we don't know what to do. But we always have each other to lean on, and we always have each other be like, okay, we're going to do this! Alrighty! You know? We're doing the Round Dance; alright! Let's do this! You know? We're going to learn, and we're going to learn together. And then we're gaining all of this knowledge; we're doing, like I said, we're gaining our knowledge, and we're not going to hold on to it. We're going to pass it down. We're going to teach our younger generations everything that we learned. And we're gifted with so many great skills. Like, we're learning, we're sewing, we're learning how to tuff, we're doing all these-

[51:12] Dr. J: Like, we made belts.

[51:13] Kim: Yeah, old-school stuff. And I told her - I was like, when uncle's nose is red, we're going to go pick some berries! We know it's ripe! And I'm like, let's do that together! Because I never had [that] ability to be like, hey, you know, let's go pick berries there. Let's go pick sage or sweet grass, and get ready for the winter. And having your friends there - your best friend there to be like, yeah, let's do this together! So we - we're like, we're learning it together. We're not judging each other, you know? Yeah! Like, it's such a big learning process, especially like traditionally. Like, you know, there's only so much traditional knowledge that I have, but we get to experience it with each other. Like, even like, you know, through work. Like, I'm excited! Like, you know, we have so much coming up! Like there's - like the feast! You know? We're [going] to be able to do that. And it makes us connected, you know, [to] our traditions. Like, culturally like, we get that ability to do that with each other. And we're learning like, every day! And we're grateful to have [our] older aunties teaching us. Like our favorite auntie Joyce! Who always like, you know, tells us like, you know, you girls do so much! And you know, like, she's always that auntie that [shows] that she's proud of us. And she's always like, what are you girls doing today? What are you girls going to be up to now? But like, knowing that we're doing good, and we're doing

stuff right, is like, you know, being acknowledged for it. And we're doing that together. And that's such a good thing that we have together. You're like, wow! You're like, you spittin' bars!

[53:33] Dr. J: Well - just kidding. I wanted to thank you for being on the Auntie's Is In: the Kim Bruno edition.

[53:45] Kim: There's so much more that I would like to talk about, but...

[53:50] Dr. J: That will be on the explicit after cut.

[53:53] Kim: Lips are sealed.

[54:00] Dr. J: If you want to support Kim, she has an OnlyFans-

[54:07] Kim: What the heck was it? Is that OnlyFans - what the heck? I can't remember. Only pans?

[54:17] Dr. J: Anyways!

[54:20] Kim: We do also sell feet pictures. You'll see!

[54:28] Dr. J: I'm so-

[54:30] Kim: But I just want to give a shout out to Wes, and letting Paulina come out to talk; I know she's on a tight leash.

[54:40] Dr. J: I also want to shout out to Kim for getting Terry to give us a donation for the Round Dance.

[54:17] Kim: A hundred boxes of pizza, y'all.

[54:54] Dr. J: One day they're going to hear these comments, and we will never show our faces again!

[55:02] Kim: I don't know if you could go that long without your gravy.

[55:12] Dr. J: She's having withdrawals; she needs a bannock cheeseburger!

[55:19] Kim: [She] just loves your pizza.

[55:21] Dr. J: It is good though!

[55:24] Kim: They do have busin' food! They're the only Burger Baron that has bannock tacos.

[55:32] Dr. J: Okay, side note; I ask Kim one day, hey, what's the band office number? Because I only had the one-eight-hundred number saved under my dad's contact. And she's like, fucking stone cold, seven-eight-oh, five-eight-five, three-seven-seven-three. It rings! Hello, Burger Baron? I was like, God damn it, Kim! I hung up

so fast!

[56:02] Kim: It was so hard trying to keep a straight face!

[56:07] Dr. J: I was like, medicine! Medicine!

[56:12] Kim: Right? Like yin and yang. What was it? Good auntie, bad, auntie.

[56:20] Dr. J: Good auntie, bad auntie!

[56:23] Kim: Remember, that's bad auntie!

[56:26] Dr. J: Yeah, that's Kim.

[56:27] Kim: Always up to no good. Uncle Slayer.

[56:32] Dr. J: You are the OG Uncle Slayer. What was this joke we had? Oh! I have all the Elders' numbers in my contacts, and she's got all the Elders' sons.

[56:46] Kim: Exactly.

[56:52] Dr. J: Thanks for being on the show. I am worth a hundred horses. By the way.

[56:55] Kim: I am worth a hundred horses, by the way! Bet you haven't met nobody worth a hundred! Well, it was a blast being on The Auntie Is In. See y'all uncles later!

Keywords: *Community, Ermineskin, Friendship, Generational Teaching, Indigenous Womanhood, Lateral Violence, Lived Experience, Maskwacîs*

Glossary

Oskâpêwis – *Elder's helper, ceremonial helper*

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Season 3, Episode 14:

Words Have Spirit

Yôtin and Paulina Johnson
With Jennifer Podemski

Synopsis: *Spoken Words are much more than they appear. They are manifestations of hopes and desires, wishes and needs, but importantly, prayers said out loud. The ability to speak into creation is fundamental to the work of air, which carries the words throughout time and memory. In this episode, we are joined by Jennifer Podemski as we share what it means to create hope and meaning in the way we share stories and knowledge.*

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Part One:
Rez-presentation and the Importance of a Support System

[0:21] Dr. J: So, Jennifer, one of the things about Season Three that we really wanted to get back to was bringing back the foundational knowledge and stories about the four elements. And so, Jennifer is part of- actually what we're calling air, Yôtin. So we're focusing on fire, water, earth, and air. And air - we wanted to present Jennifer's work - especially in the spirit of what she does as a storyteller, but also as an individual, as the air that we breathe essentially brings us not only life and gifts, but stories that can create hope, create a [vision] for a new future, and really change how we engage and actually work together. And so I wanted to bring in Jennifer to talk about Yôtin - or air - specifically in this episode, but, especially in the world that she does. Because she's not only a phenomenal Indigenous woman, but she's a Storyteller at the end of the day. She tells these stories, she gives hope. And as I said earlier [in her] introduction, like, I remember when I first met you, I was starstruck. And I was like - sorry Mom and Dad: no fucking way, right? And it was just, like, a phenomenal experience to meet this - you know - this person that I've watched not only on the screen, but an Indigenous woman too, because representation really matters. And so - I get to work with you in that capacity, get to have you here - and we're really grateful that you are here. And so, I'll let you share a little bit more about yourself for those who don't know you.

[1:57] Jennifer: Okay. Well, I am so honoured to be your first guest for Season Three, and I'm so sorry that I'm not there in person. I don't even- I don't even know what to say, but I'm just glad that technology exists because we can this like this. I'm coming to you from Barrie, Ontario, which is not where I'm from, but it's where I moved to. My life was mostly spent in Toronto, where my parents met and had me. And I built my life and career out of Toronto. My mom comes from Muscowpetung First Nation, in Saskatchewan. And I owe a lot of my career to her, because she took the time- like when I started my first production company when I was twenty-four, twenty-five - and today is my fifty second birthday, so it was a long time ago [applause] - I can definitely feel the, I guess, the vastness of the experiences I've had since then. That- my mom drove my across the country, back and forth, on our first show - called The Seventh Generation - you know, was like basically a part of the reason why they will to, I guess, lay the foundation for what became a pretty- very rewarding producing career, as a writer, producer, actor, all of those hats that I ended up wearing - mostly because I couldn't afford people to do those jobs. [laughter] Also, the pool was very small in terms of Indigenous talent and creatives, so rather than giving that role to non-Indigenous people, I just started training a lot and, you know, trying to give- built capacity so the weight didn't have to land one person.

[4:03] Dr. J: And I think that's really significant, especially- not only in an industry often not designed for Indigenous Peoples, but also having that support system, right? And everytime I hear, like- I always have in my head when I hear Seventh Generation is, like, the theme song. It's the Seventh Generation [singing]! My sister's know what I'm talking about. [laughter] But I think that when we start to think about who are those supports and what it means for us, right, we do what we do in this work because we know: one, there's a gap; but we also know that there's - often - hole for us to fill, especially as Indigenous Women - especially in the work and capacity and training aspect, right? And often, you know, one of the biggest things that we've often

talked about - you and I, Jen - is like, where are the mentors? Where are these individuals who can help lead us, teach us, guide us? And also, too, who can we talk to, right, about when - for instance - something doesn't go right or we don't know how to approach it? And so, do you want to add [a little] bit about that; about what it means to have that support, that connection?

[5:29] Jennifer: It's like the life force of, you know, the work, really, is to have people who support you. Because, the journey- when you're building something that hasn't been there before - when you're building something new or carving out a space that didn't exist before, which so many people are doing because, you know, we weren't really in many sec- any sectors. We weren't in law, we weren't in education, we weren't in justice, or the screen sector. There's all kinds of sectors and spaces that there were no Indigenous People. So, those people who are, kind of, carving out space, having some kind of support - whoever that is - is the life force of your work. But, I think one of the things that we recognize, and like when we gathered in Banff recently, is like to have peers - peer support - and especially women- Indigenous Women peer support. to foster [an] environment that is that we, sort of. unabashedly support each other and without any jealousy or resentment, and have like really healthy, thriving systems of matriarchy.

[6:25] Dr. J: Mhm.

[6:26] Jennifer: Because that, um, I think is going to help all of us, and everybody else that we know - non-Indigenous family, you know, the world, ultimately. I think it will help everybody understand that, you know, there's a safer way to be. There's a better way to be in life. And ideally, when they have those peer support systems and find time to gather - whether it's virtually or together - we can have- it gives us the strength to, you know, move forward to the next day where we may be in spaces where there are no Indigenous People. And, where you feel so isolated and alone, and, you know, targeted and you're holding the load and you have to, you know, manage it all yourself. And like all of those variables that fall onto the plate of, you know, the representative in the room. And so to have those relationships- like I cherish those relationships so much - I cherish those relationships because it feels like it just makes my process and my path more- safer, it makes it safer. You know, and I think - when we were talking - you know, we had this amazing [meeting] in Banff, and it was so short, but, you know, recognizing that everyone feels like that. Everyone wants to feel, like, supported and everyone wants to feel like we're all working towards, like, loving each other. I think that's another like, by-product of, like, [all kinds] of reality, but mostly colonialism and the by-product of, you know, broken families and not really knowing how to receive love. I think it's something I've worked on for many, many years, my whole life. And that also shows in relationships, like in friendships and friend groups. So, I think, you know, when we're all in a room together and admitting or confessing that: I too don't know how to receive love, but I'm going help you [by] just being here to support you.

[9:25] Dr. J: Mhm.

[9:26] Jennifer: [Another] thing came up too, which is 'let's just be kind to each other', but I started to think, like, well, [what is]that? What does that mean to each person? [Because] I think it looks different to each person. You know, kindness is

not one thing. And, you know, because of the inherited, you know, intergenerational trauma and things that have been passed down to us, especially through women, sometimes we mistake, you know, [kindness for] meanness. When actually, like, it's not mean, it is kind. So it's like: what kind of kindness are you talking about?

[10:18] Dr. J: Mhm.

[10:19] Jennifer: You know, and kindness- [we mistake] love for attachment,or, like, we just don't understand all the time [what] real kindness looks like. Like, I know [from] my mom, I was saying, you know, because she took the time to drive across the country multiple times so that we could make The Seventh Generation, that is kindness. But that doesn't mean that every word we shared between each other was kind. [laughter] Like, far cry! So I think just, like, [learning] how- what that means to each other [and] really exercising it and practicing it as much as possible to make sure that it serves the goal, right? If it's not serv- I don't really care what the behaviour is, if it's serving the goal - which is stronger community matriarchs, centring matriarchy, and, like, building together - then I don't really care what it looks like or how it comes out of their mouth.

[11:31] Dr. J: I think that concept of, like, [rematriarchy] - it's so profound especially in the work that we do and the work that we engage in. I think about a lot of, like, textbooks that I have to, you know, teach and share with students, and a lot of them are very damaged-centered, negative representations that put Indigenous Peoples as statistics, as, you know, these negatives. [And] when I started to think about the work that I wanted to portray, I didn't want to leave [that] story as, like, the dominant one. I wanted ones of power, of growth, of admiration, of actually challenging what is kindness? What is love from an English point of view? Because in colonial languages - such as English or French - [you don't have that] same definition, especially in Indigenous Languages, right? Sâkihitowin isn't possession and ownership, it's about, you know, I care for you, right? Putting you at the forefront, but in a western tradition '*I* love *you*', is '*I* possess *you*', right? It's also rethinking and [tweaking] the way that we think. And so that component of sharing: well what is kindness and love? Even if it's a little bit mean - as an Auntie, you can do that - because we know it's not out of, like, hate, or intimidation, or fear. It's about: I generally care for you and I'm telling you this. And I think sometimes because we're navigating these two worlds that often are colliding, we really have to - more or less - say: well what is this representation; what is this actually sharing with me; what is this telling me? And I think when we start to really break that down, we see it actually in the work that we do - especially the stories. And so, Season Three - for instance - of the podcast, we start sharing those stories of what [does], actually, Indigenous love look like? What is generational love? What is actually pulling off [the] cloak of colonialism that has embedded itself in Indigenous communities to really challenge that notion that: hey, maybe I'm not worthy enough of love, right? And it's not to say that we- even if we come from a loving home, our society's telling us that we're not good enough. And, you know, growing up- for instance I grew in small town, Ponoka, which often you know was [really] problematic, to make me question my sense of self, my representation, what I- [my] worth, and it took, you know, it took a lot of time to actually say: you what, I'm not those stereotypes, I'm not those representations, even though I had that support system, it does affect you mentally. But then you start to build that support system around you. And I think, you know, many of the people in the audience, -

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I'm going to give a shout out, right - like I have like childhood friends. I have a badass assistant professor over here that comes and supports me, you know. I have my best friend chilling in back with her [man]. [laughter] You know, I have all my research team, my family, my uncles, the love of my life, Dr. Noella Steinhauer, [laughter] who I'm just, you know- if I didn't have her, there's a lot of times I'm like: Noella, help me! You know, but it's like, because I don't know how to navigate the university sometimes because, like, there's no blueprint of like: this racism just happened, how do we deal with it? Right, but it's [the] ability to find those people around you, you know? And so there's many people here, my parents, you know, my good friends Maureen and Trisha are here, Charlene, you know, and like Pam, my mosôm Chris, who says I don't listen - which is true. But, [laughter] you know, these are these people that, you know, they gave up their Saturday to be here, right? You guys all did. And I get to do that work because it's not it's not easy work sometimes, especially trying to break these systems that are so domineering, so profound, that, you know, [there's] some times where just like, I feel like I'm failing but all of them are like: no, let's keep going forward, let's keep doing this. Even though, like, it gets to the point where it, like, it is a heavy weight on the shoulders, it's making us, you know, question do I belong here? Anyway, my tangent aside, it's significant. It's significant when you start to [do that] rematriation of what your own worth is, and, like, really starting to see that, which is, you know, sometimes I feel - as Indigenous Women - we don't get that early on. We have to learn it in our later years, and I think: well, what would have happened if you know, we both had this realization when we were in our early twenties. What would have been that change? I think about that often. And so, the whole representation [aspect] of the podcast was we wanted to make it [so] that if there was an Indigenous girl, a boy, a youth who wanted to know about themselves, here are these representations of what is worthy, what is beautiful, you know, what is important. [Society] may be seeing this aspect, but we're telling you this and this what you need to hear. And so that becomes really important. And so, when we start to think about storytelling, right, It's telling those stories. And in many of the films that you are in, and what you've worked on, you get to portray that, right, and share those insights into the culture, but also, too, the laughter. And I think a lot of the time [we] often don't laugh. We're always supposed to be very serious. I know there's, like, a joke in my department and my team is like, I'm not supposed to swear; I've gotten better. Okay, [I've gotten better]. Old Paulina would've dropped probably twenty f-bombs already, you know. But it's, like- I was told you don't want to be this representation that is negative or derogatory, you have to be very crisp and clean. You have to speak articulately. And I was like: so I'm not allowed to swear? Like, at all? And it was because it was an assumption that I wasn't going to be enough if I was portraying these bad characteristics, right? And those aren't bad characteristics per se - it's the society telling us again - how we're supposed to act, how we're supposed to portray ourselves and I felt like, that's not my whole persona, you know, it's in the work that I do, the heart of what I do.

Part Two:
The Weight of Behind the Scenes Work

[18:23] Dr. J: I wanted to ask you, what do you think is a vital story that you're telling right now in your work?

[18:30] Jennifer: [It's] been, uh, [a] very similar journey to get here. Like, [what you] experience in the academic space, I think is very similar to the screen sector where there's just, you know, so little representation. Um – so I after doing Little Bird which was, you know, all-consuming, emotionally, and physically, and so demanding on six years of my life, I went into writing comedy. So I, I really have two comedy shows that – um – I have- I'm waiting to hear about if they're gonna ever get made, but that was sort of my instinct was I – I don't think I can do that again for a while. Because it was so, uh- it broke me. It broke me. Um, and the heavy lifting of, you know, having so few Indigenous people to share that load on the team – emotionally and otherwise – it was very difficult. So, in terms of, like, what's [the] important work or the important stories, I'd have to say that I think that the most important story I'm telling right now is behind the scenes. Like, yeah, it's on the page, and yeah, it might get on TV, but I think the most important story to tell is the- is the capacity building behind the scenes, and that really was most important to me. I do care about, you know, making a good show [and] doing things that are innovative, you know, cross-cultural and exploring, you know, a variety of Indigenous perspective[s]. I'm involved in very cool, very interesting, compelling and- uh culturally important work. But I do think that my most important work is behind the scenes.

[20:41] Dr. J: No, I would, I would absolutely have to agree on that, right? Because I feel like people see the finished project but they don't see all the work that goes into it, right? People see, for instance, the podcast – they don't see us working, writing, researching. They don't see us having these ups and downs in our personal lives, right? [I] think if people knew how much work goes into all of that, it'd be very different, especially, you know, in academia, we're taught that we have to produce and write and show proof of what we're doing, but no one sees all the hours of learning back behind the scenes. But also, too, that emotional growth. I think that many people think that: oh, we went into this mindset, that this is what we're going to do. But they don't actually see that it's actually life-changing for us. You know, when I first started the podcast, I was like: oh I can get students and they would just, you know, show with me, you do research. But no! It became, this is how we Mentor, this is how we build relationships, this is how, you know, I help navigate them especially in skills that I had to learn firsthand that they don't have to learn those [skills] firsthand, right. And [what] I think about that, especially too, you know, is that behind the scenes work. I don't think people see how busy it really is. But also too, talking about your work in Little Bird, right? The emotional labour? One of the biggest things – no shade to sociology right now, but I was- I used to teach the social stratification and inequality course, and, you know, I'm talking from my own lived experience like, 'this is my experience as [an] Indigenous Woman', and then I get students who are like: that didn't happen. And I was like – you guys knew what I said in my head, right? Like, [laughter] but it was, like- you're telling me that the racism I experienced didn't happen because you didn't see it. But you are a non-Indigenous person. In my class. On social stratification. And inequality. Our textbook is the stacked deck, okay? It's all there! But it's like people don't want to believe it until they see it, you know? Or they don't realize the emotional labour of it, you know, there's sometimes when I'm writing, you know, it's just so emotionally, heavy because it means so much to us. And because a lot of the stories we tell are from an Indigenous perspective, we carry a lot of that emotional, you know, labour, [that] energy. You know, one of the biggest things I stopped doing – especially in my career, because I just couldn't handle it, you know – is I really stopped lecturing on residential schools. Because you know, close

home, close to my family, I didn't want to- not that it wasn't important, I just didn't want to see the people who are so close to me be a topic for students who would leave the class after an hour. And I personally started to change that [in my] syllabus even. You know, we get into all of these buzzword categories of Missing a Murdered Indigenous Women, you know, the Starlight Tours and I'm not trying to [diminish] that, I'm just trying to say, where is the strength in the People? Where is the resiliency? Where is the beauty? Where is the friendship? Where is the kindness? I don't think a lot of people realize just how heavy that is. Especially, you know, I was using my own lived experience in my teaching and I got told to be less Indigenous. And I remember thinking: 'I'm gonna go full-blown Indigenous now'. Like, you know, because before [I really] didn't like to be on campus in beadwork or a ribbon shirts because I felt like I was gonna be tokenized - that this was our indigenous representation, she's here, let alone not being acknowledged as a doctor or professor. And so used to challenge it. But now I'm like, you know what, I'm here, whether you like it or not - I ain't going anywhere. Period. But like really it was try- having to, like, come to terms [with] that this is what I wanted, not for myself per se, but like those generations that follow after and who will look up to me. And I didn't realize how many people looked up to me, like, straight up, I was in my own naive bubble, but I think that was sometimes a saving grace, but it was really, you know. I had to see past what, you know, people were trying to put me in and start to become this representation that I wa- of what I wanted, who I wanted, what I wanted to represent, and what I wanted to really be. And so, yeah, [do you] have anything to add to that?

[25:39] Jennifer: Yeah, I do. I think, you know, to that point and very much understanding that and relating to it is, like, when you are somewhere - when you are the only one in that space, or one of few - you have to be as big as possible.

[25:58] Dr. J: Mhm.

[25:59] Jennifer: You have to, like, you have to hold a lot of space for all the people that are supposed to be there who aren't. That's how big you have to be.

[26:08] Dr. J: Mhm.

[26:09] Jennifer: So whether that's, you know, how you present, you know, physically, or what you're wearing, or what you're saying, it just requires you to be- take up so much space, as one person. And it's exhausting work. But I relate to that. So yeah, that's a real thing.

[26:27] Dr. J: My intrusive thought is to say, like, big dick energy, [laughter] 'cause it really is like- you really, you know- I['ve] noticed too, even when you're in those spaces, you have to take up the space, but you also have to own what you're saying. [All] of a sudden, we have to become this mature, well- [laughter] how do I frame this? We have become, like, this elder immediately, more or less. We have to become this individual who knows what they're talking about, every aspect too, [so] that we're able to be able to say: this is why we're doing what we're doing. And telling people actually, you know- this is probably one of my favorite parts is: actually, you're wrong, you know. Because a lot of people are not prepared to hear that, especially about Indigenous Knowledge and the way that it's presented. [I'm] sorry, but that was of the past from individuals who weren't part of the community, who were in and out

of the community, and this [is] actually the right way to do it, this is a proper way to do it. And many people often get taken aback because they're like: well, we've always done it this way. I'm like: you may have always done it that way, but this is the right way to go forward, you know, and to learn that, and relearn it so that you're not just becoming, you know, you're not just becoming this representation of a fixed idea. And so yeah, no. Absolutely.

Part Three:
Little Paulina and Little Jennifer

[28:12] Dr. J: I gave Jennifer a list of questions I wanted to talk about. I never get to the list of questions I talked about. [laughter] But really, there's one question I think I want us to kind of talk about, and it's: what would you tell your younger self? Sorry. If you could have a conversation, what conversation would you have?

[28.30] Jennifer: Uh, that's a big one. Um, I do think about this quite a bit, 'cause- oh my gosh. I would have saved myself a lot of wasted years of choosing the wrong people. And I think what I learned from that, I mean obviously I wouldn't want to change anything, but [I] just would say; you know, no matter what you think right now, you belong here. And you're gonna do amazing things. And you may feel like you're not worth anything, or your- you don't fit in. But just believe and I'll tell you right now. Believe me, that you have a path, and you just have to trust in that path. And never ever silence yourself. Don't ever make yourself small because you don't want other people to feel bad. That's the most important. And because I made myself small in so many situations in my life because I didn't want other people to feel bad, I suffered. I still haven't paid the price on that.

[29:54] Dr. J: Mhm.

[29:55] Jennifer: So that›s what I would say.

[29:58] Dr.J: Uh, I was laughing because my dad was heckling from the audience. And uh, he said: listen more to me. Uh, no it really [is]-, I think sometimes in these spaces that we occupy we get told to make ourselves small, so that- you know, I remember being told: [be palatable]; don't make an issue, don't create problems, and I started to think that, wherever I was working [there] would be, like, all this chaos, and I started thinking like, [maybe] I'm bad. Like, maybe I'm the problem. But I was like no, I'm not the problem, because when I started to think about what is actually chaos, it's a restructuring that something has not been right for a long time and you being there is actually rewriting it to be [the way] that it was supposed to be which is essentially balanced. And that's the chaos theory. [It] is that you may think that it's destructive but it's actually fixing itself from a universal point of view. And I used to think, oh, I can't make friends or something, [but] no! It's [just] that those individuals weren't your people. Those people weren't the ones for you. And I think that, you know, learning that has been a really hard lifelong journey, but also too, it has allowed us to say when we're comfortable, and how we're not comfortable. Because I feel like a lot of time as Indigenous Women, we're made to be uncomfortable, and we've been taught to accept it. And in that uncomfortableness, you know, we limit, you know- I

think about that student who made that comment. What happened was, essentially, they came up to me after class and they're like: I didn't want to make it seem like I didn't believe racism exists. And I was like: well basically you taught me you're racist. And I remember their face was like deadpan, right? Because they've probably never been told they're racist - and I don't do this to all my students, just the ones that deserve - but it was really- they've never been challenged in that moment. I made him uncomfortable for ten seconds, when my whole life I've been uncomfortable being always cautious of: am going to be watched by security; are people gonna think that I am problematic right; or, you know, the other week, I went head head with this individual - I don't do this a lot - okay? So, but- I remember he was a white male, and he kept talking over me and I was like: are gonna keep talking over me? And like, he kept going! So I did it back to him. I was like: are you gonna keep talking over me; you think you're gonna get the last word; you want to keep talking? I was like: I can do this all day! [And] I remember his face [was], like, just so withdrawn after the moment that he realized [that] I wasn't going to back down. I wasn't gonna take his abuse and like, you know, negligence and and think that, you know, if I hadn't gone through all of these experiences which are - not saying that they're worth it,but we go through them - they start to shape us into that representation. And I remember being told, you know, many of you in this room know that when I worked for the government- super shady place, right? I remember when I first started to talk and be vocal about my treatment, it wasn't actually until a year ago - so, that was back in like twenty-eighteen -nineteen - a year ago, so six years after, I had an individual come up to me and say: you know, the fact that you stood up for yourself, it made nine other of us stand up for ourselves as well. And I think I needed that because for the longest time I thought: you know it's just me I even know if I made an impact and she came up to me and she was crying - and I was in the bathroom because I was like: oh my God, what's going on, right - but was she was emotional because she said: you stood up and it us feel comfortable enough that we could stand up. And they never told me that. No one ever told me that me doing that allowed these people to feel safe enough in their own voice. And I think that's something that, you know, I've really learned is being able to be that vocal, and, talking back to my parents. Just kidding. [laughter] I'm just- I'm teasing them now. But also, too, having my parents, you know, my dad - when I was younger - would always tell me to take no shit. When I was young, my mom would always tell me about a teaching from her grandfather saying: if you let that injustice happen, you accept it. Right? And I really started to own that and let myself say: I'm not gonna get treated like this; I'm not okay with it. And it was, you know, a little hard in the beginning because your voice will crack and you'll tremble, and I remember thinking: oh man I made- did I make a scene; was I the problem? Right? And I think for my [younger] self, it would be saying that your voice is the most powerful weapon. And, and I think that's what I really thrive upon now.

[35:10] Jennifer: I was going to- I was thinking of the same thing, of how powerful it is to, you know - when we talked about mentoring - like not even, uh- I was actually having a conversation with my mother this morning that [was], like, in regards to my children. I really try not to give advice. I do my best to turn the advice into action so that they can, you know, see in action what that would look like. And [in] the same way, mentoring is not so much like teaching. It's not like, you know, telling someone how it's done. It's- it's living in a way that inspires someone to live in that way too. Especially when that person, you know, relates to you, or looks like you, or has, you know, similar experiences to you. And it reminded me of this one time I was

on a movie. Probably- it must have been like 25 years ago, and Irene Bedard - I played her sister - and I heard some yelling outside my trailer, so, like, [I] looked through the little, like, curtain and I watched her get- like, rip a new one to [the] costume designer who wanted her to, like, dress like this 'Navajo Elder'. And she was like, you know: 'What the F do you think you're doing?! Like you think, like we- a modern person dresses like this?! Like I'm a modern, like, urban Navajo woman! I wouldn't wear this. Like did you do your research?' and she just went off on her. And I was just like: oh my gosh, that is the bravest person I've ever seen in my life. It was so incredible and I- it taught me so much. I brought so much of what I witnessed there into my own life, and into my own work, and into my own practice. Like, being able to witness bravery like that is, it's so important to your growth.

Part Four:
Conclusion

[37:26] Dr. J: One of the biggest things I›ve learned, especially with working [with] you for the past year or so, no- I›ve been working with Jennifer Podemski, to help her create a methodology for Indigenous Women in the screen sector to figure out what [are] the reasons - whether it›s socio-economic - but also, what [are] the realities of what is inhibiting [their] success? What are the skills that they can [find] to help themselves? And so we›ve been researching, actually, what is the best practice to do that [going] forward? And I think, a lot of the work that I›ve seen Jennifer do, and I just want to [emphasize] this to you, is that we were in Banff back in February and we had met with all these other screenwriters, producers, you know, actresses, and they absolutely adore you. And I think that I wanted to tell you that, as is I was in background doing all my research stuff, but you could- I was looking at all of their faces and I was just like they adore you: one, for all of the work that you do and just how important you are and even myself, you know, I didn›t know if I was gonna be able to do what you were requesting of me and then how we very closely started realize how similar, a lot of our experiences were. Especially in two different sectors, right? Film versus Academia. And I think I wanted to conclude this conversation with you and say that you are absolutely a phenomenal woman. And, I just- I just remember that time when [you were with] Michelle Thrush and I met you and I was just in awe, and I'm still in awe of you. And I want you to know for that little Jen inside of you, that you are so important and uh, never stop. Sorry. Never stop being who you are and having [that] courage, and you are so brave. I just want you to know that. And I wish you were here in person, um, because we were all going to sing Happy Birthday to you. [laughter] And yeah, we even got you a cake. [laughter] It's okay, we'll eat it, [laughter] but I just wanted to say like, you know, from the bottom of like little Paulina, you are phenomenal. And you are worthy of everything good that comes your way. And I want you to know that [applause].

[40:12] Jennifer: Thank you for all of that. Um, I feel the same way. And that's what I felt when I saw you speak. I was like, I'm not- I need to get into this world.

{40:27] Both: [Laughter]

[40:29] Jennifer: So it was definitely a step in the direction, you know, that I

dream of, you know, just to build [that] space where, where we can do this. Because that is, you know, that is definitely [repairing], you know, whatever damage was done from my childhood [laughter]. You know, it's like, it really is connecting, like, this and with all of the people that we get to connect with, all that, on a regular basis because we create those spaces to do that. So, I'm so grateful that, you know, that you have that view of me because, especially on my Birthday when, you know, you're thinking about your life and, you know, [things] you wanna change and things that you are grateful for, just marking that kind of journey. Um, it's [a] really nice thing to hear. And yeah, of course I would have liked to be there in person. But uh, whatever - for whatever reason I got an ear infection [laughter]. Of all the things. And yeah, I just would love to hug you and say thank you and, like, hello to everybody and Noella. Noella, is one of those women too that-

[42:01] Dr. J: Hold on...

[42:02] Jennifer: I'm so grateful to know and [is great to] work with.

[42:08] Dr. J: Alright, Jen. Well, from the bottom of everyone's hearts here. I think we are really grateful for you to join us even if you are virtual and we look forward to all of what you do in the future. And so we are gonna sign off. I don't know if you guys wanna cheer or anything so she can hear [applause].

[42:31] Audience: [singing happy birthday]

[42:37] Dr. J: Happy birthday to you! [applause] Ay! Love you, take care. See you soon.

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Listen along on Spotify.

Season 3, Episode 15:

Mamihcisiwin ekwa Pakwâtitowin

Yôtin, Sam Dancey, and Paulina Johnson

Synopsis: *What if Mr. Darcey were Mr. Louis Baptiste and Miss Bennet were Miss Sîkwan Ahenakew? What story would be told if the Colonial stories that captivate us today were told from the vantage point of an Indigenous lens? What imagination would come if we saw ourselves in the stories known worldwide, rather than from the perspective of "uncivilized" [00:46 or] "noble savages"? What if our ribbon skirts were worn instead of bustles and petticoats? What if it were braids instead of mutton chops? Find me in a world where Indigenization takes on Victorian representation and Indigenous love stories [1:06 that] are doused with a [1:08 little] bit of Auntie magic.*

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Part One:
Sans-Pocahontas

I wonder what stories would have been told in the 1800s in Canada; would they be of love and romance on the untamed Plains, unrequited love of the chief's daughter to the warrior, or better yet, two star-crossed lovers from enemy Nations? [1:40 But] I am 100% sure, though, that they wouldn't be about child brides such as Pocahontas or the like. [1:46 No. Not by any means.] I like to imagine it was much more than a brave warrior on his horse with his hair draped down his shoulders and ripped abs covered with his bear claw necklace coming back from a successful hunt with pride on his face. Oh no, that's a way different type of story altogether, that we may circle back to...when the kids are asleep of course.

But what if, instead of the stories of sadness and despair that are told about Indigenous Peoples during the early days of contact, we told stories of love and coming of age, such as those told by Jane Austen for instance, reflective [2:29 of an] Indigenous character [2:31 of course]? Or [2:35 maybe] two? Or four? Maybe even more? [2:36 Maybe the whole story is Indigenous?] What if the stories we told our youth were much more about living than *just* survival? What if they were about learning to love through humility after pride or, better yet, forgiving oneself?

Part Two:
Mamihcisiwin ekwa Pakwâtitowin (Pride and Prejudice – A Round Dance Story)

The Ahenakew sisters could hear the vibrating drums and the singer's voices rising through the leafless trees. A few paces behind, their parents trailed, whispering loudly to each other about the eligible young men rumoured to be coming to this Round Dance, including a promising hunter from Lake Winnipeg.

The young man, Charles Cardinal, stood there, wearing a magnificent bear claw necklace. He was surrounded by a small entourage of young women to whom he bore a striking resemblance - evidently his sisters - and a second young man whose face was marked by a disinterested look. Both had a woven red sash hung across their hips.

As the first drum beats of a new song started, the space around the singers was filled with dancers, one by one, grasping the hand of the person next to them, creating a long chain that flowed to the rhythm. Cardinal and Mêkwan rushed forward to join in together, followed by the other Ahenakew and Cardinal sisters. This left only Sîkwan, who wanted a few moments of quiet contemplation, and Mr. Louis Baptiste, who stood silently watching the rotating concentric circles, his feet not moving an inch. Glancing over at his unenthused face, Sîkwan wondered why this stranger did not participate in the dancing. He did not look unwell, at least not physically; perhaps something was wrong with his spirit, she wondered.

As the evening passed, the oldest Ahenakew daughter, Mêkwan, became fast friends with Cardinal's two sisters. They giggled with heads bent together between

songs, sharing beading tips and tricks for getting the ribbons on their skirts to lie flat while sewing.

Standing outside the main circle of attendees, Cardinal teased his friend about not participating, unaware that Sîkwan could hear their conversation over the lively sounds of celebration.

"You really should participate in the potato dance at the very least! What about the second Ahenakew girl, is she not of your *sophisticated* tastes?" asked Cardinal, pointing towards Sîkwan with his lips.

"Dear friend, you know I detest dancing with anyone besides my closest acquaintances, and she is hardly that."

❦

The next morning, the Ahenakew's tipi was filled with the smell of fresh bannock and the exhilarated voices of aunties and young girls discussing last evening's festivities. The consensus, it seemed, was that the surprise newcomer - one Mr. Baptiste - was utterly full of pride and completely lacking in spirit. Of additional talk was the potential spark between Mêkwan and the Cardinals, including the sisters and their brother, who, when not dancing, kept returning to Mêkwan's side. Most exciting was the invitation Mêkwan received to visit for tea the next day.

❦

Sîkwan peeked through the flap of the family's tipi at the heavy, wet snowflakes that cloaked the breathtaking fall landscape in a winter coat, a white blanket laid upon the land in less than a day. Creator had listened to Mrs. Ahenakew's prayers and offerings the morning prior, and granted her a turn in the weather, just after Mêkwan had set out on horseback for the Cardinals. Through the flurries, a shape emerged from the edge of the trees - a hunter on horseback moving at great speed. Mrs. Ahenakew came up behind Sîkwan and saw the figure, wrapping fur around her shoulders before stepping outside to meet him.

Dismounting in a single, swift motion, he greeted Mrs. Ahenakew, "I come by way of the visitor Cardinals; Mêkwan has fallen ill. The Cardinals have insisted that she stay with them while she recovers, and the local healer has been sent for. As I passed through on my way to a hunt, I was sent to assure you that your daughter is in good hands."

Mrs. Ahenakew tried to show concern for her eldest daughter, masking the glee in her face at the success of her plan. Sîkwan was disgusted at her mother's feigned worry, accompanied by a sinking anxiety for her beloved sister.

After the hunter left, Sîkwan bundled herself up in her warmest furs, determined to see her sister regardless of the weather. Trying to curb her interference in this matchmaking, Mrs. Ahenakew tried to reason Sîkwan out of making the journey to the Cardinal's lodge, but her efforts were of no use; Sîkwan was worried about her sister, and nothing would stop her from seeing Mêkwan.

Traipsing westward through the rolling hills, the wind bit at Sîkwan's nose while yanking at every loose strand of hair that escaped her hood, making a typically delightful walk truly arduous. After a great deal of effort, she arrived at the Cardinal's, sweating and flushed from exertion. As the snow stuck to her hair and coat began to melt, she increasingly resembled a waterlogged gopher.

Calling to announce her presence, Sîkwan produced a splendidly intricate basket woven from red willow branches that her younger sister had made. Sîkwan hoped that this was an appropriate gift, as she did not know the preferences of these Métis strangers and what things were acceptable to bring. One of the Cardinal sisters welcomed Sîkwan inside, and after slight hesitation, accepted the gift. At once, Sîkwan was guided to where her sister lay, bundled tightly in furs and wool blankets. Hearing her sister's voice, Mêkwan stirred and slowly sat up. She was feverish and had a glassy look in her eyes.

Sîkwan prepared a tea for her sister, and after gratefully sipping the mug, Mêkwan fell into a deep slumber, leaving Sîkwan alone to converse with their hosts. One of the Cardinal sisters asked about her accomplishments in hide tanning. Sîkwan was admittedly terrible, just as she lacked any aptitude for the other skills the Cardinal sisters seemed to value. Sîkwan found painting, quillwork, and beading did not capture her interest, and thus she spent little time honing such talents for she loved stories and storytelling linked to the land and in the medicines that she learned from her nokom each spring and summer. For each skill that Sîkwan admitted to lacking, the younger Cardinal sister pointedly announced her accomplishments, ensuring that Baptiste heard every word she said.

In desperate need of some air, Sîkwan excused herself from the circle and stepped outside the lodge, taking a few paces out of the faint light cast by the homefire. Looking up, she saw that all of the clouds that had brought torment on her earlier travels had vanished. In their place, Sîkwan could see the glimmering vastness of the Sky World – stories sewn together by the Ancestors and placed for all the humans to be reminded of where they came from.

"My favourite is Mistâpêw, *the Giant.*" Baptiste's words broke Sîkwan's peace.

A hand thrust a wad of amorphous striped fabric towards her. Turning, she saw Baptiste clad in a strange outer garment. "What is this?" she asked, holding the rough cloth up in front of her.

A capote," Baptiste responded, showing Sîkwan the sleeves and helping her into the coat. "They're wool. Before they ceased operations, these used to be blankets made by the Hudson's Bay Company. Cardinal and I found them in an abandoned fort."

"How foolish they were to try to give our lands to that illegitimate government of 'Canada.' I cannot imagine what came over those infantile colonial thieves!"

"Indeed. Why anyone would try to *take* instead of *share* what the Creator has given us is beyond my comprehension. At least my Ancestors had the sense to learn from the land; to live here in harmony."

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"You act as if your Ancestors were not coming here for the same reason as the Brits, do not forget you are a *guest* here."

Baptiste tried to defend himself, but Sîkwan was not listening. She tore off the capote, throwing it at Baptiste, stomping back into the lodge.

❦

The following days moved slowly as Mêkwan's condition failed to improve. Sîkwan refused to leave her side beyond helping with household tasks, and whenever she had to step outside, even for a moment, Sîkwan always donned one of her furs.

On the fifth day, Baptiste was sent to first retrieve some items from the Ahenakew's lodge, then to go with Mr. Ahenakew to retrieve a renowned medicine woman who would be returning from the mountains now that the snow had begun to fall.

Just before sunset, there was a commotion in the woods east of the Cardinal lodge. Curious, Sîkwan cautiously stepped outside to investigate, axe in hand. She was shocked to see her younger sisters stumbling through the bush leading an unfamiliar horse overloaded with parfleche, furs, and cedar boughs. As the horse approached, Sîkwan realized it was pulling a sled carrying her mother. The rear of this procession was brought up by the family's dog, Chief, who ran back and forth across the toboggan tracks, sniffing eagerly at the snow. Sîkwan clasped her hand over her mouth to stop herself from laughing at her family's absurdity.

After receiving a warm welcome from the Cardinals, Mrs. Ahenakew quietly scolded Sîkwan for intruding on Mêkwan's romantic prospects. But this reprimand was soon forgotten as Mrs. Ahenakew turned her attention to incessantly quizzing Mr. Cardinal as she pretended to fuss over her daughter.

❦

Two days later, Mr. Ahenakew and Mr. Baptiste returned just after sundown, followed by the tiniest old woman, head tilted to the sky and wrapped in fur white as the snow. The medicine woman entered the lodge and went straight to Mêkwan, ushering the others outside.

The Cardinals and Ahenakews did not go far, crowding near the door and whispering about how Mr. Ahenakew and Mr. Baptiste managed to find the medicine woman and return so fast. Mr. Ahenakew insisted that he had been gone seven days, despite only having been away two. Sîkwan, eager to move away from her family for a moment, walked to the edge of the clearing and pretended to be deeply invested in the bark of a birch tree. After a few deep breaths, she tilted her head skyward. Her eyes landed on Mistâpêw for a moment, and she thought of Baptiste before quickly forcing herself to find another constellation.

❦

The next morning, Sîkwan woke to Mêkwan chatting quietly and sipping tea with Mr. Cardinal. She looked as though she had never been sick a day. To celebrate Mêk-

wan's recovery and [13:58 to] thank the medicine woman, it was decided that the Cardinals would host a kitchen party. Everything in the lodge was pushed to hug the walls, and a great deal of food was prepared with the Ahenakews' assistance, including dried pickerel, as insisted by the Cardinals. As guests gathered, the Cardinal sisters demonstrated how to jig while their brother played the fiddle, and soon all in attendance were dancing along - except for Baptiste, who sat near the door, not a single toe tapping to the rhythm of the wooden spoons. Sîkwan, tired from trying to keep up with the lively tune, unhappily sat down beside him in want of the cool air of the open lodge door. She made a point of not speaking to him, instead turning her head to the sky and reciting the story of matotisân under her breath, to give her something to focus on besides the heat radiating from Baptiste's strapping figure. Unbeknownst to Sîkwan, Baptiste was fixated on how the firelight made her eyes sparkle so brightly they outshone the stars outside. He was growing utterly and dangerously charmed by her brash and unabashed constitution.

❦

Mêkwan's health returned to her, and the Ahenakew family returned to their own lodge and usual routine. Unusual, however, was Mrs. Ahenakew's conviction that Cardinal and Mêkwan *were* in love, no thanks to Sîkwan's interference. After all, how could a man not fall in love with their most breathtaking eldest daughter? Mrs. Ahenakew had never been more sure of anything in her life, except that Mr. Baptiste lacked all proper decorum and could never find love with an attitude like his.

While unpacking her things, Sîkwan discovered a bundle she did not immediately recognize. Laying her hand upon the scratchy material, realization dawned on her as she unfolded the capote - Baptiste. Under the starlight, she had not previously seen the different-coloured stripes running around the garment; it was quite lovely. And on the lapel was something Sîkwan was sure had not been there before - silver beads poorly sewn in the shape of a star.

❦

Sîkwan was helping her mother clean up from supper when Mr. Ahenakew entered the lodge and announced they had a visitor. Ducking inside the doorway, Mr. Baptiste politely asked to speak with Sîkwan, who shot confused glances at her sisters before snatching the capote from its hiding place near the doorway. The two entered the cloudless night, the wind singing around them, pulling at their clothes and tousling their hair.

"What is this?" Sîkwan asked, holding up the capote.

"A capote, did you forget our conversation?"

"No, what is the *meaning* of this?"

"Meaning of what?"

"This!" she raised the capote in the air, shaking it at him.

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"A gift."

"For what reason do you gift me anything at all?"

"I do not want you to fall ill from the cold like your sister did," he paused. Sîkwan did not respond, so Baptiste sighed and continued, "I have never seen anyone look at the stars like you do. Except maybe myself, but I can only guess what I look like. I am saying that I believe you and I share a passion that I have never shared with anyone before. During the kitchen party, you were muttering something to yourself. What was it?"

Beginning to feel the cold, Sîkwan paused momentarily before addressing to adorn herself in the capote feverishly. "You mentioned Mistâpêwp. When you interrupted my stargazing, I recited his role in the matotisân, *sweat lodge* story. Why do you favour one that causes confusion and fear, one that captures spirits?"

"While he may have caused harm to the bodies of the seven uncles, because of his actions, we have the sweat, which heals us. When the French came to Turtle Island, they initially caused harm, but they also gave rise to the Métis."

"You dare to compare yourself to the matotisân! How dare you disgrace-"

Baptiste cut her off before she could finish. "And you have the arrogance to not hear the meaning behind my words, to not see the intent behind my actions. Do you not see that I am falling in love with you?"

Sîkwan stood in stunned silence, for the first time in her life, at an utter loss for words. Did she really not see it? Was she so wrapped up in her own mind to miss what was in front of her eyes? Before Sîkwan could make sense of the situation, her attention was pulled upwards as the sky slowly filled with dancing ribbons of purple and green, winding their way towards the Earth. The tense silence between them was replaced with a distant crackling from above.

Sîkwan's awe was suddenly replaced with fear. "Don't you dare whistle," she hissed at Baptiste.

"I would let the spirits take me, if only you would join me there, Sîkwan. But as you seem determined to stay in this realm, I will refrain." Baptiste reached his hand for Sîkwan's and gently took it in his, instantly calmed by the warmth of his calloused palm. In this moment, Sîkwan was so emotional that she flung her arms up and around Baptiste, allowing his capote-clad arms to embrace her tightly. With her ear pressed against Baptiste's chest, Sîkwan could hear his heart beating just like the drums on the night they first met. She let out a breath she had not realized she was holding (Austen, 1813).

Part Three:
Conclusion

We cannot rewrite the past, but we can re-tell our stories. If Amy Heckerling can re-tell Jane Austen's *Emma* through the eyes of Cher Horowitz in *Clueless*, who's to say we can't re-tell our own stories however we see fit (Herman, 2020; Rathe, 2020)? Colonial ways want us to confine everything to a page and forever trap us in one set of words. But this is not our way, and it never has been. Instead, we must let the wind carry our songs and stories to everyone willing to hear. We must create it together if we are not given the space to breathe. Let us release the breaths we do not realize we are holding. While this story is set in the past, I want you now to look to the future, what do you want the world to look like? Will our future be filled with kindness, forgiveness, and love? Let it not be stained by the implications of colonization, trauma, and pain, but of passion, interest, and possibility. [21:09 I wonder if Sîkwan shacks up with Baptiste? Probably.]

Research Assistants: Métis Cultural Knowledge from Sharaya Hill.

Keywords: *Pride and Prejudice, Speculative Fiction, Star Stories, Indigenous Love, Forgiveness*

Glossary

Capote – *A type of coat or jacket worn by Métis, typically made from wool blankets.*

Matotisân – *Sweat lodge.*

Mamihcisiwin – *Pride, proudness, to be proud.*

Mistâpêw– *The Giant, refers to the constellation that is called Orion in Western vernacular.*

Mêkwan – *Feather.*

Pakwâtitowin – *Mutual hatred or disgust; prejudice.*

Sîkwan – *Spring.*

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Season 3, Episode 16:

Aunties Don't Whistle at Night

Yôtin, Darian McCullough, Sam Dancey, Senyuan Chen, George Sartison, and Paulina Johnson

Synopsis: *The wind plays a fundamental role in the way we experience the sky from how strong it can blow past us to telling us stories that we no longer hear or are aware of to even giving us memories of loves lost long ago. Even the tales of when the original uncle appeared to the all mighty original auntie is in the repertoire of the wind. For the wind, is much more what it appears to be and importantly, how it has seen many dark nights where spirit beings come out in full force especially in our teachings and foreboding oral narratives. This episode travels throughout the realm of the wind, as we examine what Yôtin tells us about these other spirit beings and what it has always been aware of in the night sky and beyond.*

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Part One:
Yôtin

When your clothes begin to shift, your body has been given a push, or the hair on the back of your neck begins to stand, that is the spirit, moving around you through Yôtin - the wind. It's a teacher - a messenger - passing along all of our greatest stories and knowledge, working as an entity that we can observe and learn from. As Indigenous Peoples, we recognize the "unseen forces [that] are at play in the elements of the universe" (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005, p. 12); we exist within a multitude of planes. Most people see with a short sighted vision - that "fact" is only what is right in front of your face, but we know that could not be further from the truth - just listen to the wind and it'll tell you that. We have become "specialists in understanding the interconnectedness and holism of our place in the universe" (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005, p. 12); we see the patterns, understand the chaos, and make peace with the unseen.

Yôtin is a connector; it is constantly shared between people through the wind, breathing, singing - from me talking to you right now. It carries not only our hopes and prayers, but our fears as well; it manifests itself within the creaks in your floorboard, the sound of your name being called while alone; yes, it is a great connector from the Creator, but it may share more than we bargained for at times. The wind transforms not only us, but animals and nature as well. When the winds are gushing, we can see how "different everything looks," we can feel the presence of the unseen (Bear & Wind, 2005, p. 164).

The air tells us a great deal about the ways of the world; it calls us to act and think "in relational, responsible and responsive ways" (Country et al., 2014, p. 279). Sometimes, the lessons that are sent to us and how we learn what the wind has spoken are difficult ones, ones that test us and our mental fortitude in many ways. The wind creates a space where different planes of existence overlap - did you ever wonder how the monster under your bed got there?

In addition to there being spirits which carry love, hope, and dreams, there are also mysterious entities whose intentions may vary. They may be a devious trickster who toys with what we see and hear, scaring us as we walk down dark corridors or stare out into the moonlit plains; they play tricks with our eyes, our ears, and our minds challenging what we believe to be true. We as Indigenous Peoples have certain rules to follow to keep us safe in this overlap of existence, a way to understand the unseen that the Western world hasn't quite grasped the concept of. We know the dangers of gossip carried by the wind, where "ghosts" and "aliens" come from, and we recognize the spirits that guide us through the sparkle in the night sky. This knowledge is taken by Yôtin and sent around, but sometimes it gets spun in every direction - a direction we may not have intended it to head. Then suddenly, we have the boogeyman, aliens, and bigfoot, and the unseen becomes utterly terrifying if you don't know what to listen for as the wind blows past your ears. Remember, everything isn't always as it seems. So come, sit down, let me tell you a bit about what lurks in the unknown.

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Part Two:
Elemental Ancestors

Looking up at ribbons of green, blue and purple dancing across the night sky, you are overcome with fear, the feeling that this is something so massive you could never fully grasp it. But this fear is short lived; it soon dissipates because you know you are safe - so long as you stand on the snow, chin to the sky but mouth quiet. This is the sublime experience of watching cîpayak kâ-nîmihitotwâw - the *Aurora Borealis* or *Northern Lights.* When translated to English, it literally means the ghosts dancing in the sky.

Simon Bird, who is Rock Cree from Peter Ballantyne Cree Nation, was taught by his kôhkom that they were wâwâhtêwak, *those that go in circles* (Ogg, 2018). Those that dance in circles in the sky are spirits, some say that they are your loved ones trying to communicate with [7:03 all] those still on Earth. Regardless of *who* the spirits are, they are to be respected. Growing up, we were told not to whistle at the aurora, or else they would come down from the sky and take you to the spirit world before your time (Sinclair, 2023).

For peoples surrounding the Earth's North and South Poles, the exact story behind the aurora varies, but throughout them all they are tied to spirit; to life and death. The Inuit across Canada, Alaska, Siberia, and Greenland share similar stories of Ancestors in the sky playing football with the head of a walrus. Gerry Kisoun, an Inuvialuit-Gwich'in Elder, was warned by his parents that if he whistled at the lights, they would come down from the sky to cut off your head to use in their game (Spectacular Northwest Territories, n.d.). Some versions add that the crackling, whooshing sound that sometimes accompanies the lights is the noise of the spirits running across the frost-hardened snow as they play their game (Falck-Ytter, 1985). Many Western scientists dismissed the mere existence of these sounds because they could not be detected by scientific instruments (Booth, 1992). Dené Elder John T'Seleie tells that if a person leaves their camp really early in the morning, "the dogs move faster because they hear the sound the Northern Lights make" (Booth, 1992, 25:45-25:56).

The Saami writer and yoiker Aslak Somby told a story of a young girl and boy who teased and insulted the northern lights. The lights came down and burned the children, turning them to stone (Booth, 1992). Gwich'in Elder Catherine Mitchell of the Mackenzie Delta region, tells a similar story of caution about disturbing the lights, where a boy and a girl were carried into the sky, but in this version, the children eventually returned to their people (Savage, 1994).

In eastern Siberia as well, the auroras are said to be capable of coming down and taking people away or severing their heads if they get too close (Booth, 1992). Despite these stories, Western science says that the lights only occur high above the earth's surface. The Saami director Nils Mattis Gaup warns against investigating the Northern Lights, "it has a power that is far stronger than the strength of man" (Booth, 1992, 24:00-24:24).

Part Three:
It's Ancient Aliens Time Y'all

The sky is a mystery to many, an ever present mystery- no matter the time in human existence, we have always looked up to the sky. It's been the source of interest and imagination since we could form thought. There are aspects of the sky that we can see. We see the Northern Lights dance around in our field of view and we have created rules to protect ourselves, but what about what we can't quite see up there, or better yet, who we can't see up there? Specifically I'm talking about the Western fascination with space ships driven by those little grey dudes. It's time to talk aliens.

Are they a conspiracy or an ontology? In Western understandings, aliens have become a social phenomenon that parts of the general public has become utterly conspiratorial over. Stonehenge: Aliens. Pyramids of Giza: Aliens. Easter Island: Aliens. Sacred symbols or bizarre lights in the sky have begun to be explained away by the extraterrestrial unknown of aliens. As said by Lakota artist Suzanne Kite "[s]ettler futurity employs revisionist history to claim that Indigenous [P]eoples, even ancient Egyptians, were and are unable to invent technologies, build monuments, or produce evidence of intellectual achievements" (2021, p. 146). Aliens are often discussed with fear of the unknown. The seemingly unexplainable, through Western ways of knowing, can be soothed through alien conspiracy theories. But, what if instead of the thought of *aliens* coming from fear, we switched our perspective towards an Indigenous understanding that already considers and includes the other-than-human and the out-of-this-world - a way of knowing that is "not based in fear of the unknown, but respect for the unknown" (p. 147)?

In Indigenous cosmology, there is an understanding of nonhuman entities and the relationships to them as vital to gaining knowledge and understanding the world around us. In the Lakota culture, the sky is a mirror to the earth - "what is above [is] what is below" (Kite, 2021, p. 147); we are able to understand the world by looking to the stars. Instead of aliens, we have Star People. Star People are sacred, animate beings of which Indigenous communities have a great understanding of, and respect for. The Star People belong to sacred understandings of the function of the world. From the sky comes a transmission of knowledge and the creation of new knowledge "through a semiotics that emerges from lived experiences, dreams, and vision, translating...cosmology through to this world" (p. 149). The story of Star Boy tells the tale of a hero and explains the origins of the "edible and medicinal root" (p. 147), Timpsula, and how it came down to earth with him. So much knowledge can be gathered by *aliens,* if we are to just take a step back and switch perspectives - allowing the fear of the unknown to become an understanding of the world Creator has made.

Part Four:
Sabe – Bigfoot

These stories travel across the air when spoken into the minds of people everywhere - just as the wind carries the leaves. They take on life and meaning, some holding true to the original, some taking creative liberties, like aliens - and like our next spooky phenomenon: Mistâpêw aka *the Giant* aka Kitchi Sabe, aka *Bigfoot*. Stories

of Bigfoot have traveled the wind, from the mouths to the ears of many different nations. At one point, these stories have traveled all the way to the settler's ear in which they have created their own tellings.

In the settler's version, this "Bigfoot" is considered a cryptid, a folklore creature whose existence isn't certain. Many settlers have searched for these cryptids through blurry photos, shaky videos, and other physical evidence (BuzzFeed Unsolved Network, 2017). However, settlers have missed the mark when they ask *what* this cryptid is rather than *who* it is. The perception of Bigfoot as an enigmatic conspiracy ignores the cultural and spiritual connections that the Indigenous perspective ascribes. From an Indigenous perspective, there is no singular Bigfoot, rather he is a type of being.

Of course, stories of Bigfoot may overlap but there is no grand consensus. However, in all stories of Bigfoot across Indigenous Nations, every single one shows that the being has supernatural or spiritual connections. To many, "Bigfoot" serves as a connection between the human and animal worlds. For some, Bigfoot lies on the border between the consciousness of animals and humans. While for others, Bigfoot acts as a bridge between the planes of the natural and spiritual world (Highpine, 2000).

Different stories explain who Bigfoot is, how stories of Bigfoot shape their culture, and what these stories mean to the community. Regardless of these differences, Bigfoot is more than a large, hairy humanoid; they are more than a "mcguffin" to be found. The common theme Bigfoot holds in Indigenous Nations is a cultural presence embedded in our communities. Among these communities, many names have been given to Bigfoot, placing them in different roles. From being a mentor, a guardian, to a boogeyman, each individual story holds unique meaning for the relationships between Indigenous Peoples and Bigfoot.

In this group of stories, the portrayal of Bigfoot is as a moral enforcer, someone who ensures lessons and good character are maintained. While these stories may change based on whether Bigfoot teaches lessons or punishes misdeeds, these stories always revolve around morality. *Gichi Sabe* is regarded as one of the mentors from the seven grandfather teachings. Specifically, *Sabe* is a giant who teaches the sacred teaching of Honesty (Turtle Lodge, 2021). Regardless of whether "Bigfoot" teaches or punishes, some consider the entity deeply connected to morality, and a forest-dwelling judge of right and wrong.

The cultural importance of Bigfoot may be lost in translation within Western renditions, but it holds strong within Indigenous stories. There are different stories surrounding different places, all you have to do is listen. Sometimes these stories are right in front of us, other times they are within us. Sometimes we must look up and find these stories in the sky.

Part Five:

Kâmanito Minahikosikâk– Pine Lake

So, now that we've let the wind blow us across the spiritual and physical planes, are you ready for a story? Here's one for you. It's based on a story from my student Sam's family. Come along with me now to Kâmanito Minahikosikâk, *Pine Lake.* It used to be called *Ghost* Pine Lake, can you believe that?

Many years before Sam's great-grandparents built a cabin and barn in the area, a group of Cree were camped up in a field one night. Now, the Cree and the Blackfoot were at war back then, caught in a cycle of bloody battles. [17:56 And, rightfully so,] some say they were once allies, which might explain why the fighting was so fierce.

Under the cover of darkness, a group of Blackfoot warriors paddled across the lake, silent as shadows, and crept to the edge of the camp. Concealed in the bushes, they waited. They waited until the fire had died down to embers, until the teepee flaps were closed, and until the only sound was the soft rustling of the horses tethered nearby. Their leader raised a hand, and the warriors fanned out, encircling the sleeping Cree. Battle axes gleamed in the moonlight, and arrows were notched, ready to fly. With a chilling war cry that shattered the night sky, the Blackfoot swiftly attacked. They surged into the camp - a whirlwind of violence - leaving no one alive. Every man, woman, and child - not even the kôkoms or babies were spared.

Many years later, when Sam's family came over from Europe and began to settle the area, her great-grandmother unearthed a scattering of arrowheads on the hill by the lake. These arrowheads now hang on the wall of their cabin, silent fragments of that terrible night. But other reminders are still there. Because of the Blackfoot's dishonourable slaughter of the Cree, the spirits of the dead remain there, trapped - forever restless. So, if you're ever out at Pine Lake and a cold wind howls through the trees, listen closely. You might hear the voices of the Cree, crying out in anguish. And the coyotes yipping and howling? They're trying to catch the spirits, but they never can. And that is why it was called Ghost Pine Lake, until the tourists got spooked and changed it to just Pine Lake. Even though there aren't any pine trees there at all, just spruce.

Well there you go, a settler ghost story. But you know, even though it makes the spirits seem scary, the real fear is the unknown. That's why so many spooky settler stories revolve around what isn't seen, like spirits and ghosts.

Stories like this one are different from the teachings that live through my family. Sure, some Nêhiyawak stories can be frightening, but all of them guide us with a teaching that is gifted and received. Our oral narratives and ceremonies keep us connected to each other and to the spirit world. The Nêhiyawak spirits in that story, they were people living here - just like us.

The air we breathe without a second thought is alive in so many ways, with the sounds that you hear, scents you smell, and spirits some of us feel. Even if you can't feel or see the spirits, they are there, all around you. Our Ancestors are here to guide

us and comfort us. This means, no matter how dark, cold, or scared you may feel, you are never alone. Take comfort in that, it's not meant to be frightening.

Part Six:
Conclusion

Air is more than the stories of Bigfoot and Northern Lights. These stories don't just appear out of nowhere; they come from somewhere and have to contain an element of truth. We don't simply pull them out of thin air. Air is thick with knowledge and communication. Air carries our stories, our hopes, our prayers. The spirit of wind meets us all, informing us as we move from place to place. Wind holds the power and insight to guide us. Wind has the power to transform. It bends trees, tousles hair, and adjusts footing; it is both gently guiding and forcefully powerful. Nature is inextricably connected to air. Yôtin, everpresent, teaches us about life's cycles. It connects us, but also reminds us of the directions we have the possibility of exploring. Yehewin, *breathing or breath*, is air in community. Shared breath through gathering, celebrating, gifting, and smoking unite us across divisions. Yehewin also invites us to consider those not present, and how we are still connected to one another. In particular, Yehewin unites us humans as well as nonhumans, as the words carried throughout the air - from breath to breath - may land far beyond their intended destination.

The Northern Lights also bridge the connection to the spirit world. They connect us to the spirits of those who've come before us, both known and unknown. The spirits that dance across the night sky are to be respected, regardless of *who* they are. Respect and admiration for the lights must live in balance, as they are a vital piece in understanding the balance between vitality and morality. The stories of Bigfoot remind us of the importance of respecting nature, and using our breath - carried by Yôtin - to do right by one another.

More than the stories of aliens and Bigfoot, air carries stories of healing and comfort. In a different kind of darkness, the stars look different. They shine brighter, and the green and purple ribbons of the Northern Lights dance around them playfully. The Northern Lights have the capacity to heal the spirit, and thus the body. By journeying alongside their dance across the night sky, one's heart beats stronger.

Air is all encompassing. It is the spirits around us, the stories between us, and the energy that spans across worlds. It is a transformative power that shapes us and our connections to one another. It teaches us about respect, about healing, about history, and about relationality. It is vital to life, far beyond respiration. It is vital to community, to futurity, to remembrance, and to harmony.

Research Assistant(s): Drake Worth

Keywords: *Cryptids, Ghost Stories, Supernatural, Kitchi Sabe, Northern Lights, Aliens, Bigfoot*

Glossary

Cîpayak kâ-nîmihitotwâw – *The Northern lights or Aurora Borealis, means the ghosts dancing in the sky*

Kâmanito Minahikosikâk– *Pine Lake, Alberta*

Kitchi (Gitchi) Sabe – *Bigfoot in Anishinaabemowin, See also Mistahâpêw*

Mistahâpêw – *Giant; refers to Bigfoot or the Sasquatch. See also Kitchi Sabe*

Yehewin– *act of breathing; breath*

Yôtin– *Air, wind*

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Season 3, Episode 17:

Eagle Child

Yôtin, Kenton Cardinal, and Paulina Johnson
With cultural knowledge from Kenton Cardinal and Ben Steinhauer
Saddle Lake Cree Nation

Synopsis: *What stories lie in the air and tell us of the past? Let us share a story of Eagle Child – not in its entirety, but for the ability to hear what stories exist in the air and teach us today. This is a small part of the story of Eagle Child and one of the many stories of the Nêhiyaw Nation, [0:43 and Air as a teacher that informs us of learning to listen and having faith].*

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Part One:
Darkness

In a distorted world, darkness and chaos consume the land. Beasts of a Dark Creator roam the physical world seeking the vulnerable. In a village, a lone mother worries for her baby boy, searching the land for a space to hide her young. *Intuition is powerful, like a calling from Creator, the grandfathers and grandmothers guide us*; frantically searching, she is guided to a gash in the earth not too far in the distance. Hastily, she kisses her baby one last time, gently tucking him into a deep crevice of rock and earth. Gone in an instant to the dark ones, the baby is alone. Frightened by the agonizing cries and screams from above, the baby begins to whimper, calling attention to the beasts above, who overwhelmingly claw and scratch, unsuccessfully reaching down to him.

Part Two:
Journey to the Unknown

Kisê-manitou took pity on the boy, giving the boy enough life daily to survive. Years go by, and the baby is alone, occasionally visited by spirits. He's taught the language and soon learns to crawl and walk. Finally, a young boy now, he crawls out of the pit and sees a desolate world - cold, dark, and empty. As he walks cautiously upon the world that once was, he returns home to his original birthplace, or rather, what's left of it. Frozen solid, the boy stops, worried by a figure in the mist. The Crane - the nurturer of children - emerges slowly, assuring and calming the boy. "Don't worry, nôsisim, my grandchild, I won't harm you. I am here to help you. The Creator sent me here, as you must embark on a journey. You will travel great distances and get what you're searching for." The boy, confused, then asks, "Why am I here? What's my purpose?" The Crane replies, "You will find out on your journey. Go east and you will find someone, they will guide you and help you understand."

The boy stares off into the distance. "But how far will I go?"

"Here," said the Crane, giving the boy the power of flight, "you will now fly high and fast as an eagle. Head east and you'll find what you're searching for. But whatever you do, do not veer off from the path ahead. Do not get distracted."

Suddenly, the boy began to shapeshift into an eagle child and took off, flying east on his journey.

Weeks turn into months, and those months into years, but Eagle Child never loses hope or the directions of the Crane. Suddenly, Eagle Child notices a glimmer of yellow and orange in the distance, watching [4:51 it] as it dances like fire. Day by day, Eagle Child gets closer and closer, and a figure becomes ever more visible. Before Eagle Child stands an elderly man, glowing translucent with waves of yellow and orange. "Eagle Child, I've been expecting you! My name is Kisê-napêwpîsim, *Grandfather Sun*." Eagle Child replies, "Ahow mosôm, I have travelled many moons to find you. What wisdom do you have for me... why am I here, what's my purpose?" Grandfather Sun giggles, "Eagle Child, you'll know soon enough. Fly south and you'll find what you're search-

ing for. Take this pouch with you, but don't open it and don't veer off." Eagle Child looks down at a large yellow pouch, agrees, and begins flying south.

Yet again, weeks turn into months, and those months into years, but Eagle Child never loses hope or the directions of the Crane or of Grandfather Sun.

Suddenly, Eagle Child hears a thunderous screech in the distance; he knows he is getting close. For him, this journey feels even longer now than before, and Eagle Child can only guess who awaits him in the distance. Before him are bolts and flashes of lightning. Heavy gusts of wind periodically push him back. Fighting forward, he arrives at two giant thunder-beings flying next to one another. "Eagle Child. I've been expecting you! My name is Okimâw-pihêsiw, *King Thunderbird*, and beside me is Nôhkom-pihêsiw, *Grandmother Thunderbird*. We have something for you." Eagle Child replies, "Ahow mosôm, I have travelled many moons to find you. What wisdom do you have for me… why am I here, what's my purpose?" King Thunderbird screeches, "Eagle Child, you'll know soon enough. Fly west and you'll find what you're searching for. Take this pouch with you, but don't open it and don't veer off." Eagle Child looks down at a large red pouch, agrees, and begins flying west.

Part Three:
Seven Stages of Life

Eagle Child flies and flies, often flying below the clouds to see what the world has become. Once again, weeks turn into months, and those months into years, but Eagle Child never loses hope or the directions of the Crane, of Grandfather Sun, and now of the Thunder-beings. *By now, Eagle Child is a man, spending his whole life flying, staying true to his journey.* Suddenly, he notices something on the ground below. A beautiful woman sits in the darkness, beside her an empty pit and a skeleton-looking structure. Eagle Child is curious and intrigued by the woman and considers veering off the path to explore, but he remembers the clear directions given by those before him.

Eagle Child remains true to his journey and flies further west, carrying on as instructed by the Crane, Grandfather Sun, and the Thunder-beings. In the distance, he begins to make out a giant mountain and a large furry bear. Closer and closer Eagle Child gets, finally arriving at the desired spot. The ground shakes as the Bear sits up. With a kind voice, she says, "Eagle Child. I've been expecting you! My name is Okimâw-maskwa, *King Bear*, and I have something for you." Eagle Child replies, "Ahow nôhkom, I have travelled many moons to find you. What wisdom do you have for me… why am I here, what's my purpose? I am beginning to grow impatient with this constant waiting." Nôhkom Bear giggles and hands Eagle Child a large green pouch. "Eagle Child, you'll know soon enough. Fly north and you'll find what you're searching for. Take this pouch with you, but don't open it and don't veer off."

Before Eagle Child can take off, the mountain begins to move. Suddenly, it shrinks into various shapes, rolling into seven individual boulders. As Eagle Child approaches, he hears murmuring and whispers, and suddenly the boulders begin circling the ground and stop, lining up side-by-side. The first boulder rolls forward, "I

am happy-time, the time in our lives where we are born and we're happy, innocent." The second boulder rolls forward, "I am fasting-time, the time in our lives where life begins to pick up, where we learn to walk and run." The third boulder rolls forward, "I am wondering-time, the stage in life where we begin asking questions about self, and the world around us." The fourth boulder rolls forward, "I represent truth-time, the stage in life where we start to affirm assuredness to self, the time in which we know our roles in community." The fifth boulder rolls forward, "I am decision-time, the time in life where we take our knowledge bundles and pursue others, the critical time where we pick our loved ones." The sixth boulder rolls forward, "I am seeding-time, the moment in our life where we initiate parenthood." The seventh boulder rolls forward, "I am wisdom-time... I am at the stage where we see the fruit of our labour grow, the time in our life where you are now an elder, where people seek knowledge and teachings through you."

"This knowledge, Eagle Child, take it with you and go north," says Nôhkom Bear. Content with what he had learned, Eagle Child once again takes to the sky.

Part Four:
Rebirth

Eagle Child flies and flies, and yet again weeks turn into months, and those months into years, but Eagle Child never loses hope or the directions of the Crane, Grandfather Sun, Thunder-beings, or Nôhkom Bear.

Sometimes Eagle Child was curious and wanted to look in the pouches, but he stayed true to his journey, not getting distracted. In the distance, he sees wisps of bright white flashes upon the horizon. He notices the air growing colder around him; he knows he is getting close. Before him stands an old man with a vast, silky beard, and as it blows in the wind, it clashes and lets out white sparks of light. "Eagle Child. I've been expecting you! My name is Kisê-napêwyôtin, *Wind Grandfather*, and I have something for you." Eagle Child replies, "Ahow mosôm, I have travelled many moons to find you. What wisdom do you have for me... why am I here, what's my purpose?" Grandfather Wind hands Eagle Child a large white pouch. "Eagle Child, you've come so far. Fly home now and you'll find what you've been searching for. Take this pouch with you. You'll know when to open it." "But mosôm," protests Eagle Child, "I don't have a home, I don't have a family." Wind Grandfather laughs, "Go home. You'll find what you're searching for."

Eagle Child begins flying home, although this journey feels shorter than the rest. As he begins to descend to the land below, he sees the original cave he was left in and the nearby rubble of the destroyed village where he once met the Crane. Eagle Child is alone, left only with the four pouches. All he could think of was the time spent on his journey, flying above the Earth without an explicit answer as to where he was headed. Suddenly, Eagle Child remembers the beautiful woman he saw in the mist. Immediately, he unfurls his wings, takes to the sky, and begins his journey west.

As Eagle Child flies closer and closer to the land, he notices creatures of the mist, not like the ones who destroyed his village, but instead two-legged. They walked in pain, wrapped in blankets, hiding. Suddenly, a beautiful voice serenades Eagle

Child; a sign he is getting closer. As he lands at the skeleton structure and pit site, he watches Rainbow Woman work. In an instant, the creatures walk up from the mist and place their blankets onto the skeleton lodge, sealing it entirely to make a dome-like structure; Matotisān (Sweat Lodge). Rolling from the darkness, rocks begin to pile up in the pit, and a beam of rainbow light stretches towards the pit, lighting the rocks on fire. Rainbow Woman sees Eagle Child observing and begins teaching him about the sweat lodge. Using her powers to move the rocks into the lodge without touching them, she teaches him the placement of the rocks and what each rock means, guiding him on the foundations of holding a sweat. Introducing herself as a helper - Oskâpêw - she crawls in, inviting Eagle Child to sit. The two-legged huddle in one by one, the flaps close, and she begins to sing.

At the end of every round, the once-deformed creatures emerge from the sweat lodge as beautiful, healthy humans. Eagle Child and Rainbow Woman continuously repeat this process until all are healed. Thus, a rebirth of the Nêhiyaw ceremony has returned the People to the Earth; the time of darkness is over. Healing has been chosen. As Eagle Child sees the new life created by this lodge, he then recalls the bundles given to him by the grandmothers and grandfathers. The land begins healing, starting with the east and working its way to the north. A burst of light shoots upwards to the sky, giving the land sunlight. Water begins to pour out, restoring the rivers, lakes, brooks, and creeks that once were. The land begins to flourish, returning to the lush and green growth it once was. And lastly, the air comes back, light and sustaining, swirling beneath the sun, above the waters, and through the lands as it once did. Once again, people began to live in harmony with one another and return to the cultural ways of the ancestors. [17:08 Êkosi - that's it for now.]

Part Five:
Conclusion

Sometimes, it can feel as though you have no idea where you're going or even why you're going anywhere to begin with. I know there have been times in my life when the easier decision would have been to stay put and question the need to explore beyond.

Now, I often encourage my students *to* question what they may think they know, how they know what they think they know, and why. After all, curiosity, exploration, and a healthy dose of skepticism have allowed me to stand where I am today, and will continue to aid me in my future. Asking questions is a good thing, but the story of Eagle Child reminds us of the importance of trust and how trust allows us to persist *without* questioning. Therefore, not only is the story of Eagle Child important in that it illuminates the significance and resilience of my People and our ceremony and the sweat lodge's connection to the land and its elements, but it reminds me of *my* capability and resilience.

The Crane, Grandfather Sun, the Thunder-beings, Nôhkom Bear, Wind Grandfather, and the like sent Eagle Child in every direction. However, even though Eagle Child yearned for the purpose and reason for his quest, he never questioned whether what he was doing - or the directions given to him by those he encountered - were

significant and purposeful. He knew that he could trust the wisdom of those who had [18:53 once] come before him and that his power and capability would allow him to follow their directions. For it is the land that will teach and guide you, if you learn to listen, hear, and feel.

Please do question your surroundings. But... always make sure you recognize what trust looks like in those surroundings; trust that those around you will set you on a path to accomplish great things. And importantly, allow yourself to learn and be curious, for learning and curiosity allow the winds of the Earth to change where you may think you are going for the betterment of yourself. [19:35 And never fear those winds when they seem too strong.]

Research Assistant(s): Giovanni Ursella

Keywords: *Creation Story, Sweat Lodge, The Four Elements*

Glossary

Ahow– *No real translation, more of a general way to get acknowledgement*

Kisê-napêwpîsim – *Grandfather Sun*

Kisê-napêwyôtin – *Wind Grandfather*

Matotisān - *Sweat Lodge*

Mosôm – *Grandfather*

Nôhkom - *Grandmother*

Nôhkom-pihêsiw – *Grandmother Thunderbird*

Okimâw-maskwa - *King Bear*

Okimâw-pihêsiw – *King Thunderbird*

Oskâpêw - *Ceremonial Helper*

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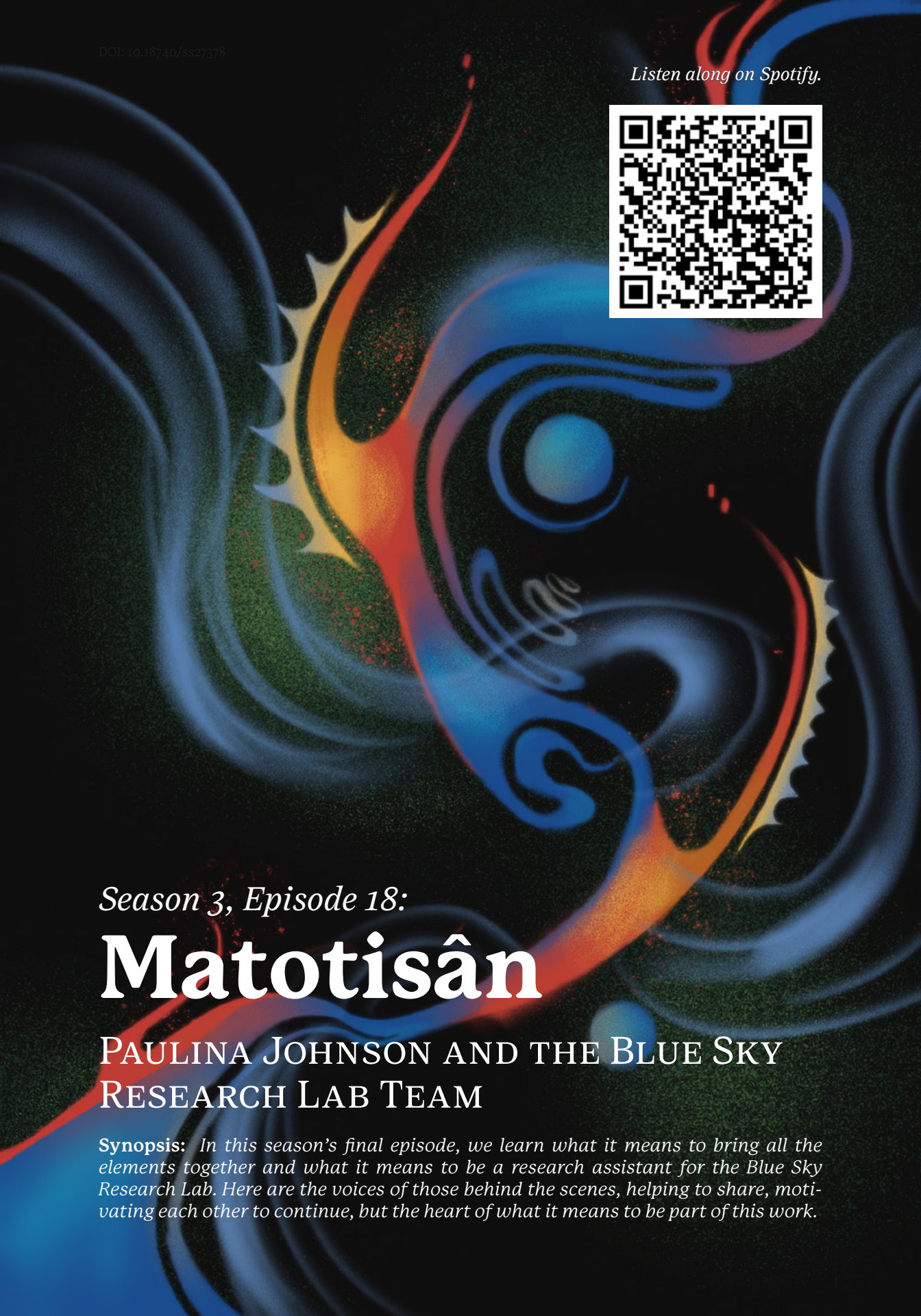

Season 3, Episode 18:

Matotisân

Paulina Johnson and the Blue Sky Research Lab Team

Synopsis: *In this season's final episode, we learn what it means to bring all the elements together and what it means to be a research assistant for the Blue Sky Research Lab. Here are the voices of those behind the scenes, helping to share, motivating each other to continue, but the heart of what it means to be part of this work.*

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Part One:
Together in Ceremony

The Matotisân, sweat lodge, allows for renewal and regeneration and symbolizes birth and healing. For hunters, sweat is a way to cleanse the mind and body. It is of strong medicine, powerful in how it heals and cleanses of illness, and is a purification ceremony that calls upon human and non-human spirits, such as that of powerful animals who can go between different planes of existence and our Ancestors.

Constructed in a dome shape, we place the center of the lodge with heated rocks from the outdoor fire and water is poured on top of them to induce sweating in those inside the sweat lodge. This ceremony is usually held for individuals who are unwell or require aid from both the living and the dead.

The sweat lodge brings together the four elements and humans. In many Indigenous communities, the sweat lodge is often believed to symbolize the bear's den. When a bear gives birth in her den, her den metaphorically becomes a womb of the earth. In the earthly womb, the bear can cleanse itself naturally, which, compared to humans, cannot unless through a sweat lodge. The sweat allowed Indigenous Peoples to cleanse themselves of their self-inflicted impurities. To counteract what is occurring on Earth, humans will need to fix it. The sweat lodge allowed them to heal their selves and restore the imbalance of the cosmos they created.

In this season, our main intent was to highlight how the Four Elements are much more than just simplified occurrences; they are filled with passion and power, beauty and grace, and importantly, teachings of what has come and will come. Together, all four elements converge in the sweat lodge and share with us the importance of working together and being one. This is the very action of what we aim to do as the Blue Sky Research Lab - to work as one for the goal of all. Our team logo is a bumblebee because, in Nêhiyaw tradition, the bumblebee works together to ensure a mission and objective are followed. We do this work not for ourselves but for those who come after us, and like all seasons before, here are the voices of those who are part of the Blue Sky Research Lab.

Part Two:
Little Bees

Sam Dancey

Pryvit, mene zvaty Sem Densi. Привіт, мене звати Сем Денсі. Hello, my name is Sam Dancey. I am a settler of Ukrainian and other miscellaneous European ancestry. This is my third year on The Auntie Is In, and I am now a master's student in sociology with Dr. Johnson.

I keep noticing teachings from the elements everywhere I look. Not only each one on their own, but how they connect to one another too. Very few things are composed of just one element. Rather, all things are a product of their constituent parts, and

they fit together relationally in a way that necessitates all of the other pieces.

When working on academic projects, we are often forced to focus on one very narrow aspect of a topic or issue, leaving out critical context. But, in exchange we are able to explore the specific topic in more depth when we don't spend too much time discussing where something fits in the scheme of the rest of the world. However, if we don't provide context, will anyone engaging with the work actually understand it? The four elements remind me that it is okay to focus on one thing for a while, because it doesn't mean that the other elements are not there or not important. We have to return to remembering that nothing exists in isolation, all four elements are important for a reason.

Sharaya Hill

Taanishi Sharaya Hill dishinihkaashon. Hello! My name is Sharaya Hill. As a Métis scholar, I am always somewhere in between: between the city and the bush, or the academic and the ancestral. Some days, I am juggling calendars or firing off emails, just working behind the scenes. Other days, I am in ceremony. Just trying to keep up with the Auntie- her laughter, her knowledge and her spirit working miles ahead of the rest of us.

Yôtin, the air, reminds me to breathe before I speak. To speak my words with purpose and intention. And when the time comes, to release what no longer serves me, and let it drift off into the wind. Iskotêw, fire, keeps me burning when I'm exhausted and questioning whether the work I'm doing is enough. It burns in me just hot enough to keep me going, but not so much that I forget to pause and tend my own flame. Askiy, the earth, has kept me grounded when my mind and spirit have been scattered across to-do lists, proposals and deadlines. When the work we do pulls me in every direction, she grounds me. We Métis have a deep tie to land, not just one place but many. Even though I'm far from my ancestral lands, I feel Askiy, my Elder, reminding me that the land knows me and I belong. Nipiy, water, has held me. In my tears after a long day, in that big river that flows through the place that raised me or in the still edge of the lake where my cousins and I spend our summer nights. The water reminds me that it's okay to feel deeply, fully and without shame. And that it will always be there to hold us.

Being part of "The Auntie Is In" means I'm constantly reminded that our work isn't just knowledge—it's kinship. The elements aren't a metaphor. They're my mentors. And Auntie? She walks with them like they're family. I just try to follow closely, heart open, and ready to learn.

Darian McCullough

Hello, my name is Darian; I come from Scottish, Irish and Métis ancestry. I am in the final year of my undergraduate degree in a double major in sociology and political science.

I have struggled with the colonial idea of being and identity. From a colonial viewpoint, we are often forced into these little boxes of identity and knowing—something I have known all too well. We see the outdoors as either something we could use for profit or a fun afternoon activity, not something that's participating in life with us.

I grew up in a rural area on the West Coast of B.C. on Salish Land. With the trees enclosing one side of the town and the ocean on the other; nature was all around me. Feeling the ocean breeze kept me cool in the heat or lulled me to sleep at night, tapping against my windows. I swam in the lakes almost every day in summer and smelt the dew on the grass every spring. Campfires at any time of the year filled my clothes with smoke. And the earth— it was there for my first steps and when I packed myself into a car to leave for university. It is easy to take all those things for granted— I know I have. But our life and the earth are such gifts. It is a character in our life just as much as anyone else, watching and supporting us to grow. They are a familiar presence, letting us know we got this.

George Sartison

George here! Growing up, I spent lots of my time on the land; specifically Treaty 4 territory, and even more specifically my grandparents' farmyard south of Melville, SK. This place, where a piece of my heart will always live, was where the elements Iskotêw (fire), Askiy (earth), Nipiy (water), and Yôtin (air) first began teaching me valuable lessons about the importance of family. The fire that burned at the heart of my family - symbolizing the warmth of love and togetherness - often took the form of the bonfire used to roast hotdogs and marshmallows amongst the bluffs of trees, even in -30℃ weather. Through the guiding hands of my grandmother, I learned to care for the earth; working the dark soil of her garden, providing nutrients and water so that it could provide for me in the form of deliciously dirt-covered carrots and beets. The well-used jug kept in the footwell of my grandfather's gold 1993 Dodge Ram held the coldest of water, poured into the eagerly waiting cupped hands of my younger brother and I, replenishing our spirits on scorching August afternoons. The games of home-free shared between a young George and family filled the air with laughter, giggles swirling above as they caught the wind, soaring amongst the clouds overhead.

This is the place where I continue to learn from the elements that surround me, characterized by the love of my family; a love that fuels me, letting me know I can do anything I set my mind to.

Luke Wonneck

Luke Wonneck here. I, too, am made of fire, water, earth, and air. Where do they come from, though? I often wonder this. How much of me is made of Edmonton (where I live now), Calgary (where I grew up), or Germany, Scotland, Ireland, Iceland, and France (where my Ancestors come from)? Physically at least, I'm in constant flux. The heat from the sunshine leaves me almost immediately when I step into the shade, the air I breath in exhales away a second later, the water I drink can get peed out in as early as five minutes (seems fast, but that's what Google says!),

what we could call "earth" takes a bit longer but we don't need to go into the details. Then there's the neurotransmissions, hormones, cells, tissues, etc in my body that these four elements become, which vary in lifespan from a split second (in the case of a pain signal) to a lifetime (in the case of brain cells). These various parts of who I am don't form randomly though. Rather, their organization is structured by specific relations between fire, water, air, and earth past and present — here I'm thinking not just of genetics and epigenetics, but of listening to a story, going for a run, practicing piano... that is, what I do in my everyday life. After all, these "doings" have stories of their own — they come from and bring together their own set of elements. And so I ripple outward and outward, and inward and inward.

Marieliv Flores Villalobos

Hola, gracias por escucharnos. I'm Marieliv. I want to start by thanking you for taking the time to listen to The Auntie Is in. This season, it's probably my favourite one, because the process of working on it has allowed me to reflect on the most basic facts that I usually take for granted, the presence of the Four Elders: Air, Fire, Earth, and Water in my life.

I migrated from Peru three years ago, and even though, when this land now named Edmonton, has welcomed me with love, there are moments when I feel isolated. In those moments, the four elements help me navigate all the feelings. The voice of my best friend saying: Breath, you got this allows me to appreciate the Air coming to my body. The warmth of a cup of tea takes me to my grandpa's strength, who, as a farmer, used Fire to burn the sugarcane in the field. The need for my dog Nala to go outside at least three times a day ensures my appreciation for the trees and the Earth's changing colours. Finally, as I am costeña, from the Coast of Peru, water is key for my happiness, so every time I take the LRT to the university the River Valley reminds me of the beauty of life.

I hope each of the episodes helped you understand better how interconnected we and the Four Elders are. Learning from Dr. Johnson is a privilege that also requires personal growth. Let's find our own respectful way to reflect on what her teachings mean for our lives, cultures, and futures.

Senyuan Chen

Heyo, Senyuan here! If you asked an 11-year-old me about the 4 elements, he would've blinked twice and said "like Avatar the Last Airbender?" Not quite younger me, not quite. However, like how the show's protagonist needed to bring balance through the 4 elements, I've realized that the 4 elements have shown me how to balance myself. 22-year-old me thinks of the 4 elements not as objects to control but mentors who have taught me vital lessons about the life I need to live.

If fire mirrors my ambitions, I need to supply my fuel carefully, too much fuel will quickly burn me out. Earth grounds my fiery ambitions into realistic goals; To be able to see the forest for the trees. With water, its constant flow taught me to flow around obstacles and find new solutions from different sources. Then there's air whose winds

change constantly, leaving several options for where they'll go. But air has taught me to be comfortable in that uncertainty and to let the winds take me wherever they go. These lessons are out there for us all to learn from. I'm grateful to be a part of this group as I've learned how to listen for these lessons. I'm glad that you're here to listen to them too.

So listeners, thank you for joining us this season! Thank you for learning more about the 4 elements, the lessons they teach us, and I hope that this season has also provided you the inspiration to seek out more of the truth. So stay tuned and look out for season 4, I'll see you all as a masters' student with Dr. J as my supervisor.

Hannah Louis

Tansî, Mîkwan Kâpawiw nitsihkâson! Akamihk ochi niya. I'm Hannah! I come from Montana First Nation in Maskwacîs, Alberta. I've been away from the reserve for quite a few years now coming to school here in the city and yeah I guess I've spent a long time learning what it means to be a good scientist and how to achieve that but now as I approach the end of my educational journey as a first year PhD student this is also my first year with the Auntie is In and working with Dr. Johnson and it's definitely not the path that I thought I would be on but it's the path I think I need to be on— you know things just kind of fall into place a little bit too seamlessly that it makes you question what fate is. This work has challenged my way of thinking and really asked of me to bring out that more personal and intimate side of me and those teachings that I grew up with you know learning from my kôkom and my parents.

With my academic background, I'm so used to discretizing and compartmentalizing the various elements that make up our world, but I'm quickly learning you can't always do that, especially now that I'm on this path of spirituality and learning from my Ancestors. Much like the elements, being on this research team, who I've become so close to in such a short amount of time, I find there is so much power in this "togetherness" or kinship, we all work together in such an incredible way and we achieve amazing things I didn't even know I could be a part of such a thing.

Giovanni Ursella

I am so grateful that I am still a part of this team and Dr. Johnson's podcast! Every season has been different-my research contribution to this one, which was mostly concentrated in an episode that talked a lot about ceremony, was a challenge to me because of its intimacy. Reading the stories shared by Indigenous academics and Elders and those written by the team felt like immersing myself in an environment that was both foreign to my settler and nonfiction-loving self and somehow also intuitive to me in some ways. It was both unfamiliar and familiar, both scary and comforting, to open myself to such intimacy. From the perspective of ceremony, at least, I learned a lot from two Elders, Elmer Rattlesnake and Dr. Johnson's grandfather, who taught us that ceremony can't be demanded or forced, and fundamental to it is that Creator is listening. I found this so profound, even though I don't really know what to do with that just yet.

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I can believe, or at least be open to believing—how could I not at least try to be open?—I can believe that I am surrounded everywhere by what is to be cared for and respected, and I can keep my eyes and ears open and be receptive to what it might mean to do that. Iskotêw, Askiy, Nipiy, and Yôtin, them surrounding us and we being of them—it is reassuring to see Dr. Johnson's elemental structure, which I understand to offer ways of listening, so that what I think I'm describing here way too vaguely has more shape and direction. When this becomes ceremony, when Creator is also listening, and we connect with and go along with Creator—I can't imagine a better guide than that.

Jude McNaughton

Hello wonderful listeners, my name is Jude McNaughton, and I use they/them pronouns. Working on this special elemental season has been a very meaningful experience for me. It occurred parallel to my own personal journey exploring the four elements and how I relate to them, and after engaging with so many histories and teachings, I felt like I could connect with the world around me on a much deeper level

On my own spiritual journey, I was beginning with the foundational element of Earth, the physical, and mere days after I decided to undertake this personal journey, I was offered the choice to work on the Earth Element episodes. I found myself engaged with a unique perspective where the elements would ebb and flow with one another and, alongside them, the ideas of the individual and the collective began to ebb and flow together, too. It really emphasized the interconnectedness of our lives with all others; be they two-legged, four-legged, rooted, or seemingly 'non-living,' such as the rock spirits that I had the privilege of learning about. Every corner of existence feels like it breathes with life, and even the concrete beneath my shoes feels "awake.

I hope you might experience a similar shift of perspective too - it's a beautiful one.

August Schaffler

Hi. I'm August and my pronouns are they/them. Working on season 3 of this podcast has taught me to learn from the elements as relatives. Elements work together to balance each other. I find comfort knowing that there are forces out there much larger and older than myself to guide me.

I'm great at getting lost, but when I'm out walking in the river valley I know the elements will be there to guide me home. Listen, I know it's more or less a straight line, but that kind of thing hasn't stopped me from walking into someone else's apartment before. But when I'm outside, I can tell where I need to go by how the trees change, or the direction of the wind, or the angle of the light through the trees. And I have the North Saskatchewan to walk along the whole way home.

It makes me appreciate how many interconnected relationships it takes to support life on earth. Delicate and resilient, simultaneously.

In the grand scheme of things, we all get such a short time to be alive. The elements remind me to treat that time with care and respect, and to hopefully leave the places I travel better than I found them.

Drake Worth

Hey, it's Drake again, back for another season! This season has yet again changed who I am and how I work, this time with the elements in mind. I carry the fire of rage and passion within me, powerful, consuming, and alive. But I also hold the calming water that soothes pain and cools the heat when it threatens to burn too hot. The air I breathe sustains me, connects me, gives voice to my thoughts, and carries them outward. All of these elements-fire, water, air-held together in the vessel of my body, grounded by the earth I walk on.

But what we don't often speak about is what happens when these elements fall out of balance: when there's too much fire and not enough water to cool it, when the air is frantic and ungrounded, and when the earth feels too far below to reach. The elements within us are powerful teachers, but they are also demanding. They call us to tend to ourselves as much as to others.

For me, being of the elements means finding that unique balance gifted to each of us, and embracing it without shame. That lesson has changed my work in profound ways. Instead of giving people what I think they expect from me, I've begun giving what I expect of myself. And that shift... has been freeing. It's allowed me to flourish without carrying the weight of everyone else's expectations. To live and work not out of obligation, but out of truth. I don't know as many movie references as the research team, but I do know one iconic line: "I'll be back" (Arnold Voice).

Jessica Morrison

Hey, Jessica here! I am a Métis woman with mixed Indigenous and settler ancestry, hailing from the White Horse Plains (known today as St. Francois Xavier), one of the six historic Red River settlements in Manitoba, Canada. Growing up, I lived in cities and was very accustomed to urban life. However, the areas covered by Treaties 6 and 7 provided me with a profound appreciation for the natural environment, which was often overlooked by my peers. This never felt right to me; I longed for a deeper connection to nature. Learning from these elements means understanding where we come from, our relationships with our surroundings, and how we want to shape our future. Working with Dr. Johnson on The Auntie Is In podcast and with the Blue Sky Research Lab has allowed me to fully immerse myself in teachings that resonate with what truly matters to me: reconnection. I am profoundly grateful for these experiences.

The knowledge from Earth, Air, Fire, and Water offers valuable guidance that can help me align my intentions and actions. I am dedicated to fostering long-term environmental sustainability, as I believe it is my responsibility to secure a resilient natural future for the children who will inherit this world, along with their descendants, and so on. In Western dominant society, our ego often places us above nature

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and restricts our vulnerability to our environment. We are only the elements for a brief time, and ultimately, we return them to Earth, so we must share ourselves with respect. I've learned that every element embodies a spirit that deserves our deep affection, as they are akin to our relatives and are, in fact, our Ancestors. We must honor and cherish them with the same love and respect we give to our family.

Eva Thompson

Hey, Eva here! I am an Indigenous woman from Canoe Lake Cree First Nation, and I grew up on Treaty 6 Territory here in Edmonton. This is my first year working with Dr. Johnson, and it's allowed me to embrace my identity in a way that I haven't before. I'm an undergraduate student in sociology and psychology with a minor in Indigenous Studies.

The four elements guide me in ways that I have only begun to notice. Air reminds me to rest, so that I can continue to chase my dreams. Water reminds me of my childhood as I spent many nights camping close to the Mcleod river, which is where I feel most connected to mother earth. It is near there, where my dad taught me how to pick berries and view plants as my relations, connecting me to Earth. Fire is the light that guides me and helps shape my path.

Part Three:
Auntie Dreams

When I first started the podcast, I primarily intended to share who my People are in the past and present stories. Following the oath of a four-year commitment to our Sundance Ceremony, I wanted to give a part of who I am as an individual and an academic. This season was to return to our original roots in Season One and the foundations of what it means to be Indigenous, but share who we are as we continue to grow and change. Many students who started in their first and second years are in their final years or graduated, but they have stuck it out with me to be part of something powerful and captivating. Season Four will be our final season, and I cannot wait for you all to hear about it. It will not be scripted and shared like it has been done for the past three seasons, but it will be all voices of those we have met on our journey as the Blue Sky Research Lab. A group of young scholars learning to navigate academia, and even I as an assistant professor, relearning who I am and what I want to be. It will be my final season as The Auntie Is In. Still, you'll find me in the loud auntie cackles of the women closest to you, in the power of every fierce woman you know, or literally in K&M buying a roast beef sandwich. I will always be there; you'll just have to look for me extra closely as I shapeshift into the many roles I am expected to play.

Till then, I am Dr. Paulina Johnson, and this has been Season Three of "The Auntie Is In."

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