

Ep.03 - Dignity and Belonging Transcript

Music

Wen 0:21

Welcome to Dignity During a Pandemic: No One Left Behind. My name is Wen Chan.

Maigan 0:26

And my name is Maigan van der Giessen.

Wen 0:28

And we'll be your host for today's episode.

Maigan 0:31

The Dignity During a Pandemic Podcast is a community project of the John Humphrey Centre for Peace and Human Rights. This podcast is part of our YEG Dignity Campaign in which we engaged with the lived experiences of folks in our communities during a global pandemic -- to open dialogue about the impacts of COVID-19, and how each of us navigates the struggles that surface and find hope and strength during these challenging times.

Wen 1:01

In this week's episode, you'll hear a conversation between Maigan and Mallory Yawngwe, who's the person you may have heard from our first episode pronouncing amiskwaciwâskahikan. Mallory is from Saddle Lake Cree Nation. She is a mother, a Cree language speaker, and an incredible business consultant whose goal is to assist Indigenous entrepreneurs with their startups. Mallory talks about how her relationship is story community and her roots are connected and what the pandemic has highlighted for her. Keep listening to hear that conversation.

Music

Maigan 1:47

Yeah. Anyway, I just thought while we're hearing- we're gonna include this piece um if that's okay, in the podcast, we just thought like it'd be great to have your voice there. And then I feel like the one thing that we missed is just off the top for you to actually have the chance to introduce yourself.

Mallory 2:05

Oh, no worries. Well, I'll introduce myself and my language -- you can use it if you would like. Um so uh, (*introduces herself in Cree*). So greetings to everybody. My name is Mallory Yawnghwe. I come from- um my parents, Peter Jackson and Theresa Anderson. And I come from the Saddle Lake Cree Nation, as well as Beaver Hills House.

Maigan 2:43

Mmm! Thanks so much. And I would just love to have you um a part of this and not having given you any time to prepare or anything like that, I wondered, a couple things, just if- if um this conversation maybe had brought anything to mind for you that you wanted to share about dignity? And then- yeah, just you know, in a lot of ways, this podcast is reflecting on this moment right now with the pandemic and what that means for all of us, in our everyday lives. And I know you're a great community member and lots of things, and you're also a mom. And it's like, there's a lot of realities that really come home.

Mallory 3:27

Mhm.

Maigan 3:29

So, um yeah anything that you want to share, we'd love to hear from you.

Mallory 3:34

For sure. Well, so I guess like when we talk about um, when we talk about like, the city using uh different names -- Cree, Dene, or whichever language they decide to sort of rename uh certain places. Um I think it's kind of like, it's really empowering for Indigenous youth. And I think about this a lot, because I know that I'm very privileged in- in a way that I was raised in my community, and I have a very strong connection to my community. And actually, I was talking with a friend of mine about this, and we were talking about, like, the responsibilities that we have, as Indigenous people as- as um Indigenous women in- in the city is to be able to make people feel uh connected to- to each other into the land, right? And so when I think about the the term, amiskwaciwâskahikan, I think about all the young people who are being now raised in, uh in the city, as opposed to in their communities, like for whatever reason, a lot of Indigenous women or families have moved to the city. Um and I think about how much emphasis I put on who I am, is because of where I come from. And I always- I always acknowledge my community first, my family, and my lineage whenever I speak at events and things. And it's always like um, you know, placing that before anything else- it's because of my community that has allowed me to become who I am. And so I think of all these, like young people who are growing up in the city, and you know, people ask

them -- and I actually just experienced this yesterday with somebody, I was asking them, "Oh, where are you actually from?", you know, like an Indigenous person. And she was like, "Uh, Edmonton?". I dunno, I sometimes forget that a lot- a lot of youth are being raised in the city, and that they're not connected to their communities in the same way. So when we- when we see like, the city, taking an opportunity to rename these places that once belonged to us, is sort of representative of that sense of belonging that these Indigenous youth are going to have to this territory. It's also sort of a way to- to connect our people back to the land in the culture um, that through colonial aspects um, you know, they took that away from us. They- they said, "No, you know, you can't be here, you're not allowed to take up space in these places, or you're not allowed to speak those languages in these spaces." And so it's kind of like a way to sort of reclaim our connection to that land. And also as- as Nehiyaw people, we always, like, identify places by- by like, story, um everything has a story, and it's representative of what um, what that territory had to offer, right? And so when- and this is just a story that I heard from one of my elders, Bert Auger, I don't know if you've worked with him, but he's like the sweetest man ever. Um and he told me about how, when they built the fort -- like this- this entire city has this big trading uh history. And when they built the fort, it was down over by the Garneau Hill, and so on, when a lot of the Indigenous people were coming for their annuity payments, or to like, get their rations, or to sell their furs, it was always within this territory. And so, one of the things- one of the stories that came out of this was that our people were coming in from, you know, all different sides of the city, and noticing that, you know, where the Garneau Hill is, it's such a big- it's such a big hill and they would see the um, the- the kind of top wooden pieces of the fort. And so they would name it um, because it looked like a beaver lodge in the mountains sort of thing. So it kind of became this. This Beaver Hills House Park, or Beaver Hills House, or Beaver Mountain House. And so I don't know I- I always go back to that story, because I always think can you imagine like what it would have been like in like the 1700s coming to sell your furs or even like my ancestors coming to this territory to sell their wares. And my dad always tells us these stories about our community were like, two hours drive down the North Saskatchewan. And he would tell us the story of [Ochimnabus], who's from our community, who would sit on the top of the hill and wait for like the trade- the canoes to come in with all of this stuff that was traded in amiskwaciwâskahikan. And it was always like beaver furs and I don't know, it's just it's my connection to this territory, and- and I feel that, you know, when we start to acknowledge the names, the original names of these these territories or these places, it also provides that storyboard for our young people to find their connection to this land.

Maigan 8:39

Wow, thanks so much for sharing that. That was so beautiful, and I think- yeah, and like a connecting point for- for people, you know, settlers and newcomers to this land as well.

Mallory 8:50

Absolutely. It's also such a great opportunity to talk about the history, like the history, that's not just the colonial history, but the the history that, um, that we know, through our perspective, and being able to tell that to, you know, not just Indigenous youth, but non-Indigenous youth. And it really kind of emphasizes that- that statement that we're- we're all Treaty People we all have this responsibility to- to uphold agreements that had come before us, and that will outlive us. But, yeah.

Maigan

Thank you, um so much. Yeah, I really appreciate those perspectives and during that um, yeah, I just, I don't want to take too much of your time, Mallory, because I know you have a busy life. Uh I really appreciate you taking the time and just chatting and sharing and um being so generous and teaching- sharing teachings. Is there anything else you want to say before we're done?

Mallory

Well, I guess one of the things that I- that I hope that come from this and why I'm always willing to share, um is that I really can't wait for the day when our young people can feel that sense of pride and that sense of uh belonging to this territory. You know, names don't only just mean a place, but it's also our story, it's also, you know, the experiences that we live here. And um it's also our sense of belonging. So I really- I really love that you're doing this, and I really hope that, you know, one day we can do some sort of campaign where people talk about, you know, where they come from and who they are and who makes us um- who makes us the new people of this territory. Thank you! Thank you for asking me (*laughs*).

Maigan 10:37

Thank you so much. What a pleasure to talk to you today. Hope you have a great week.

Mallory 10:44

Yes, you too. Talk to you soon.

Maigan 10:47

Be in touch, bye.

Music

Maigan 10:54

Thank you so much, Mallory for your contribution to what our individual collective and shared humanity looks like. We produced this week's show on amiskwaciwâskahikan, also known as Treaty Six Territory in Edmonton, Alberta. We recognize land acknowledgments are only a very small part to engage in ongoing reflection, practice, and action against the legacies of colonialism that impact us today.

Wen 11:26

To see the full transcript of this interview, or to view past projects of the YEG Dignity Campaign, just visit our website at jhcentre.org. And thank you to our funders, the City of Edmonton and the Family and Community Support Services Program. And big thanks to CJSR 88.5 FM for airing our podcast.

Maigan 11:49

Thank you for joining us today and we hope to connect with you again soon.

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