**COEUR D’ALENE KEEPERS OF THE EARTH - 1991**

**PODCAST REDUX - 2023**

**INTRO:**  WELCOME TO VOICES OF THE WILD EARTH, A PODCAST SERIES FROM THE IDAHO MYTHWEAVER. I’M JANE FRITZ.

BACK IN 1991, I PRODUCED A FIVE-PART SERIES OF DOCUMENTARIES FOR SPOKANE PUBLIC RADIO. CALLED KEEPERS OF THE EARTH, THE PROGRAMS FEATURED STORIES OF EACH OF THE IDAHO TRIBES SET WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THEIR HISTORIES, CULTURES AND INTERRELATIONSHIPS WITH THE NATURAL WORLD.

THESE MANY YEARS LATER, THE VOICES OF THE STORYTELLERS AND INDIGENOUS LEADERS ARE MORE RELEVANT THAN EVER. WE INVITE YOU NOW TO LISTEN AND LEARN FROM THE NATIVE PEOPLES, WHOSE VALUES AND PERSPECTIVES CREATE A FUTURE THAT WE ALL CAN EMBRACE.

*[SOUND OF LAKE LAPPING, THUNDER AND LOONS WAILING; FADE UNDER]*

[00:00:28] **Narrator:** Their villages were once along the shores of pristine lakes— Coeur d’Alene, Benewah, Chacolet — and wild rivers — the St. Joe, St. Maries, Spokane. They fished for salmon and cutthroat trout, hunted deer, bear and elk, dug camas and bitterroot. They picked huckleberries. Spirituality was their signature on daily living. They had respect for each other, respect for the forest, the waters, the animals and the Earth. Peaceful and happy, they lived a bountiful and good life. And despite being driven inland from shorelines and riverbanks, they remain a land and water people. They are the *Schitsu’umsh*, the Coeur d’Alene Tribe, Keepers of the Earth.

**Narrator:** Their territory radically reduced and their cultural ways endangered, the Coeur d’Alenes strive and struggle to remain a self-determined people. Ernie Stensgar is currently chairman of the Coeur d’Alene Tribal Council. Several years ago, as an employee of the Bureau of Indian Affairs Forestry Department, he began questioning management policies and timber activities on the reservation.

[00:01:43] **Ernie Stensgar:** I guess from our perspective, in terms of wildlife policy…how is it being affected? What about our huckleberry patches? What about the spiritualness of some of the areas where I know people want to utilize areas for sweating and stuff? How are the waterways being protected? Water was a big part of our life. We used to fish it all year round as kids. My brothers, my uncles took me fishing. My kids can’t do that anymore. They don't do it anymore. I was greatly dismayed of pollution of Hangman Creek, Mission Creek and partially Indian Creek. We swam in them creeks all the time. Kids don't do that anymore. They're stopped from doing it because of the pollution of that water. That was done because of the stream straightening out and probably logging activity that happened in areas.

[00:02:35] **Narrator**: These questions were a catalyst to change and a shift in sharing of power. Today, the CIA Co. manages the timber resource with the Coeur d'Alene Tribe. And one day the bureau may be phased out completely, leaving the tribe to manage their timberlands in their own way.

*[SEGUE OF FLUTE MUSIC WITH DRUMMING IN BACKGROUND AND FADE UNDER ]*

[00:03:05] **Lawrence Aripa:** When a woman was going to make a basket from a cedar tree, she would stand in front of that tree and pray to it. ‘You are a mighty tree. You have been shelter to us in the winter. You give us heat in the winter. You give us shade in the summer. You help us at all times. But now I am going to take some of your bark. I will need this bark to make a basket to carry my huckleberries. I ask your forgiveness. I will take only what I need, and I thank you.’

*[FADE FLUTE MUSIC OUT]*

[00:03:55] **Narrator:** Coeur d’Alene tribal council vice-chairman and storyteller Lawrence Aripa remembers his grandmother's prayer beneath the branches of a cedar tree on a berry picking outing as a child. Many decades later, beneath the same tree. Lawrence points up to the place where the bark was taken.

*[SOUND OF RUNNING RIVER WATER AND FADE UNDER ENTIRE STORY ]*

[00:04:16] Lawrence talks about growing up on the reservation and values learned from his ancestors, period, the stories they told.

**Aripa:** When I was a little boy, whenever I misbehaved, or I did something wrong, my grandfather would look at me and he would laugh and he would call me Cosechin. One day I asked, ‘why do you call me Cosechin?’ And they said because you are bad. And then I said, ‘who is Cosechin? What was he?’ And so they tell me the story then. When the people, the *Schitsu’umsh*, lived in different areas within our territory, our family lived way up in the mountains, past the present town of Avery, way up where the river starts. The beginning of the great St. Joe River; it was there that this man lived.

Among the people, there was one who defied everything that the people believed in. He was mean. He was selfish. He was mean to kids, mean to animals. He did not believe in sharing. He did not do what others taught their children to do.

[00:12:07] **Aripa:** He would not tell stories to children. He would not associate with other men or other people. He did everything just the opposite of what they believed in. He would kill an animal and he would take only enough for one meal. He would not share and he would leave it. And the people were always taught to use everything from an animal if they got a deer or an elk. They used every part of it for some reason or another. Even the antlers and the hoofs were used for decorations and for knife handles and other things. But Cosechin, he had no respect for these things. He would only get enough for one meal and leave the rest. He would burn trees. He would cut them down and let them die. He would burn the grass and he would laugh when little animals died. He would have a lot of fun seeing all of this destruction. He would not listen to the other people. He laughed at their idea of respect. He laughed at their way of greeting one another, of being kind to each other. He did everything wrong; and so the people finally had enough of it.

And so they called him and they met with him. And they said, ‘Cosechin you do everything against what we have been teaching our children. And so now we must warn you: if you continue to do these things, you will either be put to death or you will be banished. If you don't care about us, then you must not care about your own life. So we will banish you so that nobody will talk to you. Nobody will help you. And we do our best to help you now. We have tried to get you to believe in us, so we have been kind to you. We have been thoughtful and respectful of you. But now we will not do that. If you do not change.’

**Aripa:** So he thought it over, and he said, ‘Yes I will change. I will be a different person if you just give me a chance. I don't want to be alone. I don't want to be out there depending on no one but myself.’ So he then showed signs of turning, so they let him go. And for a short period he was a model citizen. And then he went back and did the same things; and all of a sudden he disappeared. No one could find him.

[00:15:16] What happened to Cosechin? Did an animal get him? Did he drown? Did a tree fall on him? What could have happened to Cosechin?Nobody knew. When he had vowed to change, he told the people that he wanted to be remembered for something. He said, ‘If I die now, nobody will remember me. Nobody will know who I was. I will not leave a mark. I have not done anything to help my people so nobody will even remember me. I will die without even being remembered.’ And he says, ‘I want to be remembered.’

And even now some of the people, whenever their children are bad, whenever they are mean, whenever they show disrespect for anything they will say to their children: ‘Do you want to grow up like Cosechin?’

And so he did leave a mark. He is remembered; not the way he wanted to be, but he is remembered. He was Cosechin.

[00:10:35] **Narrator:** Lawrence believes the stories helped him maintain his Indian-ness despite pressures to assimilate into the modern world. Cultural anthropologist Rodney Frey.

**Rodney Frey:** Well, I think that in a very real sense that the stories allow people a sense of identity of who they are in this 1990s. Stories aren't simply fantasies of a long lost age and a remembrance of that time and return to somehow. But stories are as alive and meaningful today as they ever were because they give people a sense of who they are. They give people a sense and can build a sense of self-identity, of self-worth, of purpose and meaning. And as a result, it seems to me and in my experiences with with Indian peoples or peoples anywhere in any situation, when people have a strong sense of their own story, when they can tell the story of who they are, how they got to this particular place and where they're going. That that is the greatest shield against all the adversities that face us as individuals in our own lifetime. Those those adversarial forces at work can be held at bay when people have a sense of who they are. That's the greatest shield they can have. Who they are is best conveyed, it seems to me, through their stories.

[00:12:00] **Narrator:** The stories that grew out of the past continue to shape the land for the Coeur d’Alenes. Created in 1986, the Tribal Logging Operation has a mandate to profitably promote its timber while giving special consideration to protecting and preserving forest lands. A board of five tribal elders guides management decisions that range from no activity to maximum production of timber. The TLO board typically reviews ecological considerations, as well as economics in making their recommendations. But these tribal elders consider cultural values and spiritual needs too. Chairman Stensgar comments on the work of the TLO board:

[00:12:46] **Ernie Stensgar:** They have a love for the land. They have a love for the people. They respect it. In their times, they depended on the land for a livelihood. They knew that if they wanted good water, that they had to protect it. They knew that water was for cleansing. Not only outside of them, but inside of them. They knew that they had to have food. So they respected the animals. They lived with them. They hunted them. They utilized all the parts. They didn't they didn't waste any of the animals. I'm sure the animals sensed when they weren't hunting, and they didn't hunt all the time. We utilize the roots for medicinal purposes. So it was important to them not to over harvest, knowing when and how to gather them. They utilized the whole ecosystem for food, for life. They realize that everything, the spiritual and the physical were together. They bring that into the forest part of it.

**Stensgar:** They realize that we as people need money to exist, that government has to have money to conduct their business, and that people need money to live. But they also realize that we have to get out into the mountains. We have to get out into nature to get that special feeling, uplifting that you get. They bring that to the committee along with their knowledge of where they traveled as kids, where the berry fields were, where the streams are, the activities around. They utilize all that knowledge and bring in specialness, you know; let’s don’t clearcut, you know, we just can't clearcut, because not only because it looks awful, it offends, it offends Grandfather.

[00:14:33] **Narrator**: A logging activity rarely approved by the tribe is clear cutting. Dominic Curley is a tribal council member and chairman of the TLO Board.

[00:14:43] **Dominic Curley:**  The whole tribe, I think everybody, except a logger, is just about dead set against a clearcut. They just don't look right to Mother Nature, and it's against the Indian religion or something like that. It's kind of like raping Mother Earth; it’s taking too much.

Just like we used to go out with my grandmother, grandfather. Some of the older people; go up there and find some huckleberries maybe, eat some huckleberries, maybe. But then you always give something back, like my grandfather he’d eat some berries and he'd take his cigarettes or his tobacco, take a piece off that and dig a little hole and put that tobacco into the ground and cover it up. He’d say, ‘I took something from Mother Earth and I give something back. I always try to pay her back.’

**Curley:** Years ago, before the white man came out, there was was good healthy timber. Where did the beetles and root rot and all this come from? All these other different tree diseases that they have to be cut down. And there's acres and acres all right together that's happening to. And you didn't hear nothing about that in the old days. If you did hear about it, maybe it's one or two trees, that was it. But nowadays, instead of eradicating that bunch there, or watching that bunch, they are taking the whole thing. Saying it will stop it. But with clearcuts going on now…what have they stopped? They’ve stopped the growth of our timber. We've got to replant it, watch it, burn it. Why and how come? That's been my concept as a little kid. I don't know. How come? Why?

**Narrator:** While working with the TLO or the Tribal Council, Dominic can't help but think of the stories he heard growing up. The values they contain are reflected in the daily choices he makes.

**Curley:** Everything's in a circle, like a drum. You got a board, a piece of lumber. It’s square. But where did it come from? It came from a round tree. The Earth is round, the Sun is round, Moon. Everything's in the circle. Anyway, something starts, it always goes in a circle and comes back to the end again. That's been my concept for years since being a little fellow and I’ve been not really thinking about that. It's been in the back of my mind all these years, and like I say, I got older and got in Council and different things that we have to make up our minds on; a lot of that stuff comes back to you. My grandfather used to talk to me. There's a lot of things that people say or do that make me think of some of the stories he told or had me do with him.

*[BRING UP FLUTE MUSIC AS SEGUE, FADE UNDER]*

[00:17:43] **Narrator:** On ceded lands, however, there is little that the TLO board can do about practices like clearcutting. Between 1900 and 1940, much of the timber on the 4 million acres that was aboriginal Coeur d’Alene territory had been cut and hauled away. Extensive logging continues today. Despite treaty protection, ensuring hunting and gathering rights, only a few of the traditional gathering places in freshwater springs remain.

Lawrence Aripa:

**Aripa**: Some of those places, you can't even get to them any more because of the different people that own them. We can't go out and camp like we did before, you know. Now, if you go up to Santa or to any of these mountains that we used to go to, you have their special permission and it's necessary now. But in those days, it wasn't because we automatically took care of of fires and we had our own environmental practices. Our idea was to save, to protect our environment. And it was something that just came natural.

Now it's more natural to throw tin cans, empty bottles and into the brush rather than try to protect those things. You know, it's common practice now to do that, and it was a common practice for us to protect those things when I was young. It bothers me. But then on the other hand, it's just the way things are. You certainly can get those things to happen the way it did, unless the people could think the same way we did, with the lifestyle around us with the same as it was then. Then the young people would grow up respecting and knowing how valuable those things are.

[00:19:36] **Narrator:** Protecting the treaty rights for future generations of Coeur d’Alenes is something the Tribal Council strives to do. Setting natural resource policy at the tribal level is one way. And political action at the state and federal level is another. Jeanne Givens served two terms in the House of the Idaho Legislature. She thinks the tribe has a lot to offer.

**Jeanne Givens:** By its nature, a tribal government has a mission, and that mission is to preserve and protect what little land is left. And that's not something that's just a policy written on paper. It's something that comes from the heart. The tribal membership expects that their leaders are going to stand up and to fight for clean air and clean water and a good way of life. We are the original environmentalists. Before that word ever came around. Indians were the caretakers of the land.

The Coeur d’Alene Tribe is a tribe that uses the teepee. And the teepee is a very nice house. It's portable. But the nice thing about a teepee is that you're on the ground. The floor is the Earth. And you're very, very close to Mother Earth from there. When you're very close, you can you can notice the differences, the moisture in the soil. You can you can feel the coldness, you can feel the warmth. And you keep really in tune with nature by being close to the Earth. The state of Idaho, the U.S. government, the Forest Service, maybe they have people who work for agencies, natural resource agencies that care about the Earth. But I think a lot of people are looking for a job. I don't know where their heart is. I don't know where their philosophy is. But but in the case of the tribes that I am familiar with in the state of Idaho, they're very committed people to protecting the land.

The value of Mother Earth, the Earth needing some tending, the Earth needing some caring, and to be treated gently, it was taught to me in a easy way just by following the seasons. Huckleberry picking in the summertime up in North Idaho to learning about preserving game and getting ready for the wintertime, and the period of the winter, which is story time and quiet time, and then the bursting of spring.

**Givens:** That's a cycle. It's a life cycle, and human beings have a role in that. We are not to alter that cycle, but we are to work with that cycle. But to live life following those cycles requires clean air and clean water and uncontaminated soil. In the gathering period, you want to be able to gather the traditional Indian foods so they're not contaminated. And we have some serious problems with contamination of soil from agriculture, from runoff from timber, and and some of those natural foods are threatened. The water potato is a native food of the Coeur d’Alene, and that particular species is threatened.

**Narrator:** In addition to logging, there has been damage to the Native land and waters from mining and agriculture. Alfred Nomee is the lease compliance officer and smoke management official for the tribe. He oversees the agricultural practices on the reservation. 98% of leases are held by non-Indians.

[00:23:03] **Alfred Nomee**: I’ll let those individuals out there know how I feel about what they've done to the land that the Spirit has given us. They've destroyed it. That's the one thing about civilized man. Far back, as I can remember in the stories I've heard, in songs that I hear, the only time civilized man is concerned, and begins to worry about something, is when he's almost ready to lose it. You destroy something and it's gone. Then you say, why didn't I protect? Civilized man has polluted the waters, he's polluted the air, polluted the land. And just now they're starting to say, ‘Where else do we go? We destroy this, where are we going to go?’

*[BRING UP FLUTE MUSIC AS SEGUE, FADE UNDER]*

[00:24:18] **Narrator:** Wherever possible, the Coeur d'Alene Tribe tries to influence individuals, private industry and government agencies to halt damaging practices, restore the land and waters to health and protect nature. For their guidance, the Coeur d’Alene people continue to turn to the stories. Lawrence Aripa:

[00:24:38] **Aripa:** Not only because they're teaching tools, but it tells who we are. It tells the kind of people that lived before us. They have a lot of value and they always will have. And I hope that we never lose it. And I hope that there's always going to be some of our people that will listen and learn them so that they can keep it going. And I think my nephew is a good example of that. I think that he'll be able to tell his children or his nephews or some other people. And because of that, my grandfather's stories are going to go on.

[00:25:19] **Narrator:** The caring for land and water is inextricably linked to the stories, to their ancestors, and to the native spirituality. Alfred Nomee:

[00:25:29] **Nomee:** I have to give something back and in order for me to give something back, then my children need to learn and understand what this is.

You try to teach and you try to envision in these young people that everything out there has a purpose. Everything out there has a life. There is a spiritual aspect to even the rocks out there. They are there for a purpose. They were put there for a reason. And there is a spirit in that. When we have our sweat lodge ceremonies, one of the things that is a part of that are the rocks that are heated to create the steam inside. The water is used. Fire is used. Steam is used. These are all interacting with basically the environment, with the Mother Earth itself. And that's basically what I see as going back to what was given to me. What was given to my grandmother, was given to my grandfather. Those people learned it from somewhere. They have passed it down to me. I will, in turn, pass it to my children.

*[BRING IN AND FADE UNDER DRUMMING AND SINGING]*

[00:27:02] **Narrator:** Ultimately returning to the source and heartbeat of their existence is what will ensure the survival of the Coeur d’Alene people. Jeanne Givens:

[00:27:14] **Givens:** Indian people give life to animals and personify an animal, and an animal has a spirit in itself. So the Earth also has a spirit. That's a major difference in viewing a natural resource that trees have spirits. A brook, a stream, and a lake and river have a spirit as well. They are living things; part of what the Creator gave us. They are a gift to us. And with that gift, we're going to honor that gift. That's why it's very sad to see something intentionally destroyed.

*[BRING UP DRUMMING AND SINGING AND FADE UNDER AND OUT]*

[00:28:04] **Narrator:** Native American flute music, courtesy of Ken Light and traditional singing and drumming by the Pierced Heart Singers.

**OUTRO:** VOICES OF THE WILD EARTHPODCASTS ARE PRODUCED BY ME, JANE FRITZ, AND ASSOCIATE PRODUCER JUSTIN LANTRIP FOR THE IDAHO MYTHWEAVER.

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WE ARE ESPECIALLY GRATEFUL TO THE IDAHO TRIBES FOR ALLOWING US TO SHARE THESE ORIGINAL RADIO STORIES AGAIN AS PODCASTS ON MYTHWEAVER.ORG, AND SPOTIFY AND APPLE PODCASTS UNDER VOICES OF THE WILD EARTH.

THANKS FOR LISTENING!