

Let's Meet at the Powwow FINAL

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COVID-19 impact, mental health, Indigenous stories, powwow significance, cultural reconnection, community healing, residential schools, jingle dress, cultural teachings, family history, journalism impact, cultural ambassador, future generations, storytelling, community connection

SPEAKERS

Noel Tesfa, Yanika Saluja, Isabelle Bailey, Unnamed Voice, Powwow MC, Gabrielle McMann, Carmine Posteraro

Y Yanika Saluja 00:05

This is We Met U When... a podcast by journalism students at Toronto Metropolitan University. I'm your host, Yanika Saluja, we go back in time, dig up news stories from the past, and track down the people in those stories. Usually we go back 10 years, but this season, we're going back to 2020. The World Health Organization declared COVID 19, a global pandemic. It was a time of lockdowns, global protests, disruption around the world, and it affected all of us in different ways.

G Gabrielle McMann 00:46

During COVID, like we weren't allowed to gather. We weren't allowed to come together for powwows. And I think many people's spirits and their mental health kind of felt that.

C Carmine Posteraro 00:57

You know, I woke up, I had a catheter in me. I had a colossal bag on my backside. It was just like intense. I couldn't move like my you know, I didn't move for 12 days. My muscles were all deteriorated. I got this scar.

G Gabrielle McMann 01:09

I'm not all the things that they like to stereotype us as, and I was still almost killed by the police. And so, like, I'm trying to say that they use those stereotypes as an excuse to devalue us.

Y Yanika Saluja 01:23

We want to know what happened after their names were in the news.

o 01:28

I've had journalists like, reach out after to follow up on a different story, but not not. I've never once had a journalist be like, Hey, are you okay? I sell those comments. I want to check in like, no, not once, not one time.

Y Yanika Saluja 01:41

No one was in a position of power, but many of them felt the power a new story can have. We're exploring what's changed and what hasn't.

U Unnamed Voice 01:52

Chloe. Can I say something? Is it fair to say that you're of Korean origin?

N Noel Tesfa 01:58

It's a heavy thing to talk about. But I think it's also very important. This is something that people need to hear.

Y Yanika Saluja 02:07

We're also thinking about the difference we journalists can make going forward by first going back to 2020, you're listening to. We Met U When... season three. This is Let's Meet at the Powwow.

G Gabrielle McMann 02:39

My name is Gabrielle McMann, I'm mixed Ojibwe from the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, and I'm a fourth year student here in the journalism school at TMU. When I was beginning to research for my episode for this season, I was working as the communications lead for the 2024 TMU powwow. And then I was also, like, deeply involved in reporting on powwow for The Narwhal, and that was a summer long project, so I'd been working on that for months. The headline was, in the pow circle, Indigenous Peoples are dancing for our families, our elders and our babies. The story covers like not only the historical aspects of powwow, but also the role that it plays in community and individual people's lives. So I traveled down the powwow trail and I talked to dancers from different communities. I was asking them about their journey inside the pow wow circle, how they got there, what it means to them, how it impacts their lives and like the teachings that they've learned from dancing in the circle, a lot of the times they shared, like very emotional and spiritual experiences with me. I think that my

involvement in both pow wow and my involvement with my community kind of trickled into the research that I was doing for my episode, so I immediately started like looking for Indigenous stories and Indigenous voices, because there hadn't been an episode within the first two seasons that reported on Indigenous, lived experience. So I knew I wanted to do that, and then I landed on a 2020, story written by Isabelle Bailey.

I Isabelle Bailey 04:42

Kwey, Bell Bailey nid-ijinikàz Pikwakagan nid-ondjibà Makwà nidòdem. Nigikinamago. Meegwetch. Hello. My name is Bell Bailey. I'm Algonquin from Pikwakagan First Nation. I am 23 years old. I am from the Bear Clan, and I'm currently living in Ottawa, as I attend Carleton University. When I wrote that news article in Anishinabek News, I was very grateful that it even had got published. It was an effort to lift everyone's spirit during 2020 when everyone was staying home. So they did a call it on social media for dancers to submit their personal stories and dancing in a powwow for the first time, was my way how I connected through my culture.

G Gabrielle McMann 05:26

I think for many people during COVID, like we weren't allowed to gather. We weren't allowed to come together for powwows. Many people's spirits and their mental health kind of felt that isolation from from community. Where we kind of see that play into Isabelle. Story is when she was writing for Anishinabek news in 2020 she was reminiscing about like dancing in a powwow and being in the circle. The first time that I spoke with Isabelle, obviously, like we were just kind of getting to know each other, and it was over zoom, but I immediately noticed that, like, okay, she's younger, she's around my age, like she's a full time university student. And even though we didn't kind of get too deep into it that first conversation, it still felt like I was talking to someone who I would consider a friend or like a community member. We had that unspoken understanding. And then, of course, we had our first interview, where I found myself sharing parts of my own life with Isabel. "Took me to my first powwow, and I was like, What's this? What's that? What does this mean? And in the past few years, like powwow has been a huge part of my reconnection, and I've worked and helped plan powwows, which was really amazing. And so I wanted to kind of talk about how powwow has impacted you, and what pow wow means to you?"

I Isabelle Bailey 07:04

Ooh, what powwow means to me? That's like a really big question. I feel like it means absolutely everything to me, to go back to community, to see all my friends, all the familiar faces, just to have a good time, to be there, to disconnect from my phone, to share all the different jokes and the gospel of the year, since we haven't seen them in a year of those, all those people. So it's really important to me to go to powwow. It's a huge celebration of our culture. We get to eat all of our traditional foods. We get to reconnect back with our ancestors. So it's just the most important time of the year for me.

G Gabrielle McMann 07:52

For me, powwow season has become a joyful time. It wasn't really a part of my life growing up

For me, powwow season has become a joyful time. It wasn't really a part of my life growing up, my very first powwow was actually in my 20s. For Isabelle, she was only seven.

I Isabelle Bailey 08:04

When I was a very shy young child. I was scared to enter the powwow circle because I was getting bullied by children in my own community. Keep in mind, I didn't know any teachings. I had no idea how to dance, didn't know anything of that sort. But I just went I had a family....

G Gabrielle McMann 08:23

I can totally relate to that. I've spent the last few years learning about different pow wow teachings, such as why dancers enter through the Eastern doorway and leave through the Western doorway. It pays homage to Grandfather sun. I still don't know how to dance, so I can only imagine what it was like for Isabelle learning at seven years old,

P Powwow MC 08:44

Second call, it's your time.

I Isabelle Bailey 08:53

When I did actually end up stepping out into the powwow circle, my mind went completely clear. The minute I started hearing those drums and singing, I forgot about everything like nothing mattered. I pursued through and I pushed through, and I just I continued to go back there and say that I belong equally as much as all of them do.

G Gabrielle McMann 09:18

I haven't been bullied within my own community, but I definitely battle with my own insecurities about being considered Indian enough, and I think that that just stems from not growing up on the rez, but also dealing with the colonial enforced system of measuring blood quantum. I think both of those things kind of contribute to feeling enough. Meeting Isabelle has reminded me that my journey inside the powwow circle has only just begun. She went from being afraid to step inside that circle to being able to dance multiple styles. I. Isabelle has come a long way as a dancer. She was a fancy dancer for many of her childhood years and through her teen years as well.

I Isabelle Bailey 10:12

The style of the fancy shawl is a very vibrant, crazy, energetic dance, which kind of represents, like my childhood, how I was full of energy and had all of this energy to give out to everybody else. So this dance is a very fast paced dance as well, with lots of spins, turns, jumps and all of

those sorts of things. The songs for them as well are very fast paced songs. The way I see fancy shawl is it's kind of representing of a caterpillar turning into a butterfly. So to me, I relate that with teen years. I think it's whenever you're blossoming into being and teen into being an adult.

P

Powwow MC 11:01

I feel that energy that you bring here with us. We want to see you dance your style. We're proud of you.

I

Isabelle Bailey 11:09

The jingle dress is a lot more serious, which is why I didn't want to switch into it until I was an adult and felt like I was ready to take upon those responsibilities.

G

Gabrielle McMann 11:24

Jingle dress dancing came to the Ojibwe people as a healing dance. This is a story that Isabelle knows well.

I

Isabelle Bailey 11:31

The jingle dress style. It comes from a young girl named Maggie White who was very, very sick and on her deathbed, her grandfather was trying to figure out ways to make her feel better, and he actually had a dream about a dress that had a sound, a very distinct sound to it. So the song that the jingle dress mimics is kind of like a running water or really strong lens. They ended up creating this dress, which they put on, Maggie, the young girl, the first time they put it on her, she sat up in the bed to put it on. The second time she was able to stand up. Slowly. They eventually made it down to the powwow Arbor, where she stood up and was held alongside her family members who tried to get her to go around the circle. And by the fourth beat of the drum, she was actually able to go around the circle. So this dress is very, very important for healing properties.

G

Gabrielle McMann 12:45

There are a few different variations of the origin story of the jingle dress dance, and how and why it first came to the Ojibwe people, but now jingle has kind of made its way into the mainstream powwow circle, meaning that there are dancers from all different Nations that are dancing jingle.

I

Isabelle Bailey 13:03

These Jingle dress dancers carry a huge responsibility that whenever they're asked, do these honor songs for elders, children or for even people who may have passed, they're kind of taking all of those very sad, horrible emotions that people may be carrying. These dancers take these

emotions upon themselves and take them into their dress to bear these negative or sad feelings so that these people no longer have to carry them.

P

Powwow MC 13:32

What it does is it brings people out of sickness. They carry people's prayers in this dance, they heal. They heal in many, many ways as they are a society, the jingle dress society.

G

Gabrielle McMann 13:50

The healing that the jingle dress is capable of bringing to our people is so meaningful because so many of us are still trying to heal our generational wounds. From colonization, from residential school, we're just still healing. Colonization has touched every Indigenous person, and we can't escape that. Many of us have had to take the steps to reclaim our cultures, whether it's helping others in our communities, helping our own families, or just trying to process the trauma that we live through. This is partly why I think there's an unspoken understanding that exists when you come across other people in the community. That connection was something that I was starting to feel between me and Isabelle, and I couldn't resist telling her too, like, "why I feel like we are connected, even though we haven't met in person. I'm like, I feel like when I talk to you, I'm talking to a friend."

I

Isabelle Bailey 14:53

And that just gave me goosebumps. And I feel the exact same way, exactly whenever you're mentioning like that. In the building.

G

Gabrielle McMann 15:02

Learning more about Isabelle's family history is bringing us closer. This is where I felt our connection continue to grow. Isabelle's family has been disconnected from their roots for a few generations. Her grandfather was adopted during the 60s Scoop the family that adopted him was actually indigenous and from the same reservation as his birth family. But despite that, according to Isabelle, he had very little information about his birth family. Isabelle does know that his biological mother and his adoptive mother were both survivors of the residential school institutions and that, of course, deeply affected his upbringing,

I

Isabelle Bailey 15:43

Because he didn't know anything and he wasn't really taught anything. He didn't pass anything on to my father, therefore, my father didn't pass anything on to me, because he wasn't taught anything. I didn't get to ask him any questions about the culture, or just being Indigenous, or just his experiences being a part of the 60's scoop. There is not one day that goes by that I don't think about him and his mom. He passed away, unfortunately, so that had a really big impact on me that affected a lot of different things. Whenever I was growing up. I sat with

myself, and I was like, okay, well, like, when, what do I do now? Where do I start? Like, who do I even go talk to? Because now that isn't even my actual family. Yeah, they're they still are family, but they're the adopted family. Okay, so where is this real family now?

G Gabrielle McMann 16:48

When Isabelle talks about her family history, it all sounds so familiar to me. I did not grow up on the reservation. I didn't grow up connected to culture. My family has been disconnected for I'd say about two generations, two to three generations. I also have great grandparents that were survivors of the residential school system. For me, I didn't grow up with that information easily accessible either. I just had to kind of take the steps to figuring it out. As I grew up from a teenager, I asked questions, and I as I got older, the more questions I kind of had. And then I came to journalism school, where we are encouraged to find answers to questions. When your journalism ties into you, trying to answer questions about yourself, I think it can be a really powerful journey. And that's kind of what it's been for me.

P Powwow MC 17:57

future generations. Hey.

G Gabrielle McMann 18:05

Isabelle's dancing is also closely tied to her healing and her family.

I Isabelle Bailey 18:10

So, my jingle dress regalia is dedicated to my family and for residential school survivors. My entire dress is the color orange for Every Child Matters. I have white jingles all on my dress. White is representing of pure and innocence. So all of those jingles are representing all the indigenous children who were forced to attend residential school whenever I dance, I'm going to dance as hard as I can, because I'm dancing for these children. I'm honoring these children. All of those children are then going back home to the teepee, the symbol on my dress, where they feel that they are safe and where they feel like they belong and that they are loved.

G Gabrielle McMann 19:06

Healing our ancestral trauma also happens outside of the circle. There is so much power in reclaiming our cultures on behalf of our ancestors, ourselves and our future generations.

I Isabelle Bailey 19:20

When I think about it, the first thing that comes to the top of my mind is I don't want my lineage to die with me. I felt like I was going to be that generation that needed to bring it back up, to learn it, to then teach it onto my kids, to pass that down.

G Gabrielle McMann 19:38

Like Isabelle, a huge part of the motivation for me to reclaim my culture is in the hopes of passing it down to future generations of my family. Although we share this goal and we share certain lived experiences, our journeys look very different. For me, I started exploring my culture more deeply through my journalism. I. For Isabelle, her reconnection started in the powwow circle.

P Powwow MC 20:11

Whenever you're ready. Let's make them dance.

G Gabrielle McMann 20:16

Dancing is one way that Isabelle supports her community, but it's definitely not the only way.

I Isabelle Bailey 20:22

I work at MĀDAHÒKÌ, so I am a full cultural ambassador there. I am always teaching different school groups that come to us, different tour groups that come to us from literally all over the world. We do a couple of different workshops there. The one we most predominantly do was intro to Indigenous culture. We do dream catcher workshops. We do reconciliation rocks, which are people writing nice messages to residential schools, survivors, victims, family, community, all of those people. And we do a lot of different dancing presentations with them.

G Gabrielle McMann 21:00

Although our professional journeys look different, both Isabelle and I use knowledge bundles to foster better relationships between Indigenous folks and non-Indigenous folks.

I Isabelle Bailey 21:10

Every single time I teach a different workshop, there's at least one person that learns something new, which is enough for me, like that's worth it. It is very rewarding to me to teach people as well. So I think in the end, let's be honest, I probably will, I probably will be a teacher. So from the book, 'Pray it Forward for the Next Seven Generations,' I wrote a story about myself and my journey and being an Indigenous woman. Near the end of the story that I wrote is just a little paragraph of one of my favorite quotes that I like to say on a daily occurrence. And it goes like this... "Mentoring the younger generation is where my passion is. I once heard the saying be who you needed when you were younger. And this is what I wish to pass on to future generations. Be the person who is positive and encouraging. Be the person who loves their

culture, honors it and strives to learn as much about it as possible. Be coachable, active, participate in life and live life to the fullest. Be proud of who you are and be proud of your journey."

G

Gabrielle McMann 22:18

For the last three to four years in J-school, I've been telling Indigenous stories. My goal is always to bring our voices to the forefront. Like many great journalists that came before me, I'm not the first, and I will definitely not be the last, but it's my way to contribute, to provide a platform for Indigenous stories that is trustworthy and community based. And through doing this story, it feels like Isabelle has become a part of my community. Yeah, have you been to the Wikwemkong powwow?

I

Isabelle Bailey 22:55

No, I haven't. I've always wanted to go though. You should go next year. I want to try to go next year, but we should definitely meet at a powwow.

G

Gabrielle McMann 23:00

I was gonna say this is sounding like we need to plan a trip to a powwow. Yeah, okay, we'll have to do that. And I have some really great friends.

Y

Yanika Saluja 23:18

We Met U When... is a production by journalism students at Toronto Metropolitan University. This episode was produced by Gabrielle McMann and Katerina Zeni. Shari Okeke is our Executive Producer and professor. Eunice Kim is our Senior Producer and Teaching Assistant. Angela Glover is our Director of Audio Production. Our season three theme music, composed and performed by Eric Croda. Web design by Lindsay Hanna. Special thanks to The Creative School, the School of Journalism, and the Journalism Research Center at Toronto Metropolitan University for supporting Season three by sending some of our producers to the Resonate 2024 podcast festival in Richmond, Virginia. I'm your host. Yanika Saluja, thanks for listening.