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Mj Oatman [00:00:11] Born into fishing by blood. At least fifteen thousand years now, on, on these home lands here. It's kind of imprinted in my, in my biology and DNA. As far as actually, physically being out fishing, catching my first fish along the, our traditional homelands here, I was 4 years old when I caught my first trout. And eleven, when I caught my first salmon, that was over, in, you know, in some of our home lands along the Columbia River. Sturgeon, I was about 24 years old when I caught my first sturgeon. So my introduction to the different species, I think also came at different phases of my life, because my dad would take me along on certain trips, and not take me along on certain trips, so I would give a lot of credit to my dad. He's, he's been my mentor, when it comes to fishing, since I was just a young girl. He said that it came pretty natural, or came pretty easy, because I loved, and was just inclined to hang out with him and my brothers. And my sister, not as much. I have an older sister. She's 18 months older than I am. And I always joke around that we're twins 18 months apart. Because we look a lot alike. She's got a little, a little mole over on that side of her face. So a lot of people, in public, they'll see us and they'll think we're the same person, and they'll ask me about my kids and I'm like, "Oh, that's my sister, Alisha." But she, her and I, were not the same type of youngster growing up, here, on our homelands. She just really liked to stay at home, and listen to her music, and draw, and do those kind of things, and anything that I could do to get out of the house. To be, you know, out horn hunting with my dad and brothers, fishing with my dad and brothers. That's usually where I was at, and, uh, that's where my, the foundation of learning how to tie knots. And learning about the different types of fishing spots, and the different times of the year, to fish these different fishing spots, when all of that was just kind of imprinted into my memory, to be able to share that with my kids. I've seen a lot of change in these different fishing spots as well, over the times, so.

Mj Oatman [00:02:52] Along different tributaries, there have been different types of changes. Here, along the Clearwater River, fishing, like I am now with just the hook and line, has just kind of become more of a necessity, because of the closure in some of our other rivers, because the salmon are not coming back in the numbers like they used to, along the Amnaha, the Looking Glass River, down at Rapid River, even, where my family has been fishing by kinship, for thousands of years. And so when, when I'm looking at fishing, in a spot like, I guess Rapid River would be the best instance. It's either manmade, or it's environmental changes, that are sometimes outside of our direct factor. I guess, I can say, it's more of the collective impact that we've had over generations of the human impact, of not taking care of the gifts, and being responsible for them, but just kind of exploiting them would be, um, the change in the river system, due to a change in the bridge. The Idaho Transportation Department came in, in 2000 and, I believe it was 2009. And they built a new bridge, you know, to, for, for commerce sake, and it's a, it's a industrial corridor, going through that, that little passageway for a, for a lot of farm trucks, a lot of, a lot of different hauling going through that, that passageway. And so, it's been a site where, I mean, there's, there's couplets that they've dated at being over 7000 years old along these rivers, where we fish. And they came in without any environmental impact studies, or any consultation with the tribe, and built a new bridge. During an off season of fishing. And so it was pretty expeditious. They got that bridge in and out, and finished within a few months. And so when fishing season came back around and the different families were down there fishing, it was, it was, I guess, for my dad it was, it was, there was literal trauma. And then there was a sort of spiritual trauma that occurred, when he was walking along the river, realizing that the hole that he went, that he caught his first salmon in, was now gone. It was no longer a fishing hole. And it was his favorite fishing hole. And it was a spot where, since he was a young boy, traveling down the Rapid River

from Kamiah, he had fished it year after year after year. And now it was just suddenly gone. And he had taught my son how to fish in that exact same fishing hole. My son was about eight years old when they made that change at the bridge.

Mj Oatman [00:05:52] That year was also the year that I stopped, stopped fishing at Rapid River myself. The year that they made the change of the bridge, it had changed the landscape along the river bank. And prior to that, I just always fished all over the river. I fished at night. And, in the back of my mind, sometimes I'd always kinda questioned, you know, was a lot of it was the time that I was at, in my life. I had just finished up a four year college degree, at a predominantly white institution. You know, eleven miles from the reservation, where I had the opportunity to learn Nez Perce language, my native tongue, ironically, from a non-native linguist who mastered our language and, you know, took with it as much as I could. And I read stories. I dove in to historical archives. I was just really embracing as much of it as I could, because I had never been so thirsty for that in my life. And I never had an awakening like that, to know that that's like my knowledge to reclaim. I didn't get that in high school. What I learned was, you know, a week long, you know, course, from kindergarten through 12th grade of like, you know, Idaho, fourth grade history. And about tribes, you know. So, when it came to intellectual freedom at a, at a four year institution, I just, I kind of took it and ran with it, as much as I could. And a big part of that, was reading Nez Perce history, from historical contact with Lewis and Clark, and on from that, and even from there, having the opportunity to see things from a world perspective, and not just this miniscule little Nez Perce, on our own homelands. But what did the international world know, about this conflict with the indigenous people of these homelands? And so I started learning more about British literature, and other correspondences, to see a little bit more about our, our place in history. As, you know, what has come to be known as the principal people in the plateau; the Nez Perce people. Because of our connection with the salmon, and the riches that that afforded us to negotiate a most favored nations treaty with the United States government. You know, at that time, was the wealth that we had as a people, being a mounted people on horse, the wealth of the horse, and what it allowed us to do with trade networks. And a lot of that, you know, knowledge came from reading these books. And a big part of what was missing through that, in reading my own family history, through McWhorter and Walker, you know, very prominent anthropologists that studied Nez Perce people, at that time, was they failed to discuss more women's roles. And so that also ignited my fire as well, is, is realizing that there's a lot of history told, but her story is very rarely ever told, in the context of indigenous women's roles from European contact, along the plateau, and just bits and pieces of it, very romanticized. Kind of like Pocahontas. Just it's, it's, it's become, It's, it's become to this point now, where I realize it's, it's, it's become part of my defiance, and speaking back that, a lack of her story being told, is why we still suffer from a lot of imbalance within our own tribal economy, and within our own family systems. Because that's a big part of what we've seen that was broken, was kinship systems. You know, through colonial contact and...we have had it fractured, but I don't think that it's completely gone, or lost forever, because families still gather along the river banks, and we still find ourselves, you know, with the the rat race of living in the 21st century, with the mineral technologies at our disposal, that we still find it inherent in our biology and our DNA to want to come out here and be along the river banks and, and catch the fish and gather and consume it and take all of those nutrients into our body.

Mj Oatman [00:10:37] But. It feels like we are in a race against time, because our water systems are changing. Because of, well, because we live in that fast paced world as indigenous people, um. Like me, I've got to rush off to work, and gotta to pay those bills, and despite what everybody thinks about, you know, the federal government taking care of

our education, I've got a pretty fat student loan to pay off from, um, from a very traumatic year of law school, that I didn't complete, that I'm working towards paying off, so that I, um. I realize that we have to, we have to start making very bold decisions, as indigenous mothers, to say, you know, sending my kid to school to learn the Common Core standards, and the content standards, and regurgitating the Declaration of Independence, may not be a priority, maybe because, as a nation, we are in a state of being an endangered species. There's less than 4000 of us out of 7 billion people on this planet. So maybe my son should be focusing his time on learning and following his nature. I mean, he's sitting in class, and he wants to be out here fishing, but he's sitting in his high school class, you know, stressing out about end of the year tests, and things like that. And that's where I also know that we have to have educated word warriors. And young girls like my daughter, and that's what I've also noticed, is that the those, those warriors, now, because our men are in the, in this state, with the opioid crisis, with the alcohol addiction, with a lot of the things that our men face, the over 40% unemployment on our reservation, that they're like prisoners of war, in their own homelands.

Mj Oatman [00:12:57] And so the women have definitely stepped up, they're, they've taken on that commitment. And, you know, that our treaty signers secured for us, to say, you know what, we put on the big girl panties. You got another seven generations that you got to look out for, and um, and our moms are struggling too. A lot of our moms are struggling, in my own family. I...We've got meth addiction and alcoholism. And because we are such a small community, it seems so disproportionate. But in my family, we've got just as many, you know, Bachelors holding, you know, storytellers and, you know, fisher women and, and that's one thing that I do know is my, my connection with fish has changed as I've become a mother. And when that bridge changed, it changed the status of the river, the landscape of the river, and I was walking along one night, and I was going to go fish along a site that I was used to fishing along, quite a bit. And that same night, there was a big storm that came in, and unbeknownst to me, had washed along a huge part of the riverbank. And so when I was walking to go to that fishing hole, a car was oncoming towards me, with its highbeams on it. So I had to stop, because I was like a doe in the headlights, I couldn't see anything. And so I was like, well, you know, and it's about one o'clock in the morning. And as soon as the car drove away, and I'm just kind of like focusing, and I've got those little tracers kind of going on. And I looked down in front of me, and the riverbank is completely washed away. And there's just the Rapid River, you know, wildly flowing right in front of me. And my next step would have been into the river. And I, I took my pole, and I walked back up, and I was pretty shaken. And I, I took my pole, and I walked back up, and I set it along the river. And and I'd only had my one son at the time. He was five, six years old at the time. And I um, I just said, I'm not gonna fish at Rapid River like that anymore. And it was really strange because that same summer I was fishing during the daytime, and I had a family from out of Boise.

Mj Oatman [00:15:21] The man, his name is John Stockton. He was adopted by a non-native family while he was...He said he was about 2 years old when he was adopted, and raised in the Treasure Valley outside of the Nez Perce reservation, and outside of any connection to fishing culture. But he also was just pulled to the river. And so, when he became an adult, he started learning more about what it meant for him to be Nez Perce. You know, through books and then, you know, through different family connections that he started making, with the Nez Perce, and he came up to Rapid River. And I remember the first year that he came up there, mind you, I've been there since. Like my mom said, 'I was sitting along the river banks while you were in my stomach. And I was watching your dad fish. I was carrying his fish for him.' So my connection to that place has been since I was in my mother's womb. And so. It was just kind of like, 'Oh, who's this guy?' You know, as he

comes rolling in, and you see him with his fishing gear, and it looks new and fancy, and he's you know, he's got these 1a plates, you know, from a strange part of Idaho. And then, then I kind of started watching him fish. And, and it's kind of a thing along that river, you know, how you stand in the river as you're fishing, kind of tells if you know what you're doing, kind of. And so it was kind of funny to watch him go and stand in the river. And my dad, he did what he always does. You know, he, he went over and he introduced himself to him, you know, and then he's just like, "You know, if you, if you get a fish in your net that way, you know, it's likely going to take you down. But if you stand like this and then you're fishing, you know, you're braced and you're secured." And so, he wanted to make sure that he was safe, number one. You know, and then he wanted to find out who he was from, whose family that he came from. And, and so that was two or three years prior, to the year that I stopped fishing, that our families made that connection. And so fast forward, his, his petite, his little daughters are now teenage girls, and I've watched them kinda just grow up along the river. And it's the first year that he feels like it's safe enough for them to learn to fish along the river. And he asked me, "Mary Jane, will you take my daughters to go fishing" and, you know, to me, it was like quite an honor, I was like, "Yeah, sure." You know, for the safety reasons of it, and, you know, the other part of it is because there's not very many women that fish along that river, there. And so, at that time, I was known as, you know, one of the younger Nez Perce woman that did fish there. I haven't been back there to fish since that night that that happened, where I almost fell in. But that day, got a fish with both of those young girls, along that river, and they both got to catch their first salmon. That's up for the... I guess that gift of giving back. You know, and I've, I've talked to both of those young girls since then. I mean, even that same summer. And I told them about what happened. And I told them that I wasn't going fish there anymore. And I told them, also, that I didn't feel like it meant that they shouldn't be fishing there.

Mj Oatman [00:18:34] But from what I know, and what I've read, about Nez Perce women; prior to European contact was that wasn't our role, necessarily. You know, it's fun. It's it's a lot of fun to get involved in all of that. Even then, that wasn't necessarily our role, and so I felt this conflict, you know. I fish. I fish because that's, that's what my family does. You know, that's what I've always done, but I've never seen myself as, you know, the primary provider of subsistence, you know, for my family. I've got dads and brothers. I'm just, you know, blessed to have it like that. Even my ex-husband, who was a member of the Yakima Nation, he's, he's still my um, spiritual life partner, of sorts. You know, we've been divorced since 2012. And a big part, I do believe in, in um, in that not working out, was the journey that I took, in education. How that changed the dynamics in our, in our marriage and our relationship. He'd.... You know, when I, when I think about it now, I just realize, you know, I had grown so much. And during the course of all of that, had some phenomenal career experiences at a very young age. And he didn't want to have any credit for it. I was always trying to get him on stage next to me, or have him beside me and, for some strange reason at that time, you know, and we've had a lot of conversations about it, because he is very much still one of my, one of my best friends. We've got two gorgeous, you know, Nez Perce/Yakima sons, and someday we're gonna share beautiful grandchildren together, you know? So we've gotta, you know, eye on the prize, as far as the long term investment. But he also learned how to fish from, from my dad. And he learned how to hunt from my dad. And so the reciprocity in that teaching, you know, with my dad, I've seen it go for many generations, and my dad is also the one that I've talked with the most, over the course of my young life. To see how much it has changed around here. To see how much our river systems have changed. And the one that he always talks about the most, is the size of the salmon, from when he was a young boy to now, the size of the salmon. It was, my first salmon that I actually caught on the Columbia River, was a wild salmon. And I didn't, you know, I was too young to even know anything about what any of that meant.

And I was just starting to become old enough to know about politics, when I was a young girl, and I remember fishing, and my dad caught a fish and, you know, it had the little, the little nubbin on the back end of it. You know, and he was trying to hide it at the bottom of the cooler because he knew that the fish monitors were gonna be kind of digging around, and he wanted all of his clipped fish at the top. And he said that, you know, the more, you know, the more of those numbers that are there, then, they're going to use those politics to shut us down, you know? And I didn't know anything about the fish politics, or the numbers, or anything like that. But I would hear talk. You know, a lot of rhetoric from just being a young girl. And my dad told me the story about the Idaho tribe fishing war, at Rapid River. I hear that story pretty much from a young girl. Every time we'd go to Rapid River, he'd tell, you know, all these different versions about being arrested down there, or going back down there when, when they had the big, you know, the big standoff, where people were being arrested. And, and he said, violently arrested, over salmon. Over... and a lot of it, he said, was, you know, families that had never actually even been to Rapid River before, that had traveled down there, because they knew that, that this was, this was, this was kind of like that....Cause that they were, they were ready to to die for. It was just on the tail end of AIM movement, and the Pacific Northwest treaty fishing wars were still in a fragile state. You know, with the Boldt decision, and so... my, my dad and his uncle, were actually fishing down at Rapid River, in 1979, was the year that he was cited. And he said there was only a couple of people cited that year. 1980 was the year that there was a big, you know, a big battle with the state. And he went down in there again, and he said, they knew what they were doing, when they went down there. They knew that it was going to be a, become a political cause to go down there, and symbolically fish at the Rapid River. And that was a case that, you know, worked in the favor of the Nez Perce people, to secure our treaty fishing rights, without ever having to work its channels all the way to the Supreme Court.

Mj Oatman [00:24:28] That's been a really interesting dynamic for.... 2019 and 2018, uh, Indian country was like, 'The sky is falling, the sky is falling.' When Obama, when Obama was stepping out of office, they felt like he had done so many amazing things for Indian Country and, and Trump was going to come in, and it was just going to be the end of the world. And it was a lot of, a lot of fear and rhetoric going on, throughout Indian country. And I remember talking with my little brother Wes, at the time, and he's just really, you know, he's really big into politics, like really big. I'm like, "Ugh, do we gotta to talk about this right now? Let's talk about, let's talk about our kids and, you know, their kindergarten play or just something else." But he's his mind is always just rolling. And how all of those things, at that huge level, impact us. You know, little Indian people, you know, along the river, or on our homelands when we're out fishing. He's always got to try to find those connections. And I remember him specifically saying, "No, no, no, no, this is going to be a good thing. I don't, I don't know how exactly, other than to say that I really feel like the backers of Trump, and the people that he is going to put in the Supreme Court, for some strange reason, I just have this feeling that they're gonna do the right thing when it comes to indigenous treaty issues, and Indian treaty issues here." And I was like, "OK, well, we'll just call them the Trump card then." You know? And, and I remember the day that he was elected, made a post on social networking about the Trump card, and, you know, the Herrera decision, the, you know, the Wyoming Treaty fishing case, the Yakima taxation case over fuel tax and transportation. In the past two years, we have seen reassurance and a validation of Indian treaty rights, with the United States Supreme Court decisions, then we've seen in the past 50 years. It was kind of scary, you know, holding our breath, sitting back. And I always have, you know, cause for concern like is, does our tribal government even realize what's going on here? Do they even know, and I realize we do. Indian country's paying attention to, you know, to those kind of decisions, because when

they are affirmed, then that gives us our teeth, and our holding to go back and fight for the water, and fight for the air, and fight for the protection of the resources. And, again, back to what I'd said earlier, not just the exploitation of it. And we're, and I've seen it with many of our, our communities taking this position of, you know, we, we had this, we had to deal with Manifest Destiny and that whole, you know, timeframe, and how it impacted us. And now we're just kind of taking the spin with it, you know, and manifesting our own destiny. I see that with a lot of the fishing families, primarily, is who I see it with. They're the ones that are, are even willing to take opposition against tribal governments' policies, that we feel may not be in the best interest of seven generations. If they are just monetarily beneficial decisions, for elected tribal officials today, but they don't necessarily have the foresight of the conservation efforts necessary for my unborn great-grandchildren, to be able to have the usury rights, and the ability to either recreationally, you know, subsistence, commercial, you know, for economy, to be able to come out here and fish, and have this as a trade resource as well as, you know, nourishment, then they, they deserve to be held accountable by, you know, by the people that are impacted by those decisions. And unfortunately, there's not very many of us that are out there doing that. There's very few. Very few, uh, Indian families that are, want to take, I guess, opposition against the tribe. Because, just kind of. You know, you don't, you don't want to stir up the pot. We definitely don't want to air dirty laundry. You know, those kind of things. So speaking to outsiders about some of these issues is still, I guess, somewhat taboo. But I, again, have had the opportunity to reflect on the words of my ancestors.

Mj Oatman [00:29:48] It was Chief Joseph, when he was being held in an internment camp in, you know, Oklahoma and Kansas. You know, on his, on his way in exile, after, post 1877 war, that realized that the only way that he can work to save his people now, from all dying from death and disease, in these strange homelands, in these desert lands, to get them back to fishing along their waters, and to get them back to their, their daily prayers and their songs. And, and what they know, the smells that are familiar with them, is to speak out. And tell the story. Tell the story to a bigger calling, to humanity, to people that, that know that, in this fast paced world, despite how we've all been undereducated and miseducated, that, you know, this whole romanticized notion of, you know, what, how Indian people always say, you know, in the, you know, the days of the Iron Eyes Cody, you know, that, you know, we're all, we're all connected. You know, we're in the river, the rocks, the water. That's not just, you know, stereotypical or romanticized, you know, Indian stuff. That's definitely a way that we should be thinking.

Mj Oatman [00:31:23] I believe that those, those acts are, are pivotal. I think that it's even more critical that the, the voices of the people that are impacted most greatly, are heard. I feel that a lot of the processes for that to occur don't necessarily... don't necessarily reach down into the grassroots, where they can hear the voices from those impacted. I feel like it, you know, I mean, it also goes, it goes both ways. And again, just being out there to share, share our stories and being willing to share our stories and to not feel like it's, it's taboo to talk about what we feel is, is broken, so that we can fix it. While also honoring the accomplishments of what our, our people have done with this deficient government system that we've inherited, you know. And it's just been since the 1950s, you know, and they're just, you know, tinkering around, putting quarters into a broken, you know, phone booth. And, you know, still trying to listen to the dial tone and, you know, bless their hearts, they're, someday going to hear that dial tone. You know, I think that they need to just make a collect call real quick. And that's why I feel like, again, these same elected leaders that are plugging the quarters in to the phone booths, are the ones that have somehow been able to take the treaty, and through bureaucracy, stash it away under administration, when things like the Clean Air Act or other congressional legislation is moving forward, or

there's areas for, not just legislative areas, but areas for litigation, or areas where we have agreements, compacts, treaties, the Columbia River Treaty, areas like that, where we could use our treaty to assert more bargaining power. And that's where, I guess, I have to kind of take the step back, and just try to figure out why, you know, why that does occur. And I'm just a policy nerd maybe, or I, am... Cursed, if you will, by having been afforded the opportunity to have the Western education, to use it as a tool to see, even within my own tribal government system, why these things might occur. Like, for instance, that as long as the dams stay in place, that the tribes can get a budget of twenty million dollars a year. And some people, you know, keep jobs in, you know, biologists, you know, they stay happy and they get to keep writing reports. And, you know, from a Treaty Indians perspective, to me that's kicking the can down the road for another generation to have to make the tough decision that feeding the international world, through the dams and the agriculture and the backs of the Camas fields, the homelands that we lost, the women's economy that was lost, to build the industry of the Pacific Northwest. And essentially the globe by the Palouse, our, our wheat fields just on the Nez Perce Homelands, our trust resources our ah, trust land resources. They're being used to feed the world.

Mj Oatman [00:35:43] The river systems that are along our waterways, and some of our homelands, contain the rare earth elements that China has a moratorium on extracting. And there's only two places in the world. And, you know, right here in the Nez Perce homelands, is, is one of them., You know, so. And one of our fishing sites that I'd mentioned earlier, Red River, up in those homelands near Crooked River, where my family fishes every year, where the tribe just recently spent seven hundred and fifty million dollars, to build a new fishing culvert, to work on salmon restoration and coho restoration. About twenty five miles up the river, there is a really nasty ore mining project that's going on. And the mining laws that are happening in our homelands are pretty antiquated. I mean, they're very clear that, you know, this is the Wild West, and we mine where we want, how we want and when we want and... So I feel like, again, you know, I can, I can sit back and, you know, I can find something interesting on TV to watch or I can, you know. I can find other ways of.... But my spiritual pathway always tells me to use those, the tools. And so I find myself looking up, you know. OK. So we've got these mining laws in Idaho and we've got this permit process. And so, you know, digging a little deeper into the mining system up there in my homelands, because I drove up there, I was working on the project where we were doing the culvert restoration for the tribal fisheries watershed project. And I was working 10 hour shifts, five days a week. And on one of those nights, I was like, I have to just get out and drive up along the river. And so I drove up into some of those mining territories. And I, I didn't I was, I just felt really naive. I didn't know that that was going on up there. And so I get back, and start asking questions of, you know, some elected officials, and they didn't know that that mining operation was going on up there either. And so I started looking into, you know, what was going on up there as far as the totality of the claims that were up there, who they were owned by. And come to find out that, you know, a company out of Canada had paid a head to, head hunting company under them, to go in and purchase 100% of those mining claims up there. And. You know, it's, it's in its infancy. I mean, we're talking like, I'm finding out about this while it's you know, it's like the, you know, the like a pregnancy test, if you will, for a comparison, that it's like, 'Oh, yeah, you know, we're pregnant, we're gonna have a baby. But, you know, we're not going to tell anybody about it.' So it's like Altiplano mining company is up there and they're buying everything. And so by the time that I go to our tribe and tell them about it, it's like, you know, getting ready to deliver and nine months pregnant and, you know, baby's ready to come and the tribes like, 'Wait what? What's going on up there?' So it feels like the bureaucracy of what our elected officials has, have to deal with, is so enormous. And so the impact of it is the, the seven generations, it's 15 generations. It's, it's, it's, it's a

millennial, some of the decisions that they face now. And that's why I would just really hope that they would feel more compelled to... To find the voice of the people that are impacted by these policies, to use them to, to slow down progress just a little bit, to say, "You know what, we need to explore that just a little bit more." Because, you know, now it's, it's again, very reactionary types of situations going on, when if we had those hunting families or those fishing families that are driving around and they see anomalies and they see abnormalities in these homelands, because they're in these, these mountains, in these backroads and these fishing holes, year round. And they pick up the phone and they call their elected officials and tribal government, or the policy people that run these programs. And they tell them about these concerns. And somehow in, in just a tiny tribal bureaucracy that is lost in the shuffle, then I cannot imagine it gives me, it just gives me overwhelming anxiety to know that, that is also what happens with a tribal government voice. In Congress, in the larger political scale, in the international economic conversations that take place. And it's like, why does it always have to happen like that when we know that we have the silver bullet? And the silver bullet is the treaty.

Mj Oatman [00:41:33] The silver bullet, our treaty is, is our call to the international world, about the lack of conservation efforts that are happening here, by the United States government, to ensure that that contract is upheld. And so for somebody like me, you know, I see it as, I see the treaty as a contract. And I know that the number two signatory on that contract was a [indigenous tribe] that that was Chief Looking-Glass. And I know that's who I descend from on my grandfather's side. And his daughter, you know, survived the war when her dad was killed after signing a peace treaty with the United States government. And that she made it into Canada, and came back here, and fished along the rivers, and had a family. And, and just knowing that... and I felt like if other young Nez Perce boys and girls were more focused on finding that truth, instead of learning untruths in, you know, K-12 classrooms. So there's got to be a hybrid model of that. And I just really feel like, you know, our, our greatest natural resource in Indian country is our children. They need to be learning the songs, the songs of our ancestors. You know, everyday, [unknown term] every, every day. So that it, you know, it becomes a way of life again. And... Need to know that, our young girls need to know that there's a place for them in, in a local economy, in a larger economy. If we have the restoration of our Indian hemp. In the early 1800s, you know, early Christian missionaries came among the Nez Perce people, and eradicated the Indian hemp. And, you know, it was, it was foreshadowed kind of, that that was going to happen. You know, in journals as early as 1909, and like Sam Black's like census, you know, journals where he came along, the Nez Perce people. And a big part of that was he saw the very robust economy that was occurring with this strange plant. You know, it was the Indian hemp. And it was the women that made the hemp rope, and then, most Nez Perce men had more than one wife. And so, the strength of the man's economy was only afforded by the strength of the rope that his women would make for him. He couldn't fish, if his women didn't make him his ropes. He couldn't teach his children how to fish, if his women wouldn't lay with him and have children. And so, at that time, it was even noted. 'Whoa, you know, these Nez Perce women, you know, it's like they kind of got a little bit too much say,' you know, it was a balance among the people, was noted in that time, in 1909. And you get to the 1820s, I mean, excuse me 1809, you get to the 1820s, and you start to see a little bit more of the rhetoric in, in some of the written history. That reflects a little bit more of the colonial context, that we were subservient to our men. And in those types of things when, you know, the earliest of written history amongst, recorded history, amongst the Nez Perce, does not indicate that at all. And a big part of that was around fishing economy, and the rope. Kamiah, where I'm from, though, the name Kamiah, the townsite of Kamiah, derives from the word Kamu, and that's the word, Indian hemp. That's the Indian hemp that they were talking about, that the

women would sit around, during certain times of the season, and make. And it was used for so many different things. But the most dominantly known, written, pieces of history, was around fishing. The nets, sites like this, we would be fishing with, uh...And again, the river system here, is so much different than when Lewis and Clark came through here, you know, because of the, the mammoths down the road, the four lower Snake River dams. You know, prior to that, they had sites along the river where there were weir sites. And you read some of the journals of Lewis and Clark, about the fishing techniques that were used then. And so much of it was around the rope technology. And that economy only existed, because the women were the rope makers. Also noted by the you know, by the fur traders. But, you know, during that time, as, as the economic boom is moving through here. And it was noted in those earlier 1909 journals that because the women lack the knowledge of the spool, and the technology of making more fibers, and more cloth out of the rope itself, it was you know, it was not seen as, as, then, as a technology, like it is now, in the agricultural use of industrial hemp, like it is now in contemporary, you know, moving forward with legislation for, for hemp, and in cannabis economies. Then in 19, or 1809 it was noted. But it was more dominantly portrayed in the journals, the foreshadowing of exploitation that would occur in the timber industry.

Mj Oatman [00:47:38] It was like, "Oh, man. Write home to the Queen, about the wood out here." You know, and so... You know, we were known as a, as a timber tribe. We're, we're a salmon, you know, tribe, but we're also, you know, as a large land base treaty tribe; we're, we're known as a, as a timber tribe. Do our families have a timber economy? Absolutely not. A lot of other families have a very robust economy off of, you know, the logging industries. Same to be said with the farming industry. I don't know of any tribal member that has cattle farm, or wheat farms. I know a lot of large, a lot of families that own large properties that they, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, leases out to non-Indian farmers on their behalf, to have very lucrative economies in those industries. And they might make, you know, one or two hundred dollars a year of royalties off of those lands. And so, now, as we spring forward into the 20, you know, we move forward with the technology that we have now, and we see this, us, resurgence of the hemp technology. You know, I know of what I know now, with what it meant for our women's economy in Nez Perce pre-history to now, in 1990- you know, 2019. It allows me to see things so much more clearly, about the the role that women can have in elevating that conversation. When it comes to water use on our reservation, when it comes to restoration of some of our women's economy in those homelands, because we are just at this point, just a fishing tribe, our treaty has only been used as a single pillar to uphold fishing, from the Indian men's fishing perspective. The men impacted by not being able to fish on the rivers, not the women that aren't allowed to make a very robust economy off of the hemp rope, you know, because that was eradicated quite a while ago. And so... I do feel like a lot of our women feel that their role is going to school, and and, you know, going to law school or going to, going to learn different ways of... sadly to say, still fighting, in this generation, this many decades post treaty, post peace treaty, that we're still in a state of fighting, we'll always be fighting, as, as indigenous people, in a constant state of defense. I also feel that there is a, like, we're in this like fulcrum point of humanity, to be a little bit more collective in the responsibility that we share, because a lot of people are starving to also know that same thing. Like, who am I? Where do I come from? That same journey that I went on. And I didn't really take it until I became a mother. I didn't appreciate it until I became a mother. And, again, when, at that same, like, as if all of the stars had aligned, at the perfect moment, when I became a mother, it was what caused me to go back to school.

Mj Oatman [00:51:29] I was working as a fisheries conservation enforcement officer. 9/11 happens, and I am told that, "You're going to be furloughed because they're redirecting all

of our National Marine Fisheries and Bonneville Power Administration budget to open up some new office called the Department of Homeland Security. And so all officers are going to be furloughed." And that was scary for me. You know, I was twenty three years old, and was pregnant with my son. You know, I was just scheduled to go to a federal land management academy training for three months, to get my, my license to be a federal land management officer. And, and all of the budget woes came up. And so I kind of saw that as like, you know, divine intervention from the creator. You know, in hindsight, at the time, it was just so devastating. My whole thing was I loved being an officer. What we did out there was, you know, amazing work. And I just, I really stood behind the mission, and still to this day stand behind the mission of that work. But when I decided to go back to school, at the time, I says, "You know what? I feel like we, you know, I love the work that we did, but it felt like we could always be doing more." At that time it was like, if we're only depending on, on natural marine fisheries and BPA budgets, then, you know, I want to go back to school. I want to learn how to grant write, I want to learn more about, you know, about fish policy and all of these different things. So my goal, when I went back to school, was to come back and run the fisheries program, the fisheries conservation enforcement program, specifically. Like I still wanted to pack a gun, and I still wanted to have a badge, and I wanted to be, like, a fish cop, still. And within the first few weeks that I was at school, I was going through the whole academic mentorship. And my mentor/advisor, Dr. Raymond Miller, he asked me a question that changed my life. He said, "So, Mary Jane, are you going to get a Bachelor of Arts or a Bachelor of Science?" And I was like, I was like, mortified. I was embarrassed. I was like turning beet red, because I didn't know what the difference between the two was. I was just going to college. You know? I'm going to college. I didn't even know. I didn't even understand at that point, I was just so naive about this whole process, that there was even, you know, an academic side and a technical side, or that I could be doing more hands-on, applied things. It was just, I just, I'm gonna be the chief of conservation enforcement. And my mom just so happened to be in school. And she was like, "Take some classes with me." And so that's how I got aligned with this advisor. And I said, "Well, what's the difference?" And he explained them to me. And I said, "Well what are my options?" And he told me about the different language options. And he's like, "Oh, you know what? We've got this..." you know. And so he tells me about Nez Perce language. And I'm like, yeah, that sounds pretty interesting. And that is basically what started my journey. You know, my son was four months old. I enrolled in my first Nez Perce language class. And there's like 24 of us, and it's mixed. There's, there's native, there's Nez Perce, there's non Nez Perce that are Indian, other tribes. And it's just a whole mix, but mostly non-native students. And a non-native instructor. And by the time that I got to the second semester, there was like twelve of us. They were just dropping like flies. Because it's a hard language to learn. But I just love a challenge. And I was like, "I don't, I don't like this, there's something about this that I don't like." And I realized it was because the whole first semester, we were never speaking the language. We were writing it down. We were learning how to translate. And we were regurgitating like a, you know, a ton of verbs and, you know, taking tests on it. And we're actually getting graded on whether or not we could spell it, in this class. And so, I sat down with the instructor, and talked with him about, you know, why I was struggling. And then I was like, "Can we please have like, some sort of an oral exam? Can we like somehow, like, talk more in this class? Like, I'm going crazy because I know a lot, but I have zero confidence in speaking it, like none." And so, you know, we worked on curriculum together, and he asked me, he says, "Well, maybe next semester you can take another lab class, and then maybe help tutor, you know, in the other class because you really seem like you got something. You know, you're picking it up really well. How, what, what's your, what are you doing?" And so I shared with him my note cards. And I had kind of created this own color coded system in my own mind of, because it's a verb based language. It's very complex. One word is a

whole sentence, depending on the suffix and prefix that you have on the word. And, and so I was like really nerding out with the linguistic part of it. In addition to like just really learning and immersing myself in, into it. And I didn't know what was happening at the time. But then next thing you know, I'm taking like nine credits of language class. And all of my other classes are kind of like, you know, at the time I was thinking fallen by the wayside, but I was maintaining my second semester in school. My mom and my grandma, my aunt Sandy, my cousin Terry, and myself, were all going to school together. We were all taking Native American oral lit class together. And that same semester, we found out that my grandpa had cancer. And so that was really, it was a battle, it was my sophomore year in college. And in that same year, one of my friends had talked me into filling in for a vacancy in student government. And, and so this strange occurrence of things would happen, to kind of just shift me in different directions. But, you know, it was one of my friends from high school. I mean, he was like voted 'most likely not to succeed' in high school. And there he was like, you know, on the President's List every year at Lewis-Clark State College. And he told me, "You should come out for student government. You know, it's not, it's more than just playing government." And, you know, he told me why he thought that I should be involved in there. And a big part of, for him was that, you know, there's a lot of crony bullshit that's going on in here, you know, and there's like a lot of student funds that are coming in, but they have no policies. And it's like these, you know, clique groups giving all of this money out to all of their friends, you know? And I was like, "Well, that's bullshit. You know, we got to change that." So we got in there, and we rolled up our sleeves, and did a lot of policy development work while we were in there.

Mj Oatman [00:58:04] That's where I had my first exposure to the State Board of Education policy setting, you know, statewide policy. A lack of tribal voice at that table, and in that arena, when it came to curriculum standards, and everything in between. You know, from basically from how I had always thought of it as, you know, like birth to death. I mean, you, you, you're born a learner, and you die a learner. And for some reason, we just tend to keep putting our little kids in these silos and then just trying to figure out why they're broken, you know. So there was a position that became available, that I had applied for. And I honestly didn't think that I had a shot in heck with it, because I had just graduated from Lewis-Clark State College. I only had my Bachelors Degree, and I had never had a so-called "real job" in education. But I started out, I was out of twenty five candidates, selected as the state's first coordinator of Indian education. Working and representing all of the tribes, that crazy, amazing opportunity. I didn't know it at the time, when I got the position, but I found out after I relocated my, my son and my husband down to Boise, I had to go down there and work for the state superintendent of public instruction, was, I didn't believe in a lot of his political views. He was a Republican that had some of the wackiest, craziest stuff going on, and I didn't really care about, you know, some of his, his political ideology, because it felt like he carried so much of his personal and religious ideology, you know, for public, in public policy arena. So it just. A lot of things about him rubbed me wrong. But again, I said, I always love a challenge. And when I'd made it through the interview pool to get to the point where I was down there, he had told me that he had seen me at student government venues, while he was working. And running for [car horn honks]-That looks like my mama, going to get her puppy. While I, while I was working in, in student government. And, you know, you, I feel like you just always learn lessons from everybody, you know, and different, everybody in life. And you, everybody's always meant to cross paths for different reasons, including like us, for whatever, unknown reason it is, some.... I always feel like, because we are, you know, the, the minerals that are in our body come from the cosmos, like we, you know, we are all connected. And it's what led me out to Washington, D.C. to do the work that I did with the Obama administration. And it's

also what gave me the courage to come back home. I had been out there, had this amazing career. I knew that I could keep going with this amazing career.

Mj Oatman [01:00:55] But it was also my reality that I had developed a certain skill set, in the words of this crazy elected official that I worked for, for four and a half years down in Boise, where, you know, he told me, "At the end of the day, the only thing that matters is the relationships that you build." And my mom had told me, as we were, before this man had even ever told me these words, as I was driving down for my second interview for this job, before I ever found out that I got it. My mom said, "I'm not really ready to let you go, you know, off into this big, you know, career world," you know, because I'm the youngest daughter in the family. And I'm, mind you, I'm was like in my late 20s, you know, very much ready for the career world. But she said, you know, the biggest reason why is, you know, "I'm afraid of the bridges that you're going to build, because it feels like you'll cross them and you won't come back." And so I remembered those words when I was talking with my grandfather, who I learned Nez Perce language with, and, you know, who taught my dad how to fish, and he was a World War Two veteran. So he's just very quiet. As a young girl, as a, as a young girl, we, I saw my grandpa every single day. He lived next door to us. And so, I would tell him, as I walked out the door "Bye grandma, bye grandpa, I love you." And I would always hear my grandma, "I love you, too." And my grandpa, "Mmm-hmm." He would never, ever, ever say those words back. It was always, "Mmm-hmm." And Harold Crick, you know, my Nez Perce language instructor, you know, he he said, "You know, you find a way that you can keep working with this curriculum," you know, and said, you know, "Don't be afraid to immerse yourself with the elders." And my comfort zone was, you know, to work with the elders that I had known, because, you know, a lot of my experiences with old Indian people, it's been like they're scary and they're mean. And then I found out, you know, that's, that's kind of true. That's like this, like this shell, or like this onion, and once you get past that layer, and get into a couple more layers, there's just so much richness. And I, I found that with my grandfather. And it was after my grandma, my grandmother had passed away. And he had told me that a lot of the stories that he was telling, he didn't tell, because, I don't know if he didn't want her to hear them, or ever find out. And it was mostly his war stories. And so I would go to him with questions about Nez Perce language. "How do you say this word? Or what's that word?" And it would usually be "[Nez Perce language] I forgot that. But", you know, and he would go into one of his stories. And I was really blessed to hear a lot of his World War Two stories. He would tell me, stories that (unknown name), Chief Looking-Glass's granddaughter, told about going down to Rapid River by wagon, when, you know, she was a young mother and bringing her children down there. And that, when they would go down there, that there was certain farm families along Grangeville that took care of them, and that there was a lot of the, the Indians, or the white farm families, along the prairie. That were, that very much wanted to protect what was left of, for the Indian people. And as they were living there, you know, in those places, and they would have, you know, the Indian families, by blood, that would travel down to those fishing sites. I guess it, his stories, of what he would tell me, that she told him, kind of changed my perspective because, you know, I grew up always thinking of Grangeville as being this like scary place, where the conflict between Indians and whites was so palatable, because of, like, one or two things that, you know, happened, you know, in the '80s or the '90s. You know, that, you know, just kind of stuck out from media. And then, I would hear from my grandpa those other stories of connection, of my family's, you know, to others. And, and so I think that with that also came that, that understanding that, um, we need to recognize, and realize that we are so much more connected than we are different. And especially when it comes to the conquest history. And the settlement history in, in this nation.

Mj Oatman [01:05:41] Because, you know, the land tenure of just my reservation alone, not speaking for any other land based tribe in this nation, is a gulf of gray area. I mean, the fine print of the code's covenants and restrictions on homes. I mean, I don't know if there's really a magnifying glass big enough to magnify them, to interpret them, about what it really means to own land on the Nez Perce Indian Reservation. And so. It's like we're, we're, as Indian people and as treaty, as treaty holders, and then furthermore, as a Nez Perce, I mean, you have to be, you know, three-quarter, I mean, one-quarter Nez Perce blood quantum to be enrolled. I mean, what other race in this world is there, uh, American Kennel Club Registry to be a member of it? And, and so, you know, with that, what do, what do we do with that? I mean to me, that again, goes back to this responsibility that we have, by blood to. For me, it's not to, what I thought when I was 25, 26 or 27 years old, of always be fighting and battling. But as you know, my mom told me and as you know, as other people that I've, I've crossed paths with is no...it's, it's build the bridges, build the bridges, to realize that we will come together with more of a shared responsibility to, to work on that preservation effort. And for me, a big part of that is in finding balance. It's not in finding equality. I will never be as strong as a man. I will never be a man. I don't want to be a man, any more than a man would want to carry the weight of what a woman has to, with the burdens or the benefits, of being a woman. Um, but honoring each other's strengths, and upholding each other, where there's any weakness and, and I, it don't matter if you're purple, or you're orange, or whatever color, I feel that that's just so universal. And getting back to an indigenous way of of knowing things, that's been a part of, of the Nez Perce way of life, before written and recorded history, is that you, the salmon, and the steelhead, and the elk. And the bear, during the time of our creation. They all gave something of themselves so that we could be here. And so, you know, they, we're a part of them, and they're a part of us. You know, there's. There's nothing hokey about that. You know, there's, there's, there's nothing... to be ashamed and, and speaking in that, in that tone and getting other people to realize and understand that it's, it's OK to feel that way. I mentioned earlier, you know, a lot of, a lot of people feel loss. They want to know who they are, and where they come from. And I have come to this belonging and sense, because, I don't know what to think about being a member of this club, with this blood. Why I was chosen to have it, why I was chosen to be born in this time, because I would have loved to have been born like three hundred years ago, prior to European contact, to see what these waters looked like, and to see what this landscape was like before it was a concrete world. And before, you know, digging her up. It was super important that was just not what was in the stars for me, you know, when they aligned and so. What I do now, with my own kids, is try to get them to realize what a sense of responsibility it is, for them to carry the blood. And to protect, and speak up for, things that don't have a voice for themselves. Because they made the sacrifice, during the time of our creation, to lose that voice and, you know, take care of us. To try to see what they have, as far as what I mentioned earlier, is the burden. But to also get them to recognize that, since 1492, the Indian people on this landscape have been carrying that burden, and feeling very little of the benefit. And we don't have a whole lot left. Our clean waters are being depleted. They're up Oro Grande right now, creating a very catastrophic situation for my children to have to deal with, down the road. Or their children to have to deal with down the road. To remind them that they have to find that balance themselves. You know, in their own individual walk and journey. And so for my son, I let him know. You know, Western education is not the end all. But believe me, you will find tools for yourself, if you make that journey, if you do it, and you don't finish it. You know, I'll be proud of you if you finish it, you, you know. But for now, it feels like we're in this state of triage, that we can't go to the model and shift over to what I said, where our young Indian kids can fish the rivers and wake up and learn the songs, and and learn and live that old way of life. I do feel that it's possible. I mean, I was at Standing Rock. I delivered food over there, you

know, during the Dakota Access Pipeline. And I saw the essence of that type of community, and what is possible. No, it's not utopia. Yes, there's, you know, a lot of a lot of things that can go wrong in that type of setting. But.... Just accepting the reality that we are all related, we're related to the salmon, we're related to the hemp rope that used to catch the salmon, to the rock weights that used to be thrown out to weight down the salmon, to the water that brought the salmon back. And that relationship of connectivity is a human connection. It's not an Indian connection. It's, it's just, it's not.

Mj Oatman [01:13:08] I guess, thanks for just coming into our, like I said, our tiny little world here, and, you know, does at times feel like, you know, a race against extinction.

Jim Thull [01:13:22] It is.

Mj Oatman [01:13:23] But, you know, like I said, at the same time, I don't want, I don't want my young daughter to, to to feel, feel the weight of that, you know? Because she's so pure and she's so young. And, and I don't. I almost I don't want her jaded by tribal politics. My parents, my mom, started bringing me to tribal government meetings when I was like twelve or thirteen years old. And so I would sit there and I would just listen to that, you know. And so maybe that's why. Because I was protected by my mother. You know, to go in and fight and protect those rights, so that my dad can be down there fishing. Because she was down there when I was pregnant, and she saw the battle. She saw women being arrested over fishing. She, you know, she knew that, at that time, being a young Nez Perce mother, having five kids, and she's under the age of twenty six years old with five kids, and she's struggling, that, at that time, even then, she knew that it was an investment into something bigger than her. And she says that, and she's, yeah, she sees that now. My brother does the same thing. You know, we got to we, we've got to start honoring our little ones for the gifts that they are, and stop exploiting our own children as commodities or treating them as possessions, because, what the creator gives, he can very easily take away. And those are just the types of life lessons that, you know, coyote stories from, you know, millennials, have told us, you know, those those are the lessons, through the Nez Perce oral tradition that have been lost, to kind of teach us to walk backwards, and see the world backwards, now. Because those laws aren't here anymore. And, you know, the coyote stories were a part of my Nez Perce language journey also. Second year is immersing in coyote stories. And so, you know, if we can find that balance with education, you know, finding ways to infuse who we are and where we come from. By, by bloodline, because that's that was what it was, was Harold said, "I need you to do a Nez Perce family tree, and use as many Indian names as you can, and use pictures." And so, through that project, I was like, 'Oh, okay, well, that means I got to talk to my grandpa.' And that's how he became my elder mentor was, you know, "Well, grandpa, you know, got this family tree and got to fill it out." And so that's, that was how my grandpa and I became connected. And my grandpa, when I was living and working back in Washington, D.C., was the one that gave me the courage to like, 'it's now time to come home.' You know, you've, you've been out there. You've learned things. You know, it's not quitting. It's just starting something else new back here.