

**Courage My Friends Podcast Series V – Episode 2**  
**Planet in Focus International Environmental Film Festival (October 12th-22nd)**

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**ANNOUNCER:** You're listening to *Needs No Introduction*.  
*Needs No Introduction* is a rabble podcast network show that serves up a series of speeches, interviews and lectures from the finest minds of our time

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**COURAGE MY FRIENDS ANNOUNCER:** COVID. Capitalism. Climate. Three storms have converged and we're all caught in the vortex.

**STREET VOICE 1:** The cost of living in the city is just soaring so high, it's virtually unlivable.

**STREET VOICE 2:** There seems to be a widening gap of the have and the have nots.

**STREET VOICE 3:** The climate is getting worse. Floods and fires. It's like we're living in a state of emergency.

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**COURAGE MY FRIENDS ANNOUNCER:** What brought us to this point? Can we go back to normal? Do we even want to?

Welcome back to this special podcast series by rabble.ca and the Tommy Douglas Institute (at George Brown College) and with the support of the Douglas-Coldwell-Layton Foundation. In the words of the great Tommy Douglas...

**VOICE 4:** Courage my friends; 'tis not too late to build a better world.

**COURAGE MY FRIENDS ANNOUNCER:** This is the *Courage My Friends* podcast.

**RESH:** How does film lend itself to climate justice? What issues does it spotlight? Through what lens? In whose voices? And how are the stories told? Join us as we look at the 24th annual Planet in Focus International Environmental Film Festival, now taking place in Toronto from October 12th to October 22nd.

Welcome back to the Courage My Friends podcast. I'm your host, Resh Budhu.

For our second episode, we are very pleased to shine the spotlight on this year's Planet in Focus International Environmental Film Festival, taking place at Toronto's Paradise Theatre from October 12th to 22nd.

We begin with a discussion on this year's program with the festival's Executive Director, Katherine Bruce. Filmmaker Deirdre Leowinata discusses her short film

*Keepers of the Land*. And we speak with filmmakers, Liz Marshall and Alfonso Salinas on the premiere of their feature length documentary. *S-YewYaw: AWAKEN*.

Katherine, welcome and thanks for joining us ...and in the midst of a film festival. So double thanks for that.

**KATHERINE:** My pleasure. Thank you for having us. And thank you so much for your interest in the festival.

**RESH:** Well, this is the 24th annual...

**KATHERINE:** It is.

**RESH:** Yeah. So the 24th Annual Planet in Focus International Environmental Film Festival, which began on October 12th, and is running until October 22nd. So tell us about this year's program.

**KATHERINE:** Well, I think this year's program represents something that's broadened our definition of environment enormously over the last probably eight years, to include social justice, climate justice is racial justice. You know, with that understanding that the environment from the 70s when it somewhat existed in its own silo, understandably, given the time politically - Not that it wasn't a political movement.

But I think this program definitely reflects that ethos that you must start from the place that climate justice is racial justice. So there are all sorts of ways of looking at that clearly. We have a film called *The Hearing* about asylum seekers and migration.

We had our opening night film last night which looks at deep sea mining. Yet another extractive- based solution to green energy. We have *Awaken*, Liz Marshall's film, which looks at Settler-Indigenous knowledge, the relationship between them, that passing and sharing of knowledge.

We have films about AI and what will we do with that time? How will it we all be compensated? What will a juster, fairer world look like? And I think understanding the environmental degradation, any solution, any framework for moving forward must look at issues of social justice and again, of climate and racial justice, gender parity. They're all connected.

**RESH:** And this is a film festival but it goes beyond a film festival because I see that from your program - I had a chance to scan it and it is very impressive I have to say.

**KATHERINE:** Oh, thank you.

**RESH:** I mean you have different types of speaking events as well.

**KATHERINE:** Yes, I think the idea is over time - and I think this is partly coming out of the pandemic and figuring out, you know, things are back to normal but we're all changed right? And audiences are changed. The way we go out and interact has changed ever so slightly you can feel it.

And we really decided this year to create a tighter program with as many panels and speakers, filmmakers present as possible. And we chose quite specifically to host it at the Paradise Theatre on Bloor Street - which is a slightly smaller house than some of the bigger theatres - that also has an extraordinary bar in the lobby.

And so last night, for instance, for our opening night film, it was wonderful in the sense that there was a crowd gathered around the bar before the film talking. And that continued after the film, right back out to the bar. Into the lobby, the conversation kept going. I was hearing snippets about people arguing, debating, wondering, questioning, thinking about the film and the ideas presented in it. And I love that idea of augmented screening events. I always have.

I think when you run an environmental film festival, and I've worked in this space, this intersection of arts and the environment for probably 20 years or something, people long for connection when they've seen these films that we present. They come away with questions. They come away with concerns. They come away with a desire to be involved, to be engaged with the issues. To help or questions about how they can engage and help. And that's what I think is so beneficial about always offering an audience an avenue, but also a space - a space to gather, if that makes sense.

**RESH:** It makes absolute sense. It goes beyond just go see the film and then go away. That's a separation between the creators and the audiences. It sounds very much like a community event.

**KATHERINE:** It is. It is. I come from the theater originally. And I loved being an actor in live theatre. I loved producing live theatre. I used to feel there's always a communion that happens in a space, when you put a live performance in front of a live audience. There's an exchange of energy. I love that idea that it's different every single time because of the uniqueness of who's in the audience and who's on stage. There's shifts with every performance. And I think it's a similar kind of thing with film.

Filmmakers are vital storytellers in our quest for solutions to the climate crisis and for climate justice. When filmmakers, can we present it's that much more powerful. But when they can't, you know, having speakers from the science community, from the activist community, from different nonprofit organizations, different thinkers, artists, activists coming together, to enhance that conversation. And to, again, create a space for those dialogues and connections so that people don't come away just feeling disheartened and that there's no point, you know?

**RESH:** Speaking of that because you have said and as you're saying now the festival is about highlighting environmental issues but really through the art of film and I wonder if you could speak a bit more to that. About how film lends itself to this conversation on climate?

**KATHERINE:** Well, obviously different than a live performance, a film has the capacity to have wide, wide distribution. There are so many streaming platforms now, which also have changed the landscape for accessibility to the content. And a film camera can go into all sorts of places that we can't visit.

Like last night with *Deep Rising*, you've got this unreal cinematography of the deep, deep, deep seas. These extraordinary, sometimes microscopic creatures that live down at the very, very depths of the ocean. It's humbling and moving and incredibly beautiful. And that camera and those filmmakers are giving a voice to those creatures, to those sea nettles that are being harvested at the rate of the equivalent of one car a minute. What are we doing taking those out of the ocean? What are the ramifications? And I wouldn't know that sea nettles existed if it wasn't for those cameras and that exploration, in order to then care about what the repercussions might be, as an specific example.

**RESH:** Now, again, as I said, I was looking at the program and you know, the festival this year certainly puts a powerful lens on so many of the issues contributing to, but also emerging out of the climate crisis, mining, sea nettles, as you're talking about nuclear testing.

**KATHERINE:** They're both extractive industries, right?

**RESH:** Exactly. Colonialism, climate anxiety, because you have your Eco Heroes there as well.

**KATHERINE:** Yep. With the *Climate Baby Dilemma* and Britt Wray speaking before, she's a phenomenal speaker. I really encourage people to come out to hear her speak on October 19th.

**RESH:** And it's also told through an array of artistic expression. And from voices that have been largely silenced. Immigrants, refugees, racialized, and especially Indigenous Peoples. I mean, this is a very diverse program in so many ways.

**KATHERINE:** Yes. you know we have two senior programmers, Leslie Johnson and Julian Carrington who are both extremely talented and I've had the fortune, the very good fortune of working with for many years now.

Julian, in his opening remarks last night spoke about how it becomes harder and harder to program an environmental film festival in many, many ways. Because I think generally, most people are hyper aware at this point that there are some problems with the health of our planet, our oceans, the air. You know, you didn't come out of a summer like we just had with forest fires and flooding and.. You must be aware that you know, something is amiss. So then your job as environmental storytellers and as environmental festival programmers is to not just make people aware of the issues of the extinction of a particular species or air quality, sort of a silo issue of the earth proper. You must look at all the inter political social and cultural intersections that weave their way through these so- called environmental issues.

And so yeah, you have to look at colonialism. You have to look at the structures in place that keep the extraction industry alive, that keep us using the extraction model to solve it, to come up with a so called green energy. And I think that there are solutions within the green energy movement, of course, but if it's still based on an extractive model, then we need to examine that more closely.

Indigenous peoples all over the world have suffered at the hands of mining and coal and gas plants in North America. The poorer neighborhoods are generally where these things are set up. So many extractive industries have profited on the backs of Indigenous peoples specifically and those who come from parts of the world where they don't have the economic clout to fight it. And that's on all of us, you know?

**RESH:** Absolutely. Now the festival began 24 years ago before we even started using terminology like climate crisis and global heating.

**KATHERINE:** Absolutely

**RESH:** Yeah. And before the environment was top of the news cycle or even for many, top of mind. So could you tell us a bit about the background and evolution of the festival?

**KATHERINE:** A man named Mark Haslam started the festival in 1999 with a group of Toronto artists and filmmakers, as I understand it. I mean, 24 years ago, the ImagiNative Film Festival was created. Within a couple years, the Reel Asian Film Festival was created. The Images Festival was created. Many independent festivals in Toronto, which are still going strong, were started around that time. So I think there must have been a real energy and groundswell for creating a space for different, unique voices in the landscape of festivals. And I think Toronto has always been a city of cinema, you know.

So they obviously felt that there was a niche, there was a need. And, from the beginning, Indigenous voices and issues were central to the festival.

I've looked at programs in the past and it does seem that a lot of the issues we are talking about now, they had their finger on from the beginning. Where we've changed is how we tell those stories, and how filmmakers are telling those stories.

For instance, a few years ago we opened our festival with Brett Story, a Toronto filmmaker, and the film is called *The Hottest August*. It's a climate story, but it's told completely differently than you would expect a climate change story to be told.

She interviews people in New Jersey through an intense heat wave about climate change and what they feel about the world ending, what they feel about the heat wave. It's absolutely fascinating and incredibly moving and there's not a lot of talk about climate science. It's just a credible collage of what people's interpretations are of what this heat wave means and where we're at.

Or *The Magnitude of All Things*. We screened that film in 2021, I believe. The filmmaker Jennifer Abbott, another Canadian filmmaker, her sister got cancer and she draws parallels between climate grief and her sister's illness. And again, it's a very powerful climate story, but it's not from a talking head, traditional documentary structure.

I think in some ways that's the biggest change. Yes, we have broadened our definition of environment over the years quite dramatically, but I think the roots of the festival always started there.

What's changed is styles of documentary filmmaking and how filmmakers have evolved and come up with new and creative and fresh ways to tell these stories and to incorporate all these intersections of... social justice has got to always be included as part of that story.

Whether it's the health of our oceans or forest fires or old growth forest or Indigenous land rights.

We carry the work of so many brilliant, brilliant filmmakers. And again It has evolved as the audience has evolved and as we've all come to understand.

Although I will say I'm still often shocked. For instance, I had a conversation not that long ago with some people and I mentioned the Great Pacific Garbage Patch and they had no idea what I was talking about. So, I sort of forget, I do, that I work in a very specific niche. And sometimes people have a general sense, okay, the environment is becoming a bigger problem, we need to pay more attention, but they're not necessarily aware of all the specifics.

So you're right Resh, there have been enormous cultural shifts as a society over 24 years. There's no question. So we have so far to go. That's all. I guess that's my point.

**RESH:** But we've come so far as well.

**KATHERINE:** We have and it's good to remember that. Thank you.

**RESH:** Absolutely. So, Katherine, for those who want to check out the Planet in Focus International Film Festival, what do they need to know?

**KATHERINE:** They need to know, first and foremost, our website, which is [planetinfocus.org](http://planetinfocus.org). The entire program and lineup of films is on our website.

And we run this weekend, Thursday to Sunday and then following weekend again from Thursday to Sunday. We chose that to sort of intensely work Thursday night to Sunday night and Thursday night to Sunday night. Thought it would help bring out the most amount of people. All of the films are there. You can buy a festival pass or you can buy individual tickets.

Again, all is on our website. There's a lot of incredible, incredible content and our Eco-Hero events are, are also up there.

**RESH:** Lovely. And for the listeners of this podcast, if they haven't already gotten out there, that means that that will be next week as well on October 19th to the 22nd, correct?

**KATHERINE:** Yes, October 19th is Britt Wray with *The Climate Baby Dilemma*. She's an amazing scholar on climate anxiety and grief and she'll be speaking on October 19th. We're closing out our festival with *Nuked*, Andrew Nisker's world premiere of a festival about the history of nuclear testing in the Bikini Atoll in the Marshall Islands. So you can keep the Oppenheimer thing going. It's a phenomenal, phenomenal film and we hope to have the mayor of Bikini Island with us that evening as well with Andrew. And Mustafa Santiago Ali will be speaking on Saturday night before the screening of *Silvicola* on the 21st, about old growth forest in BC.

Exciting events coming up next weekend. There's a lot of super exciting events tonight, including, the world premiere of Liz Marshall's, and Alfonso's film, *AWAKEN*.

**RESH:** And I'm also going to be speaking to them a little bit later.

**KATHERINE:** Oh, that's great. I'm so happy.

**RESH:** Because the festival is also launching films that hopefully will be in wider circulation.

**KATHERINE:** Yes, absolutely. All of these films. Absolutely.

**RESH:** And you also have on October 21st, the short film program,

**KATHERINE:** Indigenous Short Film Program. There are so many films, it's hard to name every one of them.

**RESH:** I can imagine. I can imagine. But again, it is a fantastic program. And this is also the first time it's running in person since the start of the pandemic as well.

**KATHERINE:** It's the first time running entirely in person. We had two outdoor opening nights during the pandemic in an attempt to keep the community together. But it's the first time the festival's been back entirely in person since 2019. Yeah.

**RESH:** Lovely. Well, thank you so much, Katherine.

**KATHERINE:** Thank you.

**RESH:** And good luck with the rest of the festival.

**KATHERINE:** Thank you very much, and thank you for your time and your interest in the festival. I really appreciate it.

**RESH:** Filmmaker Deirdre Leowinata discusses her short film *Keepers of the Land*.

Deirdre, welcome and congratulations on your film *Keepers of the Land*, which I understand is your first film and is a selection in the festival's Short Film Program. So first tell us about *Keepers of the Land*.

**DEIRDRE:** Yeah. Thanks for having me Resh.

*Keepers of the Land* is a 29-minute short, based on the coast of British Columbia, Canada. And it's about a very small nation, of about 350 people, who is doing a whole ton of work to steward their lands and waters and under this new age of reconciliation in Canada.

**RESH:** And the short film program that includes *Keepers of the Land* is running on Saturday, October 21st at the Paradise Theatre in Toronto.

**DEIRDRE:** Yeah we're really excited to be screening at Planet and Focus this year. It's our Canadian premiere and it's the perfect platform and the perfect audience for our film.

**RESH:** So could you just expand on that? So why the perfect platform? Why the perfect audience?

**DEIRDRE:** I think as Canada's environmental film festival, it attracts a crowd that really cares about what's happening in the world and who wants to do something to help change things or help improve things.

I think that because our film is a film of hope in this environmental space. I hope that it'll get people really excited about what's happening in Canada. Because this is just one Indigenous community in Canada, and there are so many other communities who are doing work like the KITASOO XAI'XAIS Nation, and who are really moving the needle in terms of Indigenous-led Conservation, and that's what our film is about.

**RESH:** You actually come from a background in environmental science, correct? And what brought you to filmmaking?

**DEIRDRE:** Yeah, yeah, I did a bachelor's degree in Ottawa in biology. I studied evolution, ecology and behavior. And I was actually based in the lab of Dr. Jeremy Kerr, who deals a lot with climate science and how it affects species ranges and biodiversity. So through that work, I got really politically engaged and I did a summer as well at the University of Alberta working on a project in northern BC in oil and gas country. And I think both of those experiences really activated the storytelling part of myself. And it really made me realize that science has a communication problem and science has a storytelling problem. Because I was studying all of these issues and



seeing at the same time how they were being represented in the media and it didn't seem to match. And there was so much disinformation out there.

So I decided not to pursue a Master's and instead I did a post-grad in environmental-visual communication at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto. It's a program through Fleming College. And then I got into the nonprofit world of communications. And I think I've been driven ever since I was little to do something to change the world in a positive way.

And for me, at least storytelling is how I can be most effective at that.

**RESH:** And through this incredible medium of film.

**DEIRDRE:** Yeah. And film is an amazing medium for it. I'm a very visual person and I think we're all really visual creatures and I think film can drive empathy and create empathy in such a powerful way.

**RESH:** Now, as you mentioned, there's a real focus on Indigenous Peoples and this year's film festival very much highlights films by and about Indigenous peoples from Canada, and also around the world. So if you could speak a bit more to why you chose this focus for yourself as a filmmaker.

**DEIRDRE:** Well the way my partner, and I work, we work together and we work quite locally in conservation on the West Coast. And a lot of our work is driven by long-term relationships with people and place in British Columbia. And we were invited into the Kitasoo Xai'xais Nation to help them create a film by my Co-Director. Doug Newsloss, who is the Elected Chief of the Nation and was at the time the Stewardship Director as well. And they have in the past been really good at doing the work, but haven't necessarily been the best at telling their story. So Doug invited us in to help them create a film about the work they do at the Stewardship Office. And so that's kind of how this project started.

When I first pitched the project budget, it was supposed to be a small budget for about a week of filming. And it was going to be a five to seven minute piece. And then it, continued to evolve and we ended up filming for about a year, with a few hiccups. And then editing over the next year. So it became a couple of year project and it's now 29 minutes.

And that kind of speaks to the amount of work that the Nation is doing. And also we felt it was really necessary to capture all the seasons because it's quite seasonal work.

As you can see in the film, their stewardship work is tied very closely to their culture and their traditions and that's quite seasonal. So we had to film over the course of all four seasons.

**RESH:** It must have been beautiful though.

**DEIRDRE:** It is probably one of the most beautiful territories in the entire country, but I'm probably biased.

**RESH:** Well, maybe, but we'll let you go. . .

**DEIRDRE:** Thank you.

**RESH:** So this is an interesting partnership between Indigenous and non-Indigenous filmmakers, and this certainly is not the only film where we see this happening. So could you speak a bit about that, how you work together?

**DEIRDRE:** Yeah, I think it's really important and essential for non-Indigenous allies to help and work with Indigenous communities who want to tell their own stories. Because a lot of these places are struggling with capacity and it takes a lot of intention and a lot more time than I think the classic film industry is used to. But I think if we make that time, and really foster great relationships, then it can be really powerful.

We worked really closely with the community to create a film that highlighted how incredible the work they're doing is. And sometimes I think it's really hard from the inside, you know, if you've just got your head down and you're doing the work, I think it can be really hard for anyone to see how amazing you are. So I see that as my role and our role as allies.

You know, this film is as much about telling Klemtu how amazing they are as telling the world how amazing Klemtu is. And sometimes I think it helps to have an outsider perspective to say: Wow, what you're doing is amazing and deserves to be seen on a world stage. And let's help you make that happen.

**RESH:** For the longest time the voices of Indigenous Peoples have really been ignored from climate conversations. Right? The relationship, Indigenous ways of knowing the environment, the climate, what that means and how integrated it is to so much of the histories and the communities.

Could you just speak a bit further on the importance of putting an Indigenous lens on climate and environmental issues and specifically, how are they dealing with it - without giving too much away from the film - but how are they dealing with it within your film?

**DEIRDRE:** It's astounding, actually, that Indigenous people have been excluded from these conversations for so long, because their mindset and their frame of mind is so different from classic colonial way of looking at these issues. And it's a really essential one to have.

I think one of the key messages in the film is who better to protect the places than the people who live there. And Indigenous people have lived in these places for more than 10, 000 years. I think the most recent data from the coast shows that it's

at least 15, 000 years. And there have been records all over the place that date back even further than that.

And if you live in a place for that long. If you live in one place and rely on that place to sustain you, then you stop thinking about the environment as external to you. And I think that's something that the colonial mindset is really missing, is that we look at the world as external to us. We have these words like environment and nature that separate ourselves from the natural world.

I was sitting on a panel a few weeks ago with a bunch of really incredible Indigenous leaders, and they were all saying they're from different communities in Canada and the United States, and they are all saying that they don't have a word for wilderness. Because it's just the place that they live. And I think we can learn a lot as citizens of this world and policymakers and climate activists or whatever you want to call yourself, we can learn a lot from Indigenous communities. We just need to listen to these people more, and we need to give them the stages that they deserve because I think we'll learn a lot more than we know.

**RESH:** Indeed, indeed. So we're all part of the integrated same ecology. What else do you hope that *Keepers of the Land* will mean for audiences? What are you hoping audiences will take away from this?

**DEIRDRE:** One thing I'm really hoping the audiences will take away from the film is that there's a shift happening in Canada and in the world in terms of how we think about conservation and conservation financing. And Indigenous people like the Kitasoo Xais'xais Nation, are at the tables. They're directly changing policy. And they're directly implementing conservation measures in their territories. And they have the data, they have the science, they're doing the work. They're combining Western science and traditional knowledge in a way that no one else is doing.

So let's think about the ways that we can give them more power because they're the ones who are really moving the bar.

The provincial governments, the federal governments are not changing things as much as the communities that have these territories all across Canada. And, you'll see in the film, the Kitasoo over the last few years has achieved more in their territory than any other form of government.

So, if we start thinking about Nations as people that we can support financially, You know, they're, not nonprofits, but the Kitasoo Nation is currently trying to raise an endowment fund for their stewardship work. And I think if you're trying to think about how to be most effective with your donations and your support, I think supporting Nations is one of the most effective ways to use your money and use your time, because they are literally at the government tables now in Canada, changing policies.

**RESH:** And policies that will benefit all of us.

**DEIRDRE:** Yeah, and policies that will make sure that we have clean air, clean water.

It's because they live in one place and they need that place to sustain them for the next 10, 000 years. Because that's their time-frame that they're looking at.

We've only been in these places for a few hundred years, especially in North America.

And I think that really affects how we think of time. We're used to being able to move around. And if one place doesn't sustain us anymore, then we can just move to another place. And I think that mindset is highly problematic and really contributes to how we think about our resources. But I think there'll come a time when we can't think like that anymore because there won't be enough.

But the Indigenous people who have been living in these places, they're already there and they're already thinking in a more sustainable way.

You know, everyone talks about seven generations, and they're already thinking in the thousands of years. They're not thinking in the next election cycle. They're not thinking in the next quarter or however we like to think about it in terms of capitalism and resource extraction and industrial cycles.

**RESH:** *Keepers of the Land*, 29 minutes well spent to change minds and hopefully to change policy as well.

So *Keepers of the Land* can be seen on Saturday, October 21st as part of the Festival Short Film Program at the Paradise Theatre in Toronto.

And for those outside Toronto, will there be other or future opportunities to see *Keepers of the Land*?

**DEIRDRE:** Yes. We are going to Banff Film Festival. We're also going to the Red Nation Film Festival in Beverly Hills. And we'll be rolling things out on our website as we go along.

So check out our website at [keepersofthelandfilm.com](http://keepersofthelandfilm.com).

And we'll be posting any screenings there and we'll also be updating on future screenings and future availability. We're on social, we're on our website.

And I think it's a really hopeful story that will maybe give people something positive to think about.

**RESH:** Wonderful. And we will be posting that website link in the show notes to this episode. So thank you so much Deirdre, and congratulations again.

**DEIRDRE:** Thanks so much.

**RESH:** And we speak with filmmakers, Liz Marshall and Alfonso Salinas on the premiere of their feature length documentary. *S-YewYaw: AWAKEN*.

Liz and Alfonso, welcome and congratulations on your feature length film, *S-Yew Yaw AWAKEN* that premiered at this year's festival on October 13th. Liz, can you give us a brief overview of the film?

**LIZ:** Yes, and thank you for pronouncing S-Yew Yaw correctly that is the Indigenous name for Awaken, and we wanted to lead with the Indigenous language because the film is very much about cultural preservation and featuring, spotlighting, centering for Indigenous Elders and their legacy stories, as well as their teachings.

And as a non-Indigenous Director, I've been invited to witness and walk alongside this incredible journey and it's really been quite an honor and a privilege and many new friends and beautiful community-based work.

**RESH:** Alfonso, this is a very personal film for you. This is very much your story. You're also the filmmaker as well. Could you speak to what this film means to you and again, some of the core themes of *AWAKEN* and how it is part of your personal journey.

**ALFONSO:** I think I'm very proud of what this film has captured. It's a small part of my journey of what I have gone through in my life. And I think it's very inspirational because it's a connection to our Elders and that's what's very important for everyone to do, connecting with your Elders and taking their teachings I think is important. I hope that with this film that it inspires others to do that and take those teachings, especially with Indigenous history.

**RESH:** And, you know, speaking of that, what struck me was how really important chapters of the history of this land, of this country is actually captured within your family history. I had the privilege of seeing this film and, you know, seeing your conversations with your grandfather and your sister's conversations with her father.

**ALFONSO:** Yeah, my sister Echo, she's a good friend of mine. ,we're not blood related. She's from another Nation, but I'm very close with her and her dad as they lived in our community for many years. Yeah, so with those teachings, with the vulnerability, with how open our Elders were in the film, even as filmmakers, we were very vulnerable as well, sharing our own journeys. But I think how powerful that was.

We are very honored and happy to share those stories. And help it with our own journeys. Because our journeys are, you know, they're not over yet. They're not over until our last days. And this is our purpose. We've found our purpose and it's helping us thrive and hoping to inspire others.

**RESH:** Now, both of you and your team, as filmmakers, are not just behind the cameras, but again, you're very much in front of it. Liz, why this choice?

**LIZ:** I moved from Toronto three years ago, during the pandemic to the Sunshine Coast. And that is the unceded territory of the Shishalh and Squamish Peoples. It was like coming home because I spent my childhood there and my family is there as well.

But my commitment at a community-based level was to really engage and learn and go much deeper in my own journey around learning about being a non- Indigenous ally. And the Shishalh Nation, there's a lot of self governance, empowerment and incredible community with the surrounding Syiyaya Movement, which is a reconciliation movement. It's grassroots. And my aunt is the co-founder of that alongside Chief Gary Fuschek, and they co-founded the Syiyaya Reconciliation Movement. And I wanted to be part of that. And I feel like this film is a small offering, but it's part of the solidarity work.

So like I said earlier, it is very much community work. And so it's very personal. And it's very significant.

**RESH:** Now, as I said, I had the opportunity to watch S-YewYaw AWAKEN and I have to say it is a really poignant testimonial to the meaning and the power and the complexity of healing. And I was struck by the role that the film itself actually plays in this process. And Alfonso, tell us a bit about how this film became part of the process of healing and reconciliation.

**ALFONSO:** Well, some people, didn't have the opportunity to participate or weren't around during the time of creating a canoe family, doing our very first canoe awakening ceremony. Coming together as a community. Paddling out in the waters with our dear Elder, who's... may have been her last time doing it. And that for me is huge.

It's a huge part of the healing. Huge part of the journey. And it's only the beginning for the healing for our community. The whole purpose of creating a canoe family is to give back up where our ancestors come from. To feel proud, to make our Elders proud, you know. Give them something to think about and be happy about seeing our younger generations getting back to our old ways as best we can. And just helping with those traumas that our Elders have gone through. The intergenerational trauma that the next generations are going through. Trying to change that in a way to get out of this modern life; to getting back to our old ways. And then also carrying the drum, sharing the songs. I've had many people tell me how powerful it is to just listen and be there to witness. When I share a song and share the words to be part of that healing.

Yeah, for me, and this is what I would like for other Indigenous people as they are going through their healing journeys, is to find that purpose. It is up to us to continue our culture and continue our tradition. So that for me gave me purpose and it has

given me pride to where I feel a lot of healing in it. And I just want to take lead in that journey and bring as many people along with me as much as I can.

**RESH:** And the conversations, again, are so powerful. Talking about sovereignty, the fight for jurisdiction, the legacy of the residential school system and the trauma that that has left. And the tagline of the film is: *Healing people, heals the land; healing the land, heals people*. And Alfonso just to continue with you. What role does the land, does the natural world play in this film and in Reconciliation?

**ALFONSO:** Well, the land is a peaceful place. It is away from colonialism. We did our best to decolonize this film as much as we can. We even did things away from this film and reconnected ourselves as much as we can with the land. Going for sweats, going for baths, things like that. So the land is very important for that connection to our ancestors. And it's not every day we get to go out and go and get away from the town or the city, because a lot of the time, especially on the Sunshine Coast, you need a boat to get away, to get far away from town. So every once in a while we do travel up our inlet to go reconnect with our ancestors in the land. It's a big part of the healing.

**RESH:** And that's interesting that you need to decolonize the filming process as well. And Liz, you have been making films for a while. You're certainly a stalwart of the Climate in Focus Film Festival. Could you speak to that, decolonizing the filming process?

**LIZ:** Yes, it was like having a foot in two different worlds. So one foot in the demands and the scheduling and the timelines and the production details. We had a very rigorous one-year timeline to develop and then deliver the film to our main funder partner, which is Telus Originals.

That's a very, very tight timeline, especially for a film of this nature. But it is a tight timeline for any feature documentary. So one Foot was in that world which can be intense. And it's also very good to have deadlines. We got a lot done. And then another foot was in this timeless reality.

You know, this otherworldly, timeless space that was part of all the ceremony, part of the Indigenous teachings. And nature, being in nature, which has a different sense of time, it has a different metronome, it has a different energy and message.

And I feel for myself, it was straddling these two realities. And sometimes it was just finding that balance and other times it was hard and it was an enormous amount of unlearning and learning at the same time. So a simultaneous process in this cross-cultural immersion of unlearning some ways of being and doing work. And at the same time, using those skills and using that vehicle to get this project made and now out into the world. But at the same time, having this incredible honor to be part of witnessing these beautiful timeless stories and teachings.

**RESH:** And this film is about so much, and it's also very much, as we've said, about relationships. The conversations with Elders are beautiful, they're funny, painful, also

hopeful. And then there is the relationship, as you've talked about, Liz between Indigenous and non-Indigenous filmmakers on this project.

Alfonso, as an Indigenous partner, what was the meaning of this relationship to you?

**ALFONSO:** I don't really find a meaning to it. I just appreciate it.

Liz reached out to me, she was already in contact with Echo. Echo reached out to me and we talked about just this opportunity and it just grew. It grew to where we are very close in our friendships. It's like we're a family now.

We've gone on this journey where we've learned so much about each other and what happened on the film, on and off the film, it was a lot of healing. And now we get to share that story with the world, which I think is the most important thing.

It's brought us closer. And I feel like we are helping people by sharing our stories. And I'm just happy with it and happy with our relationship, our family that we've created together.

**RESH:** And in terms of sharing it with the world, Alfonso, what do you hope audiences take with them from AWAKEN?

**ALFONSO:** Well, just to be open to listen. I know there's still racism out there, but there's also a lot of people that want to learn. And it shouldn't be a fight. I don't want anyone to fight. And I don't want Indigenous people to fight with non-Indigenous. I don't want non-Indigenous to fight with non-Indigenous, but just to listen. Cause we all have stories. We all have to heal together. And this is a great way of doing it.

**RESH:** I have to say this is not a film that you easily leave behind. It certainly hasn't left me. So Liz, I guess the same question for you. What are you hoping that audiences take away from this?

**LIZ:** Well, that would be part of it, is that it doesn't easily disappear in your consciousness. That it has a imprint, it has a lasting impression that you reflect on that stays within your heart, your mind.

I think that is the power of this medium, this genre of documentary, as a, you know, as a tool in reaching people and fostering a new way of seeing, a new way of looking and feeling about the world and thinking. And that's really always been my commitment to the art-form of documentary. And so that would be my hope, is that the film is like a key; that it opens something for people that is positive, that invites people.

The film is an invitation for everyone to consider what it means to decolonize as a non-Indigenous person. And the notion of healing and intergenerational healing. And listening and centering and focusing on Indigenous voices, Indigenous stories. The



truth, the pain, the suffering, but also the humor, the wisdom, the knowledge, all of it bundled together in that very three dimensional, deep and beautiful way.

You know, filmmaking is an opportunity to elevate stories and people. And that's what I hope that we've done.

**RESH:** And for those who have missed the premiere showing of the film, AWAKEN can also be seen at Vancouver's VIFF Center in late November and at the Raven's Cry Theater in Sechelt, BC in mid-December.

And these and other showing dates will be posted on the film's website, [s-yewyaw.ca](http://s-yewyaw.ca), which is also linked in the show notes to this podcast.

**LIZ:** And people can check out our website to keep their finger on the pulse of our film and news and screenings and things like that, [s-yewyaw.ca](http://s-yewyaw.ca).

**RESH:** And so, Alfonso and Liz, thank you so much for joining us. And once more, congratulations on S-YewYaw AWAKEN.

**LIZ:** Thank you so much.

**RESH:** That was Liz Marshall and Alfonso Salinas, the filmmakers of *S-YewYaw: AWAKEN*. Deirdre Leowinata on her film, *Keepers of the Land*. And Katherine Bruce, Executive Director of the 24th annual Planet In Focus International Environmental Film Festival.

The film festival is running until October 22nd at the Paradise Theatre in Toronto, so be sure to check it out.

And for more information on the festival program and the filmmakers, please visit [planetinfocus.org](http://planetinfocus.org).

More information on S-YewYaw: AWAKEN, and future show dates and locations can be found on [s-yewyaw.ca](http://s-yewyaw.ca).

Links are also in the show notes to this episode.

And this is the Courage My Friends podcast. I'm your host, Resh Budhu.

Thanks for listening.

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