

**Courage My Friends Podcast Series II – Episode 7**  
**Climate Anxiety and Climate Justice Organizing: Fearing the Future, Finding Hope and Fighting for Our Planet – Part 1**

[music]

**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

[music transition]

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

**STREET VOICE 1:** It's been two years already. If we can't get it together to deal with this world-wide pandemic, how are we going to deal with the climate crisis?

**STREET VOICE 2:** The future just seems so uncertain. What do say to my kids?

**STREET VOICE 3:** This is outrageous! The rich are getting richer, the are getting poorer. Where is the compassion? Where is the solidarity?

[music]

**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:** As the world grapples with a climate crisis, steeped in colonial oppression and capitalist greed, are answers to be found within Indigenous rights, sovereignty and ways of knowing? Where status quo politics continue to accelerate this crisis, how are the world's youth organizing for their futures? And why is their leadership so critical at this moment?

In the first segment of this special two-part episode of the Courage My Friends podcast, *Climate Anxiety and Climate Justice Organizing: Fearing the Future, Finding Hope and Fighting for Our Planet*, we are very pleased to welcome Bryanna Brown.

Bryanna is Inuk and Mi'kmaq from Nunatsiavut, Labrador. She is the originator of the Land Back movement and advocates for the sovereignty of Indigenous Peoples,

as well as Black and People of Colour communities and land ownership and reclamation as a means of environmental protection and self-determination. Bryanna is a traditional storyteller, knowledge-keeper and public speaker. She is on the National Steering Committee and Climate Policy Advisory Council of Indigenous Climate Action and is currently working with the Keepers of the Circle and the Climate Emergency Unit with the David Suzuki Foundation to establish a Just Transition campaign in Newfoundland and Labrador.

She consults on anti-human trafficking and advocates for the rights of women, Indigenous Peoples Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and environmental injustice in relation to Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and persons with disabilities. Welcome Bryanna. It's lovely having you here.

**BRYANNA:** Thank you so much. I'm honored to be here. And I really appreciate you including me in this podcast today.

**RESH:** As a climate activist Bryanna, you and others like yourself have taken on one of the most serious, if not the most serious crisis we've ever faced as a planet. Where did your commitment, where did your passion for climate justice come from?

**BRYANNA:** Oh, I think that that's a really, really good question. When I went to university I was doing my bachelor of business administration and I hadn't had a lot of background knowledge in terms of environmental studies or gender studies and things like that. But I found throughout my personal experiences, it was something that was extremely consistent in my day to day life.

So when I was still going to university in 2019, I was invited to go to a conference called *Power Shift: Young and Rising*. And I met so many people from across Canada and many Indigenous delegates and staff from the Indigenous Climate Action steering committee. I was very, very inspired by the works of other peoples, but I was also given the opportunity for the first time to protest. And Nigel from Indigenous Climate Action - he's no longer with ICA, but he had provided me a megaphone in front of, I think it was the Suncor building here in Ottawa, to speak. And that was my first time being given any opportunity to really speak in a protest so I was very nervous, but I felt the need to say what I had to say, and I felt like I should be brave and speak my truth regardless of how controversial it may be.

And at that time I found so much liberation in that because I had disclosed many social justice issues that I was experiencing at the time, for the first time, in front of a large group of people. I was struggling with many, many different issues in my own personal life with intergenerational trauma and systemic discrimination, especially in the healthcare system, and environmental displacement, culture shock, just so many different things in isolation with myself. And I had realized over time that that is one of the main causes of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

And, at that time it was extremely hard for me to speak as well because, in 2016 I was hit by a car in a pedestrian vehicle accident. And afterwards I had so much trouble accessing healthcare because a lot of doctors did not believe that I was sick

or that the impact was not that hard when I was hit by the car. But really it was slowly getting worse and worse and affecting my ability to attend school and my ability to advocate for myself and work and just so many different things. So, I feel like my position, my social location was changing due to those new disabilities that I was experiencing and trying to navigate.

So, over time I started to educate myself more on the reasons why I might not be getting the healthcare that I need because of systemic racism in the healthcare system. And I had realized that this was something that a lot of other people, especially Inuit in Labrador were experiencing and not just myself, which is another thing that was starting to just really take me out of that isolation. And over that period of time when my body and my energy became weaker because of the disabilities, I had to find new avenues for myself to be able to survive and to not be taken advantage of due to my socioeconomic and political circumstances and social location in life.

It really, really opened my eyes to the type of growth that I would need to go through to learn much more about other people's social injustice issues and human rights denials that were happening around Canada; so that I would be able to create a safe community for myself, where I could be truthful and be honest and speak about things that can often be really controversial because the denial of the human rights of Indigenous People's benefits those that are taking from the land, those that are stealing the land and colonizing it.

**RESH:** When you're speaking of this, I mean, that is so much trauma to go through and so much pain. And yet you went to the climate protest when you're still in a state of healing. Did you find healing and empowerment then within protest movements and within the climate justice movement?

**BRYANNA:** I certainly did because at that first Power Shift conference I met so many kind people, especially Indigenous youth who shared very, very similar struggles to mine. And I felt like I could relate to them. And just everybody's different intersections within themselves contributed so much to my understanding of articulating my own inner self and thoughts. So, it was extremely liberating for me. And having come in contact with Indigenous Climate Action really, really changed my life.

At the first conference I really did not know anything about Indigenous Climate Action. And later on in that same year in 2019 in June, I was with the Labrador Land Protectors and we had come to Ottawa. That is when we had originated the Land Back Movement. And there was very, very, very few people at this action or protest. We were protesting the Mega Dams that start in Manitoba and run along the Churchill River all the way to Labrador into the Labrador Sea. Because those Mega Dams are causing methyl mercury poisoning in our traditional food chains impeding our ability to participate in our cultural practices and hunt in a sustainable way and also causing flooding in the nearby Indigenous communities. That's something that really, really scared me and I realized that these projects coming into our Indigenous lands really, really affected me as well.

Like when I was 19, there were a lot of man-camps for the Muskrat Falls now Core Energy Project, I think right now it's called NL Hydro. But because of those man-camps, there were a large number of men outnumbering the women in most spaces when they would come into town in Happy Valley Goose Bay where I grew up. And I was a bartender at the time, trying to save money to go to school. I was working two full-time jobs.

I just realized a lot of the violence that came with that and the different types of substances it would bring into the town because of the drug tests that they would do at the projects. Marijuana would typically be in your system for about 30 days or so, whereas if they were to do cocaine, it leaves your system within one to two days. So I noticed a lot of people getting hooked on these types of drugs and they would be in these man-camps for two to three weeks without seeing any women, seeing anybody, any of their family and feeling very isolated themselves. So when they got out, they would celebrate and come to the bar. But there would be about 40 men and four women at the place at the time. And I just noticed how much it really affected our community. So that was really hard for me to experience, but also not say anything about it was really eating away at me without me even realizing.

When I finally met people who were voicing the truth and they weren't afraid of any violence that would come towards them because of it, just made me feel very liberated. And after being a part of that Land Back Movement I didn't realize it would catch on to become a movement because there was very few people at the protest. It felt like there was probably maybe like 13 of us. But everyone there was extremely, extremely important to be able to bring attention to what we were fighting for.

Later on I had to leave Calgary because I was a House Mother for Reset Calgary for women who are coming out of jail or who were detoxing from a lot of different substances, especially meth - crystal meth in Alberta is a really, really big issue there. I've never seen anything like it - and a lot of women who were escaping human trafficking. And eventually that became very, very hard. And because I'm Indigenous and it was a Christian-based program, it became difficult for me to deal with interpersonal things within those dynamics. And I only lived there for about four months

I moved to Ottawa and I was staying in a shelter. So my conditions got worse over time. But that is when I had applied to be on the steering committee with Indigenous Climate Action.

When I was getting ready for the interview, I remember just sitting in the shelter and reading about Indigenous Climate Action and saw they had brought a really large banner saying Land Back to COP25 in Madrid, Spain. And that's when I realized that Land Back had caught on as something larger than just that one protest that we had with the Labrador Land Protectors on June 10, 2019.

**RESH:** So the way in which you were the originator of the phrase "Land Back", then could you just go a little bit more into that?

**BRYANNA:** Yeah, sure. The night before June 10 , I was with my cousins, Amy Norman and Aaron Saunders. And we were just drawing posters with our markers, you know, just bonding because I don't get to see them often.

And it was really late. I think it was probably like 1:00 AM and I said to Amy, I said, "What if I wrote LAND BACK on the sign, do you think that's weird? I think it's just really simple. And to the point." She said, "Yeah, go ahead, do it. You can try." I was like, "Okay, I'll give it a shot. See what happens." and that's honestly what happened.

**RESH:** Wow. And it was born! It got right to the point. So what does Land Back mean to you? What is the philosophy of that phrase?

**BRYANNA:** Wow, I think that's a good question. I was really, really impressed by how it had gained so many different definitions, but very similar definitions across organizations. I was really surprised, even Ryerson University had written a Yellowhead Institute Paper Land Back Report on it.

I find other people are teaching me so much. And I think it's extremely important that it is about the collective energy of Indigenous Peoples and our allies, Black and Indigenous Peoples and People of Color who are protecting the land throughout the world.

I was really surprised that it was a global movement. And something that I really noticed was the solidarity that had began to grow amongst so many people because of it. And for me, it was really about consent and Free, Prior and Informed Consent over our land and our body.

It was really important that through this movement, Black and Indigenous solidarity was being fostered and growing. Because without the liberation of Black lives and Black peoples, no person of color - people of the global majority - or Indigenous Peoples are safe. If Black peoples are experiencing racism and discrimination, we all are. There's just so many ways in which we blindly contribute to that white supremacy or upholding that white supremacy and denying the rights of Black and Indigenous Peoples to have our own voices and to create safer spaces for ourselves and for the environment, I think is just so important. And I think that really ties in with Indigenous Climate Action's value of amplifying voices of the most marginalized peoples that there are, because we're often silenced so much.

For a reason, I feel like a lot of larger corporations and people who benefit from our oppression are very, very afraid to hear our truths and to see us coming together as a larger community and building that community and growing it. And I just really appreciate that because I feel like so many changes could be made from that.

**RESH:** And I like how you said "the world's majority people", because Indigenous, Black, racialized people, are truly the world's majority people. But what you're talking about, not only in terms of being on the front lines of the crisis, and we'll speak more about that, but also in not being listened to. In not having their expertise and

knowledge considered, is part of I think what we refer to as environmental racism, is it not?

**BRYANNA:** Exactly. Yes. We're often just always silenced.

During the time of residential schools, I feel like they were used as detention facilities to allow for land theft; which had also broke down our relations to family and culture and the land, causing intergenerational trauma. And because we had that breaking down of our relations to ourselves and our families and all of our relations, it became really, really hard to come together in solidarity and to create our own self-sovereignty as well. Because when we experience the breaking of our family and our relations and because of that pain that we inherit from that destruction we are often disconnected from our own emotions and our own inner self. We are kind of forced in a way into a more individualistic mindset, which benefits the capitalist society which we are in.

**RESH:** Going back to the meaning of the land. Growing up, what has the land meant to you? What has it meant to your community in Nunatsiavut?

**BRYANNA:** Nunatsiavut means "our beautiful land". Growing up the land has always been very, very important to me because in Inuit culture, and I know it's similar in many Indigenous cultures, my mom and dad taught me that all things have a spirit. So I must respect every single thing that I use or that I am given and, use that to the fullest to respect the object.

It makes me think that we are all matter in different forms, just vibrating at different frequencies. And so that is why I cannot disrespect any blessings provided to me from the Earth and the universe. I remember if I was ever wasteful with anything as a kid, my mom .. It would be like horrible. Like I would be shunned. It would be the worst ever, because we had to have so, so much respect for every single thing and to not waste things and pollute the environment more. It was mostly to make sure that we are grateful for the thing. Especially if we ever had animals that we hunted. It's extremely important that because you took the life of that being you have to respect every single part of that being. You need to use every part of the body and the bones and the fur, just everything.

So when trying to walk in two worlds, I was always really conflicted and trying to operate in a more colonial manner just to survive, but then also try to keep these teachings that were passed down to me through culture in my mindset when operating in everyday life. It can be really confusing. But I feel like, those values of having respect and treating everything as though it has its own spirit made me really, really grateful for so many things and I find that that grounds me when I get too lost in the other stuff.

**RESH:** That's beautiful Nunatsiavut means "our beautiful land". And right now, where Canada is actually warming at two to three times the rate of the rest of the world, we also have specific communities, Nunatsiavut being one of them, that is actually right

on the edge of that. How is the climate crisis being experienced there? What are you seeing when you are back home in your community right now?

**BRYANNA:** Back in March, I had traveled to Labrador with Keepers of the Circle. And we had done interviews with many Inuit women to question, whether they had ever experienced being a part of an impact assessment process for any natural resource extractive projects that were coming into our lands. And the majority of the women had never, ever experienced that or been a part of any type of impact assessment.

So that was very telling to me because it really shows how silenced we are and how undervalued our knowledge is as Peoples of those lands. That work was really, really important to me as well, because with that data, potentially we could make changes.

But when I went there I know that the people I had interviewed and even family members I have, they're noticing the impacts of the hydro dam on the water. And they're also experiencing a lot of flooding as well. And many people who live in the Valley, in Happy Valley Goose Bay, are really afraid of losing their homes. A lot of homes are along the river and could easily just fall into the river that's starting to flood.

I also noticed that there are a lot of people who are drowning now, when they go out onto the ice. Growing up, I would always go with my family to our cabins and we would travel on the ice to get there. There's a lot of people there who do that and they just know the land, they know the trails to go on and they know what ice is safe to go on; that is thick enough to hold your Skidoo and, your cometic and everything so that you don't fall through. But now, because of the change in the weather, it's a lot harder to read the snow. It's harder to read the the land to understand where it's safe to go. And a lot of people are drowning because of it.

That's something I spoke to my grandma with when I was there. So that really hard to deal with and I personally get extreme anxiety just partaking in that. I get really nervous when people take me with them on their skidoos now to go onto the land, onto the ice, because there's large patches of slush, slushy water that's starting to melt and I'm there like holding my breath as we drive past it. Because it's just really hard to predict now.

**RESH:** So you can't even trust the traditional knowledge. You can't trust the ground beneath your feet. I mean, certainly that would give rise to a great deal of anxiety. And one of the most prevalent mental health impacts, especially among young people is climate anxiety. So could you speak a bit more to the meaning of climate anxiety? How does it play a role or does it play a role within your work as a climate justice organizer?

**BRYANNA:** Definitely. I do experience that a lot because. I grew up with a very strong connection to the land. And I just feel that it protects me so much. I feel that the land witnesses all that we experience and I feel like it just holds me and hugs me

and just provides me so much in every, every way, the water, the trees. Everything, the medicine from the plants, just so so much.

And I get a lot of anxiety because I just know that this culture of capitalism and destruction is so rampant and so many people just want to be successful. They want to be the alpha. They want to have the most resources possible. And those with the largest resources, have the most power and say politically, and it's really, really easy for these organizations and political groups to deceive us and think that they're doing something about it. Think that they have the right solution while what they're providing is false solutions that is satisfying and palatable when hearing so that we trust blindly something someone said. And because of that, it's often followed by no or very little action. So, experiencing that narcissistic abuse from institutions and political groups is very exhausting and I feel like delusional. And for me, it does make it hard to try to think of ways to overcome that or to get my voice heard amongst it or change anybody's ideas.

And sometimes all I can do is just take a day and not have the weight of all that come onto me and just practice self-care and just be okay. And with the fact that I'm enough and what I'm doing is enough and hopefully planting seeds in other people's consciousness. And hopefully they could teach me as well.

But I do get this really big feeling of doom sometimes. Especially when I really notice that the messages that we're hearing from the most influential people are just corrupt. Is lacking truth. So I definitely feel it. I definitely get nervous. But I feel like, I'm, stronger than that. You know, I feel like my love for the animals and the land and the peoples that I grew up with and the peoples that are parts of my communities, I feel like that love just somehow is able to overpower a lot of things. Even just love for self, I find allows me to come out of feelings of darkness a lot. I feel like a common denominator among all people... we are the result of the love of all of our ancestors. There was thousands of people that had to come together throughout history to make me today. And I feel like because of that, I am the result of so much love. So I prefer to choose that and I prefer to walk in my truth and integrity. And I feel like because of that, I'm able to find more people and grow a community who are similar to me in those ways.

**RESH:** So it's very much that power that's found within connection, community, ancestry, and solidarity as well.

**BRYANNA:** Definitely.

**RESH:** This is pretty much the number one issue for so many people, but particularly so many young people throughout the world. And they're feeling much of what you're describing, that doom, that feeling of being completely overwhelmed by this really, really huge issue. That the future is not looking so bright. What would be your advice for people, especially young people who are listening to this podcast and feeling all of that?



**BRYANNA:** I think it's really liberating to find ways to be grounded within yourself and your own values and be solid with your own values, but also be flexible to learn. I think it's really, really important that if you are able to convey some message that is beneficial to the greater collective, the larger consciousness that we are all a part of; it's really, really important to be able to find a way to speak about it and just no longer hide in shame or isolation or guilt and, find ways to connect with what you truly resonate with, inside of you. And, I think being able to operate from that position with intention can provide you a lot of ability to stand on your own two feet, to be comfortable with anything that you say. Especially if it's for the purpose of helping the environment and other peoples.

And I think because of those values with a lot of Indigenous Peoples, we look to making decisions for the greater good, but also for the generations to come. I've always been nervous to speak because of colonial violence that persists rampantly today, as well as conditioning of the minds of Indigenous children from Residential Schools that have been inherited within me and my programming due to intergenerational trauma. Breaking the cycles and finding ways to connect with myself, to have a better relationship with myself really provides me strength in connecting with other people and things outside of myself.

**RESH:** This connection that is made by obviously yourself, Indigenous Climate Action, that the, fight for climate justice is very much rooted within decolonization and self-determination - How should we understand the connection between the climate crisis and colonization?

**BRYANNA:** One quote that Indigenous Climate Action uses that I really like is, "Colonialism caused climate change; Indigenous Rights are the solution". We are left out from so many spaces and so many decision making processes and tables throughout history. Because our culture is to protect the land. I think Indigenous Peoples are very important to be investing in, in terms of being able to come up with solutions, not false solutions, actual solutions to the climate crisis.

But because of the colonial violence that we continue to experience and because it is a culture of honoring profit over people; it's really, really hard to get a say when your values are rooted in protecting the land and protecting something of non-market value.

And it's not just the responsibility of Black, Indigenous, People of the Global Majority to do that; allies are really, really, really important. There's so many things that we need to deconstruct or decolonize, or just eliminate entirely from our practices and systems and policies to be able to get to a place of having ways to come together to find solutions.

**RESH:** At a recent gathering, held by the Council of Canadians, you made that point, that Indigenous rights and sovereignty aren't just part of climate justice, they are in fact climate justice. And therefore it's crucial that Indigenous leadership and ways of knowing be central to global climate organizing, the global climate movement, just

transitions and whatnot. Are you seeing this happening? Is indigenous expertise and leadership becoming more core to climate justice solutions and movements?

**BRYANNA:** I really hope so. I really think so, because I am welcomed into rooms or decision making tables that I never thought I would see, I never, ever thought I would be included or be allowed; especially with how I grew up and the ways I experienced a lot of different violence on a daily basis. I still get really nervous when I do any type of speaking. Like even just to do this podcast today, I got really nervous, but I know that that's my own thing. I know that I'm welcome here. And many people make me feel very, very welcome. I hope that in the spaces that I am in that I am not being tokenized. I'm not just there for their marketing,

**RESH:** To essentially look like change, instead of there actually being change, right?

**BRYANNA:** Yeah. Like action is so important to me and standing up with integrity and meaning what you say and following through with that is so, so, so important.

It's definitely because of those residential schools that, I even end up silencing myself sometimes and thinking I'm not good enough because of that deeply, deeply embedded trauma. But it's something that I have to speak about to take away the isolation factor that kills so many Indigenous Peoples and breaking cycles of narcissistic relationships. And just to be able to see through false things that people might try to loop me into. Just things like that. Yeah.

**RESH:** And yet your words LAND BACK have become so immediately recognizable as a call to action within climate and Indigenous Rights movements. It has just resonated so powerfully. Bryanna, what does it mean to you when you hear your words being echoed across these movements?

**BRYANNA:** I think it meant the world to me. And I just remember when I saw that Land Back banner they had in Madrid, Spain at COP25. And because Madrid, Spain was the place where my great, great, great grandmother was human trafficked and displayed in a human zoo for a year and then brought back to Labrador. So it had some type of spiritual significance.

I remember in February, 2020 going to a Wet'suwet'en protest. It was really large here in Ottawa. The whole street was filled and people were yelling LAND BACK. And nobody knew that I was the originator because to me it's a very, very collective movement and not for me to own or anything like that at all whatsoever.

But just because I started it and prayed about it, it was just really, really beautiful for me to see that because it felt like even though the people did not know what I was going through or knew that that's something that I originated, it felt like they were rooting for me to get better. It provided me such a feeling of community after I feel like I was hiding from the world for so long.

Another reason I was staying in the shelter, was because I had so many medical issues and I had a really bad infection in my jaw that required an emergency surgery.

So, just quietly to myself having that feeling of community even though no one knew just felt so nice.

**RESH:** I can imagine. I mean, it's just two words Land Back, and yet it means so much. It's about people returning to the land, the land returning to itself. And it sounds like for you, it's about you returning to a sense of community and to yourself as well. It's deceptively simple, but so incredibly meaningful. These two words.

**BRYANNA:** Yeah. I really like how just so many other places and peoples used it to create their own definitions as well. And something that really stood out to me too, was when a lot of Indigenous Peoples started to create their earrings with beading that said Land Back or clothing, hoodies t-shirts and things like that, that had Land Back on it. And to me, that was really important because these, Indigenous Peoples that are creating this merchandise, they're selling it and it's going back to them and their community. And these are the people who are protecting the land. And it's empowering the people who are on the front lines of these movements. So that made me really, really happy too.

**RESH:** No, It sounds wonderful. I mean, I would love to hear something I said but you know, echoed throughout the world, it must be so powerful.

Now you were also at the most recent global climate conference that took place last year in Glasgow, COP26. What was that experience like? And what actions were you involved with there?

**BRYANNA:** The climate anxiety there was real. It was the worst I've ever felt it. And then I feel like that brought back a lot of intergenerational trauma for me that it just started to just show up more. So my instinct was to just hide, but I didn't.

I was really, really proud of myself for that. And I just remember being dumbfounded by everything going on. And there's just so much happening when you go there that it's, really hard to navigate the rooms and figure out which one you want to participate in, especially for the negotiation processes.

I just kept telling myself that I needed to show up. That it's extremely important. That I do belong. And I had a lot of fun with the group that I went with. We were with the Indigenous Climate Action and Climate Action Network Canada.

I met so many beautiful people across the world with similar values and Indigenous Peoples from Brazil, from Australia, from Africa, everywhere. It was just amazing to me to find out about other people's work. And I was just taking it in so, so much information.

But then also I noticed I wasn't allowed into certain sections where there were higher level, higher status politicians or CEOs of mining companies or hydro corporations. We were still cut off from so many rooms and decision-making processes and seen as a threat is what it felt like. So I remember wanting to get into one of these rooms during the conference and I had to get a special ticket to get in the doors.

The security were pointing me back and forth to go to different rooms saying, "Oh, I think you're in the wrong room. You're not allowed in this one". So I found that to be really weird. I did understand the high security measures, but at the same time, I don't see why I would be such a threat, especially if I had gone through the metal detectors and security prior to going into the conference in the first place. So, I just found that to be interesting.

I remember being on the *Alternatives to Hydropower to Protect the Climate and Indigenous Peoples* panel. And I was put on that panel because Tom Gold Tooth from the Indian Collective, was called to a last minute meeting and I was his replacement for the panel. And all morning I was writing my speech and just getting prepared because the Executive Director of Indigenous Climate Action asked me to go. And when I got there, the other men on this panel, did not want me to speak at all whatsoever. They did not want me to get on the stage. And they kept refusing that I be a part of their panel. And a woman by the name of Angel, she was with our Indigenous People's Caucus from York University. And she brought me up onto the stage because I was just so afraid because that really affected my confidence. So I was brought up on the stage and the men were speaking and they hadn't left any time for me to speak at the end. And so when it came to my time to speak - I think it was about 15 minutes remaining for the panel - I spoke up and I said, " Am I speaking here as the only Indigenous woman on this panel? Am I going to speak today?" Because they were just speaking as long as they could, I think to ensure that I would not have the space . I only probably got about the last five minutes to say anything. And I was cut off before what I had written could be said. So, that really affected me.

**RESH:** So, there was that type of marginalization of you as an Indigenous young female.

**BRYANNA:** Yeah. And it just showed me how much they just don't want me to speak.

**RESH:** So here you are on this panel at COP26, which is the global climate meeting of everybody. If you had been given your due time, what were some of the important messages that you wanted to say at this conference?

**BRYANNA:** The panelist was speaking for hydro projects, he was not against them. He was encouraging that we have them and I think he works on some projects, hydro projects in Congo. And I was about to speak and bring up all the issues regarding hydro projects and how it had affected me in my life and the lands and other people and how it is a false solution. Indigenous Climate Action really works to address false solutions. And I know that carbon credits are one of them, but it gets

pretty deep. I could spend a really long time explaining why they're false solutions. And I think that's what I was trying to do at the time.

**RESH:** So what was a couple of the takeaways from the COP26 itself? Did you leave there feeling a sense of we're moving ahead in a good direction as a global community. That we still have work to do. That we're moving back. What were some of the takeaways?

**BRYANNA:** I felt that many older people who are in positions of power, really want to keep the status quo and want to keep doing business as usual. Whereas I've noticed a lot of the youth are very, very active. And really, I find really genuine with a lot of their activism and what they were saying and came together in solidarity.

I remember meeting a girl named Liz from Germany. And her coming up to me after I spoke about Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls at the Indigenous People's Caucus. And there was a few other people as well, another person who works with us at an Indigenous Climate Action as well as another new friend that I had made. And they came up to me afterwards and they were congratulating me and telling me they love what I said and that they encouraged my work. And Liz was really happy because she felt that through the work I'm doing. And what I had said there was a lot of solidarity with the Indigenous Peoples as well as Two Spirit Peoples and the LGBTQQIA2S community.

When I do have those smaller moments of making other people feel like they belong or making them feel like what they're fighting for is just as important as what I'm trying to bring awareness to. I love making those connections and finding solidarity. And trying to focus on that more rather than a lot of the negativity or oppression or corruption, really brings me good energy and reminds me of why I'm doing that work.

**RESH:** And you've mentioned that you were making those connections to other young people from across the world and we have seen just a growth of youth leadership fighting for the planet. Could you speak a bit more about why it's important to put youth in leadership positions as well? Why, why should we be listening to youth?

**BRYANNA:** I think it's important to listen to young people because we want a future. We want our own future. We want there to be resources and clean water and everything to be able to exist and to have our own generations to come. And I think maybe a lot of people are waking up to the realization that a lot of the things that we had been born into are systemic programs that we did not create, that that we don't want to be a part of, especially if it's violent. Also because of social media we're able to spread, so, so, so much information on social justice issues and come together in those ways, too.

A lot of people are finding out about so much knowledge that these systems and colonial institutions have been trying to hide for so long. So now I think people are snapping out of that programming, those, those boxes, those systems, and deciding that that's not what we want. It's not getting us what we need or a healthy

environment, a healthy life. And it's really just making us sick and I find maybe people are really enjoying, voicing how they feel about it, because maybe they're realizing that bottled up emotions just make your body sick and stiff. And always having to, pretend just to keep a good reputation or to be in with a certain group or keep a certain job; it's not worth losing our planet over. It's not worth losing our healthy environments over. I hope that that's the case.

**RESH:** I think we all do. In your work with the David Suzuki Foundation, you are part of a Just Transition Campaign for Labrador. What is the meaning of just transition? And for you, what should it, what must it include or look like?

**BRYANNA:** I think that that's something that we're still very much in the process of defining together. Something that's important is including and, uplifting Indigenous and Black peoples and people of the global majorities. How our voices are included, but also try to find ways to create dynamics where we do not feel that we are voiceless as to divert from the status quo. That was the last 150 years in Canada or longer.

**RESH:** When you're thinking of a just transition, what should come out of it? What would that ideal future look like for you?

**BRYANNA:** I think it's important that we learn to become more transparent and that even our work cultures shift to something that is more sustainable for everybody. Even if it's to have longer self-care, shorter work weeks. To create spaces where there are more people of the global majority in decision-making spaces, not just at the very front and the bottom of the hierarchy of the organization just to promote diversity.

I think we need to be in the decision making processes and be able to partake in our cultures while, working, while living a sustainable life where we can just be ourselves and have liberty over ourselves and our own consciousness. And transparency of what we are doing with these, products that extract so much energy. I think that that would be a really good idea.

I would like to come together collectively to really figure out how we could all partake in creating different systems, different policies, different ways of living; so that it is accepted to live more, I guess, Indigenously. To be able to live in ways that we can actually protect the land and it be valued.

I would prefer for work to not just be something that's so extractive for the purpose of profit and just for the purpose of marketing or showing a certain face and taking action.

**RESH:** How can people become involved in action? The Land Back Movement or Indigenous Climate Action? Because I know a lot of people want to, they just don't know how to take that first step. So what would be your advice?

**BRYANNA:** I think it's very, very important to include Indigenous Peoples within your organizations. To be able to be employed, to consult and tell the organizations what we need to be able to continue these movements in a healthy way. And to be able to advance these movements as well.

Employing Indigenous Peoples for the work that they might already be doing for free could be just one step. Because I realize a lot of people just in my day to day life might just ask me these questions regularly. Just, expecting it to be free because, it's just something that's so important to me and my heart as a being. But so many native people get taken advantage of in those ways, because it's just expected and we're expected to educate and just do it because it's our culture and it's coming from our hearts and who we are. But everybody has to eat at the end of the day. Everybody has to pay for rent or make sure their kids go to school, everything.

And then I think it's really, really important to understand and read the *Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action*. I think it's important to read the *National Inquiry Into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls*, as well as the new *National Action Plan for the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls*.

I think it's really important to push the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. And. I know that one place that I had worked with through the Climate Hub with Dr. Jen Goby, she has her own website that is called *Research for the Frontlines*. So I think being connected with them would be good because you can provide your own resources in your spare time if you are a researcher, if you are a lawyer, if you have some knowledge that would be able to advance, if you're a journalist, anything. You can sign up through *Research for the Frontlines* to be able to advance these movements and be connected with Indigenous Peoples who are on the front lines, who might need those resources or help with research. Anything in those ways to be able to bring awareness to those movements.

And another thing I think would be good is to create more Indigenous Advisory Councils or committees in your own organizations. To have more training and speakers from Indigenous Peoples. But also to donate to either frontline activists themselves or their organizations that are genuinely giving back to the communities. That's something that I would start with.

**RESH:** Thank you so much, Bryanna. It has been a pleasure having you as part of this podcast.

**BRYANNA:** Thank you. I appreciate it as well. Thank you so much for providing a safe space for me to share all of this with you.

**RESH:** That was Bryanna Brown,, climate justice activist with Indigenous Climate Action and originator of Land Back.

I'm Resh Budhu, host of the Courage My Friends podcast. Thanks for listening.

**COURAGE MY FRIENDS ANNOUNCER:** You've been listening to the Courage My Friends Podcast, a co-production between [rabble.ca](http://rabble.ca) and the Tommy Douglas Institute at George Brown College and with the support of the Douglas Coldwell Layton Foundation.

Produced by Resh Budhu of the Tommy Douglas Institute, Breanne Doyle of [rabble.ca](http://rabble.ca) and the TDI planning committee: Chandra Budhu and Ashley Booth. For more information about the Tommy Douglas Institute and this series, visit [georgebrown.ca/TommyDouglasInstitute](http://georgebrown.ca/TommyDouglasInstitute).

Please join us again for the next episode of the Courage My Friends podcast on [rabble.ca](http://rabble.ca)