

Gregory Nothstine.mp3

Speaker 1 [00:00:00] All right. Right now. Thanks. Yeah. So I guess it's kind of trying to figure out how people teach and learn Inupiaq dance. And that's the gist of it. And the other piece of it that I'm really interested in is what the educational value of the songs is. And so I know that's something that you kind of also worked in with the folk code song and then other things like that. So yeah, if you wouldn't mind just briefly introducing yourself so that I have it on, on the recording and then telling me a little bit about how you learned about dancing and to dance.

Speaker 2 [00:00:39] I learned to dance here at this event tonight. I was inspired by the drums and the singing, and I learned during the invitation dances that I was actually pretty good at it. So there was a time that there was an elder from the King Island group, something that stopped coming to this. I knew because they had one dance group performances from the sixties these dancers into the seventies, apparently. And he was discouraged by some of the other dance groups copying their songs and dances without permission. So he decided it was probably a good thing that they stopped showing up. But he did say that, and she said this. His name was the late Paula feel. I'm not really keen on dancers.

Speaker 1 [00:01:33] You know.

Speaker 2 [00:01:34] When I first met him, when I was a teenager, I learned how to sweat. And he taught the Hopi the family system structure between teasing cousins, the cousins on their father's side. I don't recall if it was they can tease the cousins on the mother's side or vice versa. But the most important thing was not to offend anybody, and you couldn't directly talk to someone who had offended you because that could turn into a a real heated debate. Hmm. And so they had this teasing cousin structure and didn't need policemen or and that's how they kept the social order. And the teasing cousins could tease you and humiliate you in public, but you couldn't you couldn't do anything about it. And that way, they knew that they had done wrong. It was an indirect triangular triangle and way of doing things. But the most important thing was to try to avoid offending or hurting anybody feelings. And they did cross that line. Your teasing cousins would come and tell you about.

Speaker 1 [00:02:48] Okay.

Speaker 2 [00:02:50] So I'm giving you some context to show something that I was informed about my grandfather who was buried in Anchorage. He suffered from cancer in the fifties. He was flown to Anchorage for observation and fortunately passed away. They never flew his remains back to normal and they were never able to mourn his passing. And so he was buried in the Anchorage Bowl in the fifties. And at that time, 15th Avenue was the furthest road south. And he was Warren was five miles, passed in an unmarked grave, and they never married. And he had seven daughters and a son, and they never were able to mourn his passing. Yet I was informed by my mother that she had to plead with my her mother to name me after him because I was born like several years after. And normally you the tradition is to name them the children who the firstborn child after the passing of somebody after them. There's good spirit in this legacy around and that way, that childhood or that event. So I was always like kind of curious and not really sure what that all meant for me. But I knew already, perhaps knowing that the indigenous population of last year suffered greatly in its own processing to adopt social norms. Yeah. And one of the social norms that pretty much cripples every indigenous population is drinking alcohol, right? Because when you drink alcohol and you look at Western society from an outside

perspective, it seems to be encompassing all life activity. Babies being born. Job promotions. Job demotions. Teams winning, teams losing in the sunshine and raining. But everything is about consumption. And I know that our population and the business people have had their challenges with that. Unfortunately, more so than not. So they and this includes me and I adopted this internalized the simulation standard on the basis of glamorization that I saw that was reinforcing other people's behavior. And they really we reinforce among ourselves subconsciously. And I bought into it and I was like, Yeah, you can't trust anybody that doesn't drink. But I got in trouble. And, and because of that, I ended up trying to look at why my grandfather strayed before I sobered up and I couldn't find it. I went to all three cemeteries in Brazil and they I couldn't find I didn't know that he didn't have an unmarked grave. I just was looking for hangings and I didn't see him three years after I so I had the presence of mind to call just in the kind of, you know, your fingers do the walking, right. So I called the first to nothing called. The last one was out in that road and they said, well, be well and let me check. And then I guess I held on for like 3 minutes, seemed like last longer. But when he came back and said, yeah, there seems to be some remains of that particular name here in the cemetery. And I said, Cory, I really think I'm coming down so well. It was supposed to close in about 10 minutes. Where are you coming from? I told him. Well, I'm already is somewhat south Anchorage and you're about five or 6 minutes away. The new bypass off Minnesota, he said, Yeah, yeah, okay, I'll just hang out. I don't mind. So I was like, You've been looking for this for a long time, so I don't mind helping you. So apparently the only he was buried in an unmarked plot. They only marked the even ones with a marker. So he brought a metal detector. We found it, of course, and being named after him, I wittingly thought to myself, well, I found myself anyway laying my ad. He used to call me Dad and I was ten years old. That I think was crazy. Yes, but in her mind, I was the reincarnation of her and her dad usually would call me that. And as confusing as it seemed to me, it made sense to her. And I used to think, I don't know what, think about that. But that's when she would just say, That's my dad. And I would say, okay, and I'd go about my business and play out.

Speaker 1 [00:07:56] But I had a similar experience. So I, you know, both of my parents were really involved in a lot of the hell you villages. And so I when I was born, I was right after one of their close friends had died and I was given his name even though I'm not Alaska native, they gave me his name and I remember being five or six years old and I was going and visiting them. And then she was 40 or 50 and she was calling me brother as very confused and I just didn't understand it at all at the time.

Speaker 2 [00:08:25] And in the spirit of things, that meant, yeah, that's what they meant. Yeah. So as I was sitting there and of course I brought my mother to the she was happy that and she thanked me for finding it and she mourned his passing. She was I was never able to mourn my dad's passing. Well, he was buried in 55 or 56 and I found his grave in like 90. And it was like 45 years later that she was able to finally find his plight and at least weep for us, for him. And she was delighted that we did that. And we say we said before the event that happened before I even shorter that there was this inspiring thought that said it's now a time to sing and dance. You got to learn how to sing and dance. And I don't know where that thought or experience firing came from. I did talk to Paul Turano and I said, I found my grandfather straight away, says, I remember your grandpa. I remember going to your mom's, your grandpa. This village when I was about four or five years old, we used to ride and get excited because we got a ride in the boat. Then from King Island to Wales, and we'd spend about two weeks in Wales because your village would catch a whale and there'd be lots of dancing and celebration. And, you know, even though I asked him if I could dance with the King Island dancers as a kid, I joined the group and learned some songs and he just said, Yes, good God. You want to learn. It's really good. You

know, and they went off on that story about writing about that, he said. There's some elders that I think that were my age now that were kids like me when we used to watch all those drummers in your village. Real strong women, real graceful. Your village has a lot of good songs, you know, I bet you if you go back, you'll probably learn some might be a good idea. And I told that to my mother and she said, Well, maybe it's the ancestors telling us to start reclaiming our songs. We should go back and try it. I mean, okay. And me and my cousin, Richard Chaco, all one of the third oldest of the oldest daughters of my grandmother and a very the first born our woman. We said, yeah, let's do that. And so the three of us, we went to Wales. Hmm. And we learned one song, the invitational. And we sang it at the high school graduation for the graduating class of 1998 May, May, 1990. And I remember feeling how awkward it is that they these kids were being cloned and ties and suits. They didn't have any traditional songs celebrating their achievement, their certificate of assimilation, as I see it.

Speaker 1 [00:11:35] And not raw.

Speaker 2 [00:11:38] But and then the all the little kids were being dressed up the same way. But we knew we sang at the graduating class and then we did record some of those songs. There's a lot more to that story, but what we didn't record, we started practicing and for like six years we were real sheepishly trying to reclaim them. And there was a lot of embarrassing moments, seemingly embarrassing, because when you told us This is your culture and you've never done it before and it's like you're supposed to know, but you're not. Yeah, you don't grow up with it. It's like, yeah, it's like saying to somebody, Your family has always eaten this food, you're supposed to like it. And if you don't have an acquired taste for it, sure, somebody is not your you know, if you never grew up with it, you're not going to have an acquired taste first. We didn't have an acquired feeling for knowing how to sing and Paul Tialona would help us out. I remember even before this, even all occurred, he would motioned me to to dance one of the songs and he said, This comes from Wales, this is a Wales song. Oh, we sing it in honor of your you're village all yours. I know you don't recognize it, but in the future, if you do, it's customary to dance that song from your village. Otherwise the other dancers groups can claim it for themselves. If you don't claim it gives them permission to keep it. So I got one at night. I mean, the cultural interruption. Kept us all from keeping it or at least practicing it. And we're grateful that the King, like dancers, have been persistent in rebelling against the assimilation process of the missionaries and church churches that, you know, we're trying to do a good thing, but we're just misunderstanding and incorrectly interrupted and suppressed the songs of that of the indigenous population in Alaska. So songs and dances commemorate successful hunts, relationships, experiences and nature. And there are poetic body and language of story and suffer through song. And that's the only way I can perhaps interpreted it. I'm still trying to figure out, okay, there's lots of motions. You see the motions and I'm wanting to know how do you interpret those? You can see someone say, Well, that's when they were walking. That's when they're, of course, looking. You can probably figure that out by just observation alone. But there are some other very subtle movements of the hand and the arms and the gestures of the women that denote certain story telling moments. And, you know, if you're not aware of them, you're not going to pick them up. And then they're they're supported by incantations and and words. So songs and dances have been a way to communicate morays and social values and attitudes and behaviors. And this is information that's been interrupted through disease. And we don't all know it because all those elders that had that knowledge, those living libraries, passed away during epidemics and pandemics of the last century.

Speaker 1 [00:15:25] So you see the the kind of educational importance of them being passing down these moral values and customs and.

Speaker 2 [00:15:33] Well, yeah, you know, for what it's worth, I'm not all that keen on it. I just have a I just have an idea. You may want to talk to other elders in villages like Wainwright Point. Hope there are some Barrow rural ites here. I wouldn't particularly know who to refer to, but from all I know I'd observed, these were ways in which our indigenous population reinforce correct behavior and discouraged incorrect behavior. And, you know, coming from a hunting gathering society that knew all of the different weather forecasts and had 200 different words for snow, types of snow, weather patterns were always somebody else's specialty, and everybody had a common knowledge of what to do and what not to do. When certain environmental changes occur and how to subtly know how to hunt different animals in a particular environment. So all those kind of nuances have been lost. And because of the interruption.

Speaker 1 [00:17:01] And you think a lot of them lived in songs and dance, all of them did.

Speaker 2 [00:17:06] And it's no different than what contemporary songs and dances are. You've got hip hop talking about social mores and such. I think no different for the Inupiaqs or the Maori and all we had were all accustomed to some form of socializing, ritualized and poetically telling our stories as in the bouts. For the most part, the indigenous population here in Alaska, we're like four or five generations away from the interruption of our cultures. And so a lot of us are still, you know, if it takes seven generations to wipe out language, song and such, we're, you know, the indigenous population in North America, the Cree, the Blackfoot, all of those Indian tribes in the lower 48 that still continue to hold their songs. They do it, you know, because that's the last resort, because without that, all you got left is the interruption of consumption. And those that type of behavior is really a pity party and it by itself.

Speaker 1 [00:18:26] Yeah.

Speaker 2 [00:18:26] And then that really led to a stereotype that this is a vicious cycle that seems to be neverending. But for us as a community, we went to our first AFN event back in 97 or 96 or Carrickmore, and when we got on stage it was a statewide televised event. And my cousin Tina D then Cheryl or Sandy, were in Nome, no, no, no. There were a voter I think one of them was in Wales and one of them was a gnome. And they said, Kingkamuit, really? Who are they. And then they recognized us on stage.

Speaker 1 [00:19:09] Hey there. And they were all happy.

Speaker 2 [00:19:11] And they're cheering and they're in there. And then then they listened to us. And then as excited as they were, they said, I can hardly hear them singing. But we did. Not all the same, but they were just proud that we were there. They saw us and that marked the end. And I guess it's more inspiring. Thought among them the Wales community to have the dance festival because Wales was known for its messenger feast. Yeah. And when the messenger, they would run 30 miles or 50 miles to the next village to let people know that Wales was having a feast. And then they would all come to Wales and they'd have this big celebration. And it would start with a message of peace, of course. But they said with time to time you started. So they started the first one through a few suicide prevention grants, talk of tobacco cessation grants. Let's just take that. We we had the first gas. First of all, we went to the first dance festival 2000, and they kept on holding it for the pandemic. So we would have had the one August 1st, 21st and 2020 and,

you know, we already had the 20th and 29th. And that was inspiring because when we held the first one, none of the kids went to the Invitation Invitational by the 12th and 13th year kids. Right during the invitation, they were coming to dance.

Speaker 1 [00:20:56] So how do you how do you think they learned the dance to come to the invitational watching or aren't.

Speaker 2 [00:21:03] Social reinforcement anymore more no different than people learning how to drink alcohol. It's also social reinforcement. They see adults exemplifying the behavior and enjoying the activity. They're going to want to emulate that. They see the value in it and they're going to emulate it.

Speaker 1 [00:21:24] But it's never like explicitly taught to them. Right?

Speaker 2 [00:21:28] It is encouraged in the schools.

Speaker 1 [00:21:30] Okay.

Speaker 2 [00:21:31] I know that Faye, the late Faye, I'm not too sure. And Wales was asked and looked upon as one of the. Cultural bearers of the school. And being a cultural bearer is a ominous task. But it is also a very blessed role that has you know, it's not something that you just walk into some. But for those that know it, they can. Hmm. You have to practice it. But with all this technology and advancements in technology, television and audio, visual, social media, it's a real it's a real challenge to to encourage you to claim their heritage because they're being exposed to so much other worldly cultural. Social norms that seem to grow popular and they want to portray those popular types of social norms and behaviors and clothing styles to get the validation that they wouldn't. get, because you're trying to assimilate you're sure you're being cloned into the rest of society and therefore you can't find a way to differentiate yourself, differentiate yourself from everybody else. You're just another clone.

Speaker 1 [00:22:57] Yeah. So some of the people I've been talking to have mentioned to me that there's a role that animals in the land play and learning in part in participating in Inupiaq dance. That's something that you feel too, or that not something you've seen as much.

Speaker 2 [00:23:18] For the hunters. I wouldn't. That might be so. I'm not one of the fortunate ones to have that Hunter experience. I grew up mostly in the concrete jungle, watching Captain Kangaroo.

Speaker 1 [00:23:30] And Adam and.

Speaker 2 [00:23:33] Sesame Street. Uh huh. But. And I think I'm somewhat cursed and blessed with one regard. And that is, by the time I was even before I was three, I was flying between Nome and Anchorage, and I learned about TV before, long before any of my cousins did. And when I told them about it, they just thought they just didn't know what to think. And they thought I was making stories up.

Speaker 1 [00:24:02] I could see it being unbelievable. Okay. Would you. And that's how Margaret teaches songs or dances to each other. We practice. So what does that practice kind of look like?

Speaker 2 [00:24:18] We just come together once a week for an hour and a half weeks. We sing repetitively, just continuously. Some are more dedicated. Some people in the group are more dedicated, and others have the time to learn the songs. And I have to admit, you know, I just come once a week and I'm still learning. And I mean, I could dance some of the songs, but I don't want to. What's important for me is I want to be able to dance to a song that people can see, that they sing it right. I don't want to be dancing to out of tune singing. I'm doing my own. I guess, in that regard. So I prefer to see real well for someone else to dance. And. And I was able to really be pleased with Walter, my cousin, and to tap Cox on Walter. It's like as he goes by a lot and.

Speaker 1 [00:25:19] I met him yesterday.

Speaker 2 [00:25:20] He's been he's been dancing a lot. And, you know, and I, I don't mind supporting and singing in support of someone else being able to dance really well. I mean, if they can do that for me, I'd be happy. Do I can I can do several other dances just like he's doing it. But I enjoy singing and dancing and watching.

Speaker 1 [00:25:41] Yeah, yeah, yeah, I think so. I was talking to Roy yesterday. He was kind enough to to talk with me for a while, and he was saying that he thinks that he he was going to talk to you about it for others. He said that it might be okay for me to come and watch a rehearsal at some point in Anchorage. I live in Eagle River right now, so. Oh, cool. In the area. And why.

Speaker 2 [00:26:02] Not? I mean, it's up to, you know, we practice every Monday, 630 to 8 at that at the church right now. We used to practice over the curtain on the tribal council for the before the pandemic. And the church was the first facility to allow us to go back together. Yeah, I would gather the tribal council still too worried about liability and risk and because of the pandemic to allow us to use the facility again. So, you know, who can blame them? Yeah, yeah.

Speaker 1 [00:26:39] But we wanted to I love to just see and kind of get to see it a little bit more with all that you go through. But the last thing I wanted to ask you about, if that's all right, is this about the folk song that that you guys like. And I know some about it, but I know you.

Speaker 2 [00:26:56] Can go to YouTube and learn more about.

Speaker 1 [00:26:59] What they watch. The videos.

Speaker 2 [00:27:00] The both.

Speaker 1 [00:27:01] Of them. Yeah. Oh I've watched all the videos and I, I've read the articles and I, I've looked into it, I've done my research.

Speaker 2 [00:27:07] Okay. You know, we did, we did have a kind of like a unveiling here and we gave out flowcharts. Yeah, yeah. And we had a box and it was like a debut of sorts. But the real debut happened like in December of the same year when we were here doing, and then they had a press release and all this other press conference so out. But when we first showed it at Wales, there was like a him, I him and then and the president might ask the kids to come out. And when the kids started having fun doing it at the Wales Dance Festival, the cast of Germany erupted.

Speaker 1 [00:27:52] Yeah. Do you think it do you think it's having an effect? Oh, yeah.

Speaker 2 [00:27:57] In fact, 500 National Guards in Florida.

Speaker 1 [00:28:03] Yes. You you talk about that, you know.

Speaker 2 [00:28:08] Even though there's just a group of allies I co-counsel with across the nation on native liberation and we have a culture night weekend workshops and we share different, you know, parts of our heritage from from the North American Indian to the Hispanic and the Chicano and folks in South America and a lot of Plains Indians and of course, us Alaska Natives, we're working on native land. Against the policies that interrupted us from being where we are. And so we are way back to reclaim our heritage. But there's a lot of crying and there's a lot of sobbing. Yeah, there's a lot of emotional growth that was inhibited because the human being, when you want emotional intelligence to turn to further or to you want to incubate, that it's been interrupted, you know, indigenous populations. And the misinformation is you can't cry because if you do that, seemingly the missing, that's the misinformation. If you cry, you're healing your spirit. And the misinformation is interrupt that and don't let them. heal. Hmm. Um, it's like pus in the wound. You let the pus drain, and if you leave the pus in there, that is not being strong. That's stupid.

Speaker 1 [00:29:58] Right? Yeah.

Speaker 2 [00:30:00] Oh, stop being very intelligent. So in the right context, with the right support, without judgment or ridicule, in a safe place, people can reevaluate where they got hurt or where they began to feel interrupted, not being themselves. And. And we're all born good. We're all born intelligent, likable, creative, resourceful, full of life and wanting to help one another. You see kids in the kindergarten playground holding hands and carrying on. That innocence is interrupted by well-meaning, misinformed adults. And when I went to those workshops and I shared the float coat song, they loved it and I didn't make it. One couple of times they would call me on the weekend. They said, Craig, listen. And they're doing the float coat song.

Speaker 1 [00:30:56] This really wonderful. Have you ever thought about doing another similar type of thing or.

Speaker 2 [00:31:01] Well, there's been discussion about clean air, you know, because of our lungs to help people be inspire them to be non tobacco users. Another one is for wearing their helmets, for wheelchairs. Remember all your helmets, you know, to avoid brain injury. We're looking at there are some entertaining. I'm entertaining it. Anyway. So there's that component of prevention. Prevention songs that. Mm hmm. And who knows? We might even have a sobriety. Some come out someday and just say.

Unidentified [00:31:40] To be a living example of the truth that we can live and enjoy life without having to consume.

Speaker 2 [00:31:45] Yeah, and it's. It's okay. It's all right. And for those of you who believe that you need this necessary to enjoy life, then you know that's your choice. But for those of us who are not part of this plague of consumption drama, filling up our prisons and disrupting our family systems and going into foster care and going into the Department of Public Safety, we're the population, not consumers, who are reducing the incidence of

alcohol and drug related crimes, and we're reducing the burden on the rest of society and having to pay for all the social ills some. We're not a part of that.

Speaker 1 [00:32:25] Now the songs represent that and to encourage it.

Speaker 2 [00:32:29] Yeah, there's a way to do that. Yeah. They always said the blackout speaks and the. You said that Indian prophets of the healing message is going to come from the north. Don't know who's going to start it, but I think there's. We're on the right path.

Speaker 1 [00:32:43] Yeah. Oh, wonderful. Thanks so much. I really appreciate it, Amina.