

[MUSIC PLAYING]

**HALI JAMA:** From Wisconsin Sea Grant, I'm Hali.

**BONNIE** And I'm Bonnie.

**WILLISON:**

**HALI JAMA:** And you're listening to *The Water We Swim In*-- stories about the Great Lakes and the people working towards equity.

**BONNIE** Wisconsin Sea Grant is based at UW-Madison, which occupies the traditional land of the Ho-Chunk people. The stories on this podcast span the area we now know as Wisconsin, where the lands and waters are cared for by the 12 native nations that call Wisconsin home.

**WILLISON:**

[MUSIC PLAYING]

**LIZ CARTER:** For 11-year-old Glenn Jackson Jr, this warm late summer day was important. It was a day he had waited for all year. It was the first time his father, Glen Senior, would take him out to gather mahnomen, the sacred food of the Ojibwe people. This was the day he would become a wild ricer. Walleye, muskellunge, whitefish, pike, and bass are plentiful--

**ALLYSON:** Mama. Ma,

**LIZ CARTER:** --in the many rivers and lakes.

**ALLYSON:** Mama.

**LIZ CARTER:** Yeah?

**ALLYSON:** We're right here.

**LIZ CARTER:** We're right there? Not quite, because we don't live in Minnesota. See that little green part? Is that part of the big state of Minnesota. That's where Glenn and his family live.

**ALLYSON:** Isn't that cool?

**BONNIE** That's Liz Carter, who's reading to her daughter, Allison. They're reading *The Sacred Harvest*, by Gordon Reggunti. I crossed paths with Liz at an online book club, started by some of our colleagues here at Wisconsin Sea Grant and their partners at the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission. The book club focuses on children's books, even though the attendees were all adults, because the book club is to get adults thinking about children's books for their kids or for their young students.

**LIZ CARTER:** Hi, my name is Liz Carter. I live just outside of Denver, Colorado, with my husband and our three-year-old daughter. I'm a softball coach, and actually just able to add tech startup founder to my official title.

But as it relates to the book club, I am also a member of the Ottawa tribe of Oklahoma. So how I would normally have introduced myself is [SPEAKING ANISHINAABEMOWIN]. And what that means is, hello, my name is Liz Carter. I am a member of the Otter clan and I live in Denver, Colorado.

And as of a year and a half ago, I would not have known what those words meant. I wouldn't have known to say them. I wouldn't have known anything about them, for two reasons. Number one is that I live in Colorado and my tribe is in Oklahoma. And it's very difficult to learn the language of a group of people when you're 1,000 miles away from them.

But the second reason is a little bit more intentional, in that my great-great-grandmother, who at some point was sent to residential school, had a very specific request that she did not want her children to learn anything about the language. She did not want them to know the language. She didn't really want them to know a lot of the cultural and other traditions that we have. Simply for preservation reasons, she wanted to keep them safe.

So that was passed down to her daughter, who was my great-grandmother, who also did not teach her children any of the language or any of the cultural traditions. We did pass down the fact that we are Ottawa Indians. They always enrolled their children in the tribe, and were very proud to do so. But we have two generations of a gap of the language and of our cultural traditions, that we're trying to reclaim right now.

**BONNIE** The book club we both went to is called Maadagindan-- Start Reading.

**WILLISON:**

[MUSIC PLAYING]

Maadagindan is an Anishinaabe word.

**MICHAEL** So in that word, maadagindan, means to read something, something that's inanimate--*agindan*. The *maa*, *maad*  
**WAASEGIIZHIG** at the beginning means we begin, or we start-- Like *[NON-ENGLISH]*-- to begin to do something. So maadagindan  
**PRICE:** means that we begin to read.

[ANISHINAABEMOWIN SPEECH]

So I just introduced myself in the Anishinaabe language. My name is Michael Price Waasegiizhig. I am Anishinaabe. I am from the Bear Clan. My family is from Wiikwemkoong First Nations, in Manitoulin Island, Ontario.

**BONNIE** Michael was an honored guest at one of the book club meetings. But it was Morgan Coleman who came up with a  
**WILLISON:** name for the book club, during her internship with Wisconsin Sea Grant and the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission, otherwise known as GLIFWC.

**MORGAN** I figured that the thing that we wanted with this project was for kids to start reading about these topics and get  
**COLEMAN:** them interested. And so I literally just typed that into the Ojibwe dictionary that I was using, and saw that there was a word-- Maadagindan.

**BONNIE** Maadagindan is meant to do two things. One-- increase awareness of Ojibwe culture. And two-- to teach kids and  
**WILLISON:** educators about the Great Lakes and their important place in the watershed.

I joined the Zoom and watched others trickle in. There was a few librarians, the book club organizers, a few people with a background in education, and some of the people were Ojibwe tribal members. Liz Carter joined, as well. That first meeting we were discussing the book, *Growing Up Ojibwe*, a picture book created by GLIFWC.

**LIZ CARTER:** So I was on my phone listening to it. And my daughter was off playing something. And we started by playing the song, [NON-ENGLISH]. And in the Ottawa dialect, it's [NON-ENGLISH]. So my daughter didn't quite pick up on that.

But I think it was like the second line of the song, she sings *miigwech*. And my daughter, from across the room, picked her head up and looked at me and goes *miigwech?* Which means thank you. And to see her connect that song with that word that she knew was just-- like, my heart sang. It was so incredible.

And from that moment on I was like, oh, this is-- I'm supposed to be here. This is perfect. And then later on, I believe Anne asked the question of a couple of the other indigenous members of the book club, you know, their experiences. And to hear other people's experiences was just absolutely invaluable-- to hear people who are on the same path, but at a different point and different experiences.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

I think it's just really important that we learn as much as we can from one another. And then I decided that I was going to share my story about how much trauma that we've experienced, just in my family line and in my tribe. And I-- maybe it was imposter syndrome or something, but I never really thought that people would care.

And to have everybody on that call not only listen to me, and pay attention to what I was saying, but the fact that it resonated with some of them was just something that I never expected. And it's my story, it's not-- why would anybody else care about it? And somebody else on the call said that she hoped that everybody could send me some healing vibes, just to start to heal some of that trauma. And it just it made me feel so seen, and so empowered, and so loved and cared for. And it was an absolutely incredible experience.

**BONNIE WILLISON:** So I remember when Liz shared her story-- this moment-- and it was really powerful for me and I know all the others in the group, as well. I don't think anyone who attended Maadagindan anticipated the people that we'd meet, the stories that we'd hear. On this episode, we explore Ojibwe children's literature, the Anishinaabe language, and indigenous reconnection to what's been taken through colonization.

**LIZ CARTER:** The Ojibwe migration took many hundreds of years. Finally, in the mid 1500s, the Ojibwe found their special place-- what is now northern Minnesota and Wisconsin-- where our people lived. Alison was in northern Michigan.

**ALLYSON:** And me?

LIZ CARTER: Mhm. Our people are called the Odawa. The Ottawa tribe of Oklahoma.

**HALI JAMA:** The Ojibwe language and the Odawa language are very similar. They both fall under the umbrella of the Anishinaabe language. When we met Liz, she told us more about the history of her tribe, the Ottawa tribe of Oklahoma.

**LIZ CARTER:** We've been through a lot. And not that any other tribe hasn't. We were removed from the Ohio Great Lakes region. I believe it was 1837 was when we were removed from that area, down to what is now Ottawa, Kansas. And what I have heard is that we lost nearly half of our tribal members, once we moved down to Kansas, because the environment was different. So we went from-- I think it was I think it was over 600 people down to like 300 people, in a pretty short span after we moved it to Kansas.

Then the Baptist church was going to build a school in Ottawa, Kansas. And so what I have learned is that school was intended to be a residential school for my tribe. But we were moved a second time down to Oklahoma. So we missed the residential school piece of things.

And we were able to turn that school into what is now Ottawa University, where they have done a really good job of celebrating our tribe. And tribal members can get an education from Ottawa University for free. And it just is-- it's a way to really add to the tribe, instead of what it was probably intended to do is take away from the tribe as much as possible.

So we made that move in the late 1860s, down to Oklahoma. And that move was like 180 people who came down to Oklahoma. Most of them were children. Most of them were orphaned children.

And it was a move that was intended to make the tribe stronger. Because we actually bought land down in Oklahoma, thinking that if we owned the land, that they couldn't move us again. And it has worked out in our favor. And the fact that the American government OKed that agreement, OKed the land sale, and we've still been able to be there. But we went from about 180 people that were moved down to Miami, Oklahoma, and now we're like 3,000 to 4,000 members of the tribe.

**HALI JAMA:** Liz lives in Colorado. Actually, she's a fifth-generation Colorado native on her mom's side. Her dad, also an Ottawa tribe member, grew up in Oklahoma, and moved to Colorado in the early 80s. She mentioned that living in Colorado is a barrier to connecting with her Ottawa heritage, since the tribal nation is in Oklahoma. That is, until COVID happened.

**LIZ CARTER:** So it was February of 2021. We were in the depths of COVID lockdown. And I happened to see on my tribe's Facebook page that they were going to start doing online language classes. And I guess before COVID they would do a weekly class in the tribal building. But with COVID, and the inability to gather, they decided to take those classes online. Which means me, sitting in Colorado, I'm actually able to start taking online lessons.

And the first lesson that we had was actually about emotion. And I remember my instructor using the word for uncertain. And the way that she described the word for uncertain, how it would kind of translate into English, is that I am unable to understand what my ancestors are telling me, so far. So my ancestors are trying to tell me something, but I can't quite understand what it is. That's the word for uncertain. And when she explained that, I was absolutely hooked.

It was just an eye opening experience for me of how complicated these words are, and how much meaning, and beauty, and action they really have. So I have been taking language classes since February of 2021. My Sunday-- I build my time on Sundays around these language classes, so that I'm able to be there, because it's something that is really, really important to me.

And I-- again, I just want to have-- I just want to do whatever I can to bring back the language, and bring back some of those cultural aspects into my life and into my daughter's life. It is an absolutely incredible experience because this language is so beautiful, and it is so emotional, and it is really, really difficult.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

So when I grew up, I obviously grew up speaking English. But I also took French for about nine years. And so my brain has learned languages where there is a noun, there's a verb, adjectives, adverbs, whatever it might be. But it's pretty much the same formula. This language takes that formula and completely throws it on its head, for the better, I think.

English is about 70% nouns, whereas Anishinaabemowin, which is the official word for this language, means the language of the original people. Anishinaabemowin is 70% to 80% verbs. So every noun that we have in English, it's actually a verb in Anishinaabemowin, which means it has to be conjugated, which means that it has to be modified. All of these things that just make the language, as an English speaker, that much more difficult.

There is a beautiful book called *Braiding Sweetgrass* by Robin Wall Kimmerer that talks about this-- how hard it is to learn all of these nouns. The part of the her story that really resonated with me was she too was reading the dictionary, and saw I saw the word for bay. It's like a body of water, a bay. But it wasn't a noun. It was the verb to be a bay.

And how angry she got at this because there's no way that a bay is a verb. There's no way. It is a thing. I can see it. I can touch it. It is a noun.

But then she started realizing that it's the action of the water that makes it a bay. It's the action of the elements that turn it into this thing. And so to be a bay is actually far more accurate than the noun, a bay. And that is something that I have really tried to pay attention to as I'm learning this language because it is so, so difficult.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

So when it comes to teaching all of that to a three-year-old, it makes it that much more difficult. I wake her up every morning. And I walk into her door, and I say [NON-ENGLISH] because that means you wake up. You wake up. It's time for you to wake up.

But if I was waking us up, I would say [NON-ENGLISH]. So when she says it, she tends to use the wrong tense, because she knows [NON-ENGLISH], because I say things to her. So I try to work in different experiences where we're talking about multiple people, or where I'm talking about a group of people outside of us, and how the different words are used. But I believe that my ancestors are just absolutely smiling, any time they hear us say any word.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

So whenever we go out for a walk, we say hi to the animals in our neighborhood. So if we see an [NON-ENGLISH]-- or if we see a squirrel, we'll say *ajidamoo*. Hi. Hi, squirrel. How are you?

And just trying to bring back the language in whatever way that we can. And at this point, when it comes to my knowledge of it, I still am very much at a three-year-old level of the language knowledge. So from a linguistic perspective, we're kind of on the same level. So it's really nice to be able to have a partner in crime, you might say, of learning this language.

My dad, who is also an Ottawa Indian, he-- I dragged him into language classes. I can't even remember how long ago. It was sometime last year. And so he has learned some of the language. And it's been incredible for him to reconnect, as well. He just-- I think he just wants to be around the language.

And he has felt a little bit more regret than I have because he knew his grandmother, who also went to-- I think she also had to go to residential school, as well. The details are a little bit fuzzy because they didn't really want anybody to know about it. But he wishes that he could have had more conversations with her about how she grew up, and what it was like, and what it was like living on the reservation as a young child, and what she remembers.

But we've both just kind of mourned this gap in our history, that we're never really going to know a lot of these answers. And now it's our job to create our own answers and come up with a new story.

**HALI JAMA:** I think it's really-- like, you can see her dedication to wanting to get closer to her culture, and go back to her roots and learn her language. But it's also kind of bittersweet. Because it's like, she shouldn't have to do that. It really sucks that her entire culture and way of life was ripped away from them.

And I could not imagine-- I couldn't imagine myself-- like, if my culture was taken away, I could not imagine learning Somali. Even at this age, just because it's such a complicated language. There's so many-- like, sometimes, when I'm translating in English, it's just-- I'm like, I got to think about this. Because you have to figure out ways to say it. And I think that's what she was also talking about, when she was speaking earlier. But, yeah, it's really great to see her dedication, like, her passion, though, it's really inspiring.

**BONNIE WILLISON:** Yeah, I was going to ask you about, like-- because Somali is your first language. So you don't have to think, probably, about how it's different with the verbs and noun structure and everything. It just comes natural. But does it have a pretty different like structure than English, do you think?

**HALI JAMA:** Yeah, completely. And that's why it's been really hard for my mom to-- or my parents both, but especially my mom-- to learn English. She's still struggles so much with learning English because we have such a completely different structure. For example, in Somali everything has a gender. So it's like, that desk-- like [NON-ENGLISH], that's a boy. And it's like, the knife is a girl. And like, all these-- and it's that kind of stuff.

And then, also, the order in which we say things. Like, if you really directly translated it, it would be backwards in English. So I don't know. There's just a lot in terms of translation that is different. But also the writing aspect of it, the reading aspect of it-- it's completely different alphabets and all that, so.

**LIZ CARTER:** So I found out about the book club through my tribe's Facebook page. My language instructor has-- she's the second chief in the tribe. And so she plays a very big role in terms of communication with everybody. And I just happened to see that she posted about this book club.

And I asked her about it, to see if it would be appropriate, because my daughter is 3. And my language instructor said, yes, just do it. Like, just do it. So I signed up. And I think the first meeting, I had signed up probably a couple of weeks before and received a notification that everything was full. So I was like, oh, man, maybe I can-- maybe we can join the second session.

And then about two days before the first meeting, I got an email saying that we were in. And I was like, oh, my god. But we haven't read the book. I don't know what's going on. so I'm trying to get as many resources as I could. And it was the book *Growing Up Ojibwe*, which, unfortunately, is not at my local library. But there was a game that had been built.

And I just tried to learn as much as I possibly could because I really wanted to be as respectful as I could with, first of all, everybody's time. But second of all, with these resources that are very, very important to me. But then to be able to see everybody who just wanted to learn more about this way of life was just really welcoming. It just felt like a warm hug.

**BONNIE WILLISON:** So as Liz said, the focus of that first book club meeting was the book *Growing Up Ojibwe* by GLIFWC, and it's illustrated by Joshua Whitebird. Morgan Coleman was the person who chose that book for Maadagindan. She developed the book club list during her internship.

**MORGAN COLEMAN:** Yeah, so it was a lot of research. First, combing through lists of books by Ojibwe authors, about Ojibwe experience, and also set in the Great Lakes region, that have something thematically to do with the Great Lakes. And so then I had to whittle that down to books for children. And then I had to access these books-- via ebooks, via going to the library-- and do a lot of reading.

**BONNIE WILLISON:** Morgan ended up with four featured books, which we've linked to in our show notes. Each meeting featured an honored Ojibwe guest that had some connection to the story of the book. The first guest was Hannah Arbuckle.

**HANNAH ARBUCKLE:** Hi, I'm Hannah Arbuckle. I'm the outreach coordinator for the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission. And I'm a member of the Bad River Band of Lake Superior Chippewa. I'm not going to lie. I think I was a little bit nervous when I agreed to speak about growing up Ojibwe.

Because it's really-- it's a part of my identity, but I didn't really I didn't grow up on the reservation. I grew up off the reservation. But I've always been tied very deeply to my community in Bad River, where I'm from. And I feel like being able to share that with others who felt the same was, really, almost healing, in a way.

Because I think a lot of other people who might identify as growing up Ojibwe I think struggle in the same way that you have these two identities. You have this native identity, where you're trying to fit into the society-- the mainstream society we live in today, while still holding onto those really important cultural things. And being able to share that with everybody was really cool experience for me.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

**LIZ CARTER:** Each one of the special guests that came on brought something new that I had never really thought about, but it felt like it was inside of me. Which is a feeling that I experience all the time now when I ask somebody a question about anything involving our culture, and they give me the answer, and I get this feeling in my head that's not, oh, wow, that's really cool to learn. I get this feeling that, oh, I already knew that. It's just reconnecting with something in the back of my brain, or in my gut, or whatever it might be.

I think to hear as many stories as we possibly can is so important. Whether it's somebody who grew up on a reservation, immersed in that culture, or somebody who wasn't, I think that each story is incredibly valid. And that's the takeaway that I had from each book that we read, from each session that we had, was just bringing a sense of validity to these stories, and breathing life into these stories that maybe otherwise would have gone unnoticed.

One of the coolest experiences, for me, when it came to reading the books with my daughter, was-- she's three. We read shorter books. We read-- she loves the board books. She loves something that's shorter, that she can really digest.

But when it came to reading the second book, *The Sacred Harvest*, it was a little bit longer, more words on each page, very different than what we normally read. So we would read a couple of pages, and then we would put it away. And then she would want to come back to it.

And to see her start to gravitate back to that story, and remember where we were, and remember who the people in the pictures were. She remembered Glenn. And she remembered what they were doing. It was really encouraging for me, on a developmental level, to think of how she is connecting the dots, and making that next leap, logically,

And how important books are in the overall education of a child. I try to read as many books as I possibly can. to her. I think our minimum is like 10 to 12 books a day. Because I really just want her to be exposed to as much as possible. And she's a total COVID baby so her biggest experiences in life have been through books.

**BONNIE** Michael Waasegiizhig Price was one of the honored guests, as well.

**WILLISON:**

**MICHAEL** I think the perspective of Anishinaabe or Ojibwe stories-- we look at the world in a different perspective. We look  
**WAASEGIIZHIG** at the world that the animals are considered to be our relatives, that our Earth is considered to be the mother of  
**PRICE:** all living things, and that we begin to learn these relationships and these connections through our stories that we wouldn't learn anywhere else. And the unique thing about it is, this is uniquely Anishinaabe. So if you go listen to stories in Navajo country, or Blackfeet country, or in different Indigenous Peoples' worlds, I mean, their stories are all uniquely coming from their philosophy and their worldview.

But our stories talk about our relationship, and our kinship with the natural world. In a lot of ways, I think that's what the world has been missing. I don't see that we have that spiritual connection to the world. And if you go back and read the works of philosophers like Rene Descartes and Sir Francis Bacon, they worked very hard to separate human beings from the natural world, and to declare that all of nature is mechanistic, and without spirit, and without conscience, so therefore we can just manipulate nature to our needs. And that is such a-- that philosophy, I think, has been problematic for our society for hundreds of years.

Anishinaabe stories talk about us being on equal footing with all of nature and with all living things, and that we need to nurture things like respect, and reciprocity, and relationship with the world that we live in. So that's one of the things that I get from the stories that I read and I hear.

**BONNIE** After the break, more from book club guest Michael Waasegiizhig Price about the stories that made him who he  
**WILLISON:** is today.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

OK, so one of the books that was on the list for the book club was called the *Birch Bark House* by Louise Erdrich. And I didn't get to read it for the book club, but I did pick it up afterwards. It's a chapter book, so it's at the middle school level, or maybe-- it's about a 10-year-old Ojibwe girl who grows up on *Mooningwanekaaning* which is Madeline Island, in Lake Superior.



But it was kind of funny. So I haven't read a book for 10-year-olds since I was 10, probably. So I was like, OK, you know, I'll just read it during my lunch break. But then I kept reading it. And like I just found myself thinking back to the book when I wasn't reading it, just while I was walking around or doing other stuff.

And it's just this really simple kind of feel good story about this family-- this Ojibwe family on Madeline Island. I mean, it's not all feel good. There are some trials and tribulations. But I started telling my best friend about it. And then I lent her the book. And she also just ripped through it.

We're just reading this middle school book. And there's actually like 7 to 10 books in the series. And we both read the first two and are onto the third one.

**HALI JAMA:** Right now I kind of want to read it

**BONNIE WILLISON:** Yeah, you should. Yeah, so Michael Waasegiizhig Price was the honored guest when we discussed the *Birch Bark House*. And we were able to speak with Michael Waasegiizhig at a separate time about Anishinaabe stories, like the ones featured in the book club books.

**MICHAEL WAASEGIIZHIG PRICE:** Because within the language is also the philosophy, and how we relate and connect to the natural world. So we learn a lot about our connection to the Earth just by studying the words in our language, the Anishinaabe language.

**HALI JAMA:** Michael is a teacher. He's been a teacher for a long time. He's taught at tribal colleges, then he got his certificate to teach the Ojibwe language. Now he works at the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission as the Traditional Ecological Knowledge Specialist.

**MORGAN COLEMAN:** Of course, that's part of my job is helping to integrate language and culture into the work that we do. I also teach language to the staff, so that they have more of an appreciation of the language. Oh, I love it. Absolutely love it.

And by teaching and preparing these lessons, it actually improves my skills as well. And it gets the language more firmly rooted into my mind and my spirit.

**HALI JAMA:** I also asked Michael how he became interested in teaching the Anishinaabe language.

**MICHAEL WAASEGIIZHIG PRICE:** I guess it goes all the way back to my relationship with my mother. She attended nine years of residential school when she was a young woman, from 1938 to 1947. She was there for nine years.

And in that time, the schools were designed to take away the language, and the culture, and the identity from these native children. And my mom lost her ability to speak her language. And she had no more connection with her community at home.

When I became an adult, after I learned that, I had a deep commitment, and I guess I would say a mission, maybe, to help to restore the language that those schools had destroyed. And also to bring back this worldview and this philosophy that Anishinaabe people had about the world. Our ecology, our cosmology, our traditions-- I wanted to be a part of that movement to revitalize our culture.

I didn't-- I wasn't exposed to any of the language or the culture when I was a kid. In fact, I really didn't even know the word Anishinaabe, or Ojibwe, or Odawa, or even Chippewa. I grew up in southeastern Oklahoma, among Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Cherokee people. And, yeah, I was exposed to other tribes. But I didn't learn anything about my language and culture until I was an adult.

**BONNIE** Michael's family comes from the Wiikwemkoong Nation, on unceded land of Manitoulin Island, in Ontario, Canada.

**WILLISON:** That island is where his mother is from.

**MICHAEL** Well, she grew up there until she was nine years old. And that's when she went into the residential school. When  
**WAASEGIIZHIG** she got out of residential school, then she moved on to Sioux Saint Marie. And eventually she met and married  
**PRICE:** my dad there. And then they moved on to Oklahoma.

I'm mean pretty much into my 30s, begin to talk with my mom, and she would tell me stories about her childhood. And then she told me about the schools that she went to. And at the time, I really didn't understand the mission of these schools, and what they were, and why they existed. But once I did learn, I started researching more and more and more about our family and our people.

And I remember that my mother had a family tree done by a professional. And when they created that family tree, the names went all the way back to the late 1700s, back before native people started having Christian names. And I was absolutely blown away to learn more and more about who I was and my roots because I'd never learned it as a child, or as a teenager, or not even as a young person. So, yeah, that started my life on a whole new different journey.

I remember when me and my mother went back to Wiikwemkoong to visit family, and I heard a story that was told there. The story was about a village of people that lived on an island. And while they were on the island, the people started-- the people were growing-- were growing sick. And also on the island, too, the brush had overgrown in the forest, and the whole island had become unhealthy.

And so the medicine person-- the old man that lived in that village-- a vision came to him that, in order to chase off the bad spirits from this island, we needed to burn the island. And so that's what they did. They sent the young men out. They sent the families off to relocate to another island.

And the young men went out and set fires all across the island, and totally burnt the island off. And they stayed at this other location for the whole winter. Well, the next spring, all of a sudden, with all the char and all the burnt everything, all of a sudden green grass started coming up on the island.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

And as a result of all the green-- lush green bushes and shrubs and grasses, now the deer and the rabbits started coming back to the island. And soon the berries came back. And eventually, the Anishinaabe people in this village returned back to the island.

And now the island was healthy again. And so now the Anishinaabe people lived well. And fire became an integral part of the culture of keeping the forest healthy.

So when I heard that story-- fire chasing off the bad spirits-- you know, this is probably in 1989. This is when Yellowstone-- they had the big fire in Yellowstone. And they talked about forest regeneration by wildfire. And I thought, these two are the very same thing.

And the scientists are talking about forest regeneration. And Anishinaabe people are talking about chasing the bad spirits off and bringing health back to the forest. Those two were the exact same thing. And that really sparked a-- it really sparked in my mind that, wow, there's something here. That these stories do contain knowledge and wisdom.

And that's when I began to read and to look at different stories, and start listening to storytellers. And when I was just a young man, I was in college. I thought I knew quite a bit, being an undergrad. But I guess I can say that was my first exposure to indigenous knowledge. So it didn't come out of the Western academies. It came from our community.

**BONNIE** You went on to study forestry. Did that-- is there a connection, there?

**WILLISON:**

**MICHAEL** There had to have been. I've been drawn to the trees, to the forests, my whole life. So, yeah, it's part of my path.

**WAASEGIIZHIG** I started late in life. I started learning the language, probably, when I was 37, 38.

**PRICE:**

And I learned from a few people in the Leech Lake, Red Lake area. I started to learn how to speak Ojibwemowin, which is a little bit different dialect from what my family speaks back at Manitoulin Island. But since I was living in Minnesota, I'd say, well, I'm going to learn the dialect here. And so I learned how to speak, or I learned the language, over the course of about, I don't know, 15 years.

I was just dabbling in the language. And I finally realized that if I ever want to have any type of comprehension or fluency, I need to really get serious about it. So in 2019, I enrolled in intermediate and advanced Ojibwe language courses at Bemidji State University. And I learned from Anton Treuer.

And then I really got a grip on the language. And then I got a certificate in teaching there. Yeah, so this has actually been my first teaching gig, here at-- in the languages, here at GLIFWC. Again, like I said earlier in my introduction,

I really reflect back on my mother, who's already passed on now. But I think about me going back and reclaiming the language for my family, and for my son. And, yeah, I would love it if she would have been around to see me get that. But she probably knows somewhere, somehow.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

**BONNIE** So when we talked to Liz, she had just come back from a big road trip. Remember how she was taking language classes with her dad? Well, at the same time, he was also studying for his bachelor's degree.

**WILLISON:**

**LIZ CARTER:** Well, my dad, who's 73 years old, just finally earned his bachelor's degree. He made a promise to me back in, I think, it was 2011. I was graduating from grad school. And he made a promise to me that he would get his undergraduate. And so his motto was get your degree when you're 73.

So last week, we went to Ottawa, Kansas, to see him graduate. And spent a couple of days there, and explored the area. But we were able to see a couple of the gravesites of my family.

And it was a very surreal experience, to see these people who I've tried to learn as much about as I possibly can, but also the feeling of sadness that was there. The feeling of just-- you could just feel it in the air that they didn't want to be in this area. They didn't want to be in this territory. And I really felt that, throughout every ounce of my soul.

And it made it a very, very strange trip, to be so excited to learn so much about these people, and to be able to reconnect, and be able to see their final resting place, but to know how terrible it was for them, and how much sadness just enveloped their life, once they moved to Kansas. And then, after we spent a couple of days in Ottawa, Kansas, we went down to Miami, Oklahoma, where our tribe currently is.

And to be able to meet my language instructor face-to-face-- some of the people who I've done language classes with, to be able to see some of our tribal artifacts, and be able to just be where my tribe is-- was so just good for my soul. It was great to finally be able to meet these people. As great as it is to connect online, there's nothing like connecting face-to-face. So to be able to see that-- to be able to see the things that we have built, to be able to see the ways that they are improving our tribe and working so hard to make sure that we are as strong as we can be-- was absolutely fantastic.

But then again, there was still this feeling of just, like, we're doing the best that we can. We're doing the best with what we've been given. And they are amazing at that. They are doing so much with what they've been given.

But I don't feel like I will have a complete sense of who I really am as an Ottawa Indian until I am able to go back up to the Great Lakes region, and be able to be on the lands where my ancestors really were. So hopefully next summer we can make that journey.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

**MICHAEL** Well, if you look back on the history, native peoples did not have a positive relationship with our government. All  
**WAASEGIIZHIG** the way up until 1978, it was basically illegal for native people to perform their ceremonies. So now that, in 1978,  
**PRICE:** they passed the American Indian Religious Freedom Act, that's one thing.

On the other hand, two, a lot of these stories and this knowledge was being expropriated and written in books and sold. And the native people got no recognition and nothing in return. So taking these two things together, a lot of native people learn to be very tight lipped about their knowledge-- ceremonies, the stories, the language. I grew up in that time frame when people were tight lipped about these teachings.

I was lucky enough to have a mentor and a teacher that had a different approach to knowledge. He said if we don't start talking about these things among ourselves, we're going to lose this knowledge. And of course that silence from our elders came from colonization, came from boarding schools.

In the boarding schools, they made they made the kids ashamed of who they were and ashamed of their knowledge. So many of us students of those boarding school survivors, we've had to deal with, you know, do we share this knowledge or do we not? And as a teacher, that's been my philosophy is to be more open.

**BONNIE** So today we've already talked about colonization, boarding schools, and the experience of our indigenous guests  
**WILLISON:** who are working to reconnect to their heritage.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

And what brought us here? Reading children's books.

**MICHAEL** I think it's really important to promote native authors. It's really important, I think, to promote the native authors  
**WAASEGIIZHIG** who actually grew up in the communities, and now they're writing books. And they offer a genuine perspective of  
**PRICE:** Native American life and worldview.

**BONNIE** So our coworkers have led for Maadagindan meetings so far, and are planning to do more in the future. I caught  
**WILLISON:** up with them to see what stuck with them from the book club experience. Here's Anne Moser.

**ANNE MOSER:** As librarian with Wisconsin Sea Grant, I do a lot of programming with kids. I take a Great Lakes topic and I sing,  
and I make crafts, and we dance, and we tell stories. And the power of stories is-- it can make such an impact on  
children.

But these stories for children are so important, as they grow up and they are becoming who they are. They're  
finding their identity. Who are they? Who are their friends? Who are their relatives? This process of finding their  
identity is so strong at this age group that our book club is targeted for.

And books must reflect all of the faces that we find in society now. And it's also understanding your identity, and  
also appreciating others. So creating empathy for others. So a child's growing up and, you know, they're hearing  
the stories of the Ojibwe people. They're hearing their full history of the country-- all the things that have  
happened to our native populations.

They begin to have empathy from a young age. And this is very important when we're trying to create  
community in our country, and have all of us listening, and hearing, and being respectful with each other. It  
really starts at a very young age. So having these books that are reflective of our society are just really, really  
important.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

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[MUSIC PLAYING]