

Transcript of Interview with Stacy Laravie by Kit Heintzman

Interviewee: Stacy Laravie

Interviewer: Kit Heintzman

Date: 02/14/2022

Location (Interviewee): Nyberg, Nebraska [Ponca Tribe]

(Interviewer):

Transcribed by: Angelica S Ramos

Some of the things we discussed include:

Indigenous family oriented culture. Death of Tribal members, from COVID directly or aftereffects
Lost language speakers/keepers, story tellers, medicine men and women; the pandemic taking away
knowledge. Father in assisted living; losing visitation access. The negative health impacts of isolation
An outbreak of COVID at the nursing home in Fall 2020; father caught COVID; father, Andrew Laravie
(Ponca name Walking Strength) died in 23 April 2021; lost grandmother to COVID. Not being able to have a
traditional pipe ceremony for father's death, he was a pipe carrier. The Ponca Tribe's loss of federal
recognition in the 1960s, father's activism for federal recognition. Raised by great grandfather; learning
how to live off the land, learning language and culture from father. Touch as a love language and giving up
physical contact when visiting father, slow normalization of physical distance and no/minimal physical
contact. Rushed vaccination distribution; vaccine mandates; deciding to get vaccinated. Easy access to
vaccination, masks, cleaning supplies, tests, and other outreach from the Ponca Tribal government; getting
kits and care packages together for people isolating; COVID pay; vaccine distribution at Ponca run clinics.
Indian Health Services. Being unable to perform funerals and ceremonies; being in charge of ~11 funerals
in 2021. The shutting down of their museum and cultural center. Different circumstances on large
reservations and poor reservations in contrast to personal experiences in Ponca service areas. War
metaphors. Being a caretaker for family; mental health in the pandemic; plant medicines and
pharmaceuticals; disabling grief, being low functioning as a single mother; appearing high functioning and
learning to reach out for help; guilt. Land as church; stopping gardening in a state of grief, preparing to
plant again. Being a busy person pre-pandemic, but one who was balanced and with routine; feeling busier
now that projects postponed by the pandemic are coming back up. Comparing Ponca Tribe, Nebraska State,
and USA Federal governments' COVID response
Becoming more introverted. Having children with medical conditions, asthma, learning disabilities
Caught COVID twice, once pre-testing. Contradictions in the federal government's handling of the
pandemic, eg. Masking. Boarding schools striping children of cultural knowledge and connection; history
repeating itself in the theft of religious and cultural identity for indigenous peoples during this pandemic;
resonances with those children in boarding schools who could only perform ceremony in secret; spiritual
safety. The federal government had no advisement on cultural awareness for spiritual protections;
patriarchal and colonial governance. Colonization as a mental status, not defined by demographics
That the expansion of mental health care digital infrastructure isn't enough without spiritual support
Survival mode and making art. Children watching a parent learn to cope in a healthy way. The pandemic as
a genocide of the generation. Worries that histories will forget many of this moment's failings
Marginalized people losing more during the pandemic.

Kit Heintzman 00:00:00

Hello, I would you please start by telling me your full name, the date, the time and your location?

Stacy Laravie 00:00:11

[introduced herself traditionally] aka Stacy Laravie. My name is Stacy Laravie, and it is 10:33 February 14 2022. And I am based out of Nyberg, Nebraska, for the Ponca Tribe in Nebraska.

Kit Heintzman 00:00:32

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Stacy Laravie 00:00:43

Yes.

Kit Heintzman 00:00:44

I'd like to start by just asking you to introduce yourself to anyone who might find themselves listening to this, what would you want them to know about you and the place that you're speaking from?

Stacy Laravie 00:00:55

Well, I introduce myself, traditionally. I am a PANCA. Member, as well as I work from my tribe. I am the Tribal Historic Preservation Officer. And I am also the museum curator. And many, many other hats. I am also a direct descendant of Chief Standing Bear. And yeah, that's, and I'm a mom. So

Kit Heintzman 00:01:36

Thank you so much for that. Would you start by just telling me a story about life and the pandemic?

Stacy Laravie 00:01:42

The pandemic? Wow, I think we all have similarities and I know, tribally, it has been tough on tribes. Indigenous people, they're a very family oriented society. So our gatherings that we have in ceremonies, you know, it's very community based and family based. Even our, we've lost quite a few people within the tribe due to the pandemic, either from direct COVID cases, or after effects from COVID. My father was one of them. He passed away after just from complications. Um, and I think, you know, we could, even our funerals, we could not gather in funerals, we have ceremony that goes along with our mourning process, and just, you know, someone's passing on to the next realm, you know, we have our own ceremonies that we do, and we were unable to do a lot of that. The whole etiquette and process that we would normally in protocols that we would traditionally follow, we were not able to do that. We, so that was hard. I know, once everything was lifted, you know, to a point where gatherings could be in larger groups and such. Um, me personally, it was very overwhelming, because I am also in charge of like the funerals and the cemetery type stuff. And it was just there for a while I had just 2021 I had probably about 11 funerals, just in that short amount of time. And I of course, was related to majority of them. Were all related somehow. And not only that, during the pandemic, a lot of museums, you know, and cultural centers were shut down. So we were unable to, you know, educate others on our culture and heritage. So that took an effect. We do own

businesses, the tribe itself. So I know, you know, your COVID a lot of those were shut down. But I think the biggest impact was not being able to gather as Panca was, like we would have, and then not being able to gather just my own example, my father was in a nurse assisted living. And I made it a point to I'm a single mother, so I could not like, traditionally, he would come live with me, but being a single mother modern times, you know, things are different. And I, we had to put him in assisted living, but it was where I could go visit him every day, sometimes twice today, you know, with that, with COVID, that was all, everything was shut down. No one could come in and visit, he was not able to come out, you know, like our normal car rides, or whatever it was.

Stacy Laravie 00:06:25

Um, so that took a toll on him. I know. And it took a toll on everybody else in the nursing homes. And he was on assisted living. And then within probably two months, his health declined. And this is before he got COVID his health declined in his dementia got worse. And I know it has to do with not being able to have that family that contact. So then he was moved to the nursing home side, because he was no longer able to do the cares that he needed to for himself. And I was no longer able to go in and care. Like I could, I could just leave things at his doorstep. Or, and that was really it. And then he went to the nursing home side, and there was an outbreak of COVID in the nursing home, so then everybody had to be sent away to other hospitals or wherever they could be housed at. And he got COVID. And I was unable to be there with him for that. And that was hard, because he was my, he's my best friend, you know, and so I'm gonna try not to get too emotional. But this was in 2000, let's see, when did he get it? This was would have been in late fall 2020. Um, that was our first year of COVID. Um, and then he got COVID. But he was like, you know, he came out of it fine. So we thought. And then, fast forward, he got his shots and everything because 2020 was fairly new, no one really knew what was going on. So, he, um, fast forward to 2021 beginning of the year, they started lifting things a little bit, I was able to, in order to see him I had to be vaccinated, which at this point, everyone was kind of questioning the vaccines. No one really knew what was going on. And I didn't get mine right away, but then they said, if you want to see him, you know, you need to be vaccinated. I got my vaccines. I was able to see him distantly and but I was not able to hug him or touch him. So I had to settle. Okay, this is better than how it's been. And then, of course, and I had to do scheduled visits, as opposed to popping in hearing them. The staff and the regulations say, oh, Wednesday's not going to work for you to see your father. What he's my father. You know, it's even that was hard to Have it was still a restriction. It's not like he was a destination I was going to. He was a human being, you know, all these people in the nursing home was he, they're human beings. And so then I was able to see him see here. It was April, it was like the second week in April, we had our visit. And everything, he seemed to be in good spirits. But then April 23 2021, I was at work in another state. And he unexpectedly just passed away. And we're thinking it was his heart. But I wonder how much was either one effects of the COVID itself, what it did to his organs. And then on top of that, the shots were so new, that, you know, what if they haven't been tested, like they should be. So I'm not against vaccines, but they're just not tested, like they should be, I don't even know what's doing to my body, you know.

Stacy Laravie 00:07:30

And so I just don't know, it was just very out of the blue. He went to sleep, and he never woke up. So that's, that's been hard. I lost my grandmother, she had COVID. I know, the, I think the effects of COVID She had a lot of other things going on with her. But within a few months, it was she, her heart was at this percent. And

then it went down to 20%. And I just lost her just the beginning of this year. And it's just, you know, it's been a lot, there's been a lot of loss, especially within tribal communities. You know, we want to be together, that is our livelihood. We're very, our society is very much family oriented. We're like the buffalo, you know, we have to we have our roles that we all play with each other's lives. And the tribes all across the United States, you know, the tribes, it's not just us like, it's like the same story over and over again. The thing with the Ponca Tribe is we don't have a it was worse on the reservations. And also, I think, some of the reservations, some more, I guess, poor ones, you know, a bigger ones, like the Navajo Nation. Um, I think they had an even worse, just because of, you know, not be able to, it's such a huge area, that there just wasn't enough care. Like, you know, it's just everything is miles and miles apart. And all ours, like we have on reservations, the families, they were together, even when they were on isolation, there are so much together still, that there was a lot of like loss on the reservations, like some of the ones that aren't so spread out. Um, so it's either you got the larger ones where there's just not enough health care or like, you know, people to go around to all these homes to make sure everything's being taken care of. Um, and then, of course, there's like the water crisis down there, too. They're like, well wash your hands all the time. Okay, well, what about areas where they don't have water? The clean water to do that? You know, it's so frustrating but and then, um, then you got the reservations that aren't as large but everyone's like, closer together. So people are getting it left and right, left and right.

Stacy Laravie 00:14:49

And you know, and then the Pancas, we don't have a reservation we have service areas. So certain counties in Nebraska, Iowa and South Dakota, that we were all spread out. So. So a lot of us like there are quite a few that live in larger cities. So I mean, our situation is different, but the common denominators like we all lost language speakers, storytellers, traditional ceremonial people, like our medicine, men and women, a lot of knowledge was lost, just from the pandemic itself. And we're scrambling and for one of our projects is, you know, we want to start recording people. And it was too late. And, you know, I am like, my job, I do like eight different things, because we're just a smaller department. But it's like, I just can't get to these people fast enough to our elders, or knowledge keepers fast enough. And they're all passing away. We've lost so many language keepers to. And it's just so it's a trauma. It's, it's almost like going into war. And I can see why a lot of like, I myself. And I have no problem talking about mental health. I myself, have never been on any kind of medication. I'm a naturalist. So I go on my plants and herbs and stuff. I finally broke down this year. And had to reach out for help. And because my go to people who are my mentors, and my, the people that guide me, they're gone. I don't have that. And so, I mean, it's, it's hard, because like, I could talk about the organization of the tribe as a whole and working as like in the employee side. But it also ties in, because we work for a people. We don't, this is our I work for government, I work for people, the people are first. But I'm also related to all of them. So it's like very personal, you know, talk about joining a work that a job that is very, very personal. And so it has played lar, like, I just feel like I don't know, I don't know if it's the type of PTSD or what but there's a lot of trauma that I'm going through right now. And just trying to and not only for my own, like I said, my, within my job and my duties, I have to if there's a funeral, I make sure that there's burial space. And I have to help with the funerals. And I have to like over and over and over again, is like going to war. And it's like you just don't get a break. You don't get to grieve. I don't think I've grieved for anything. I just keep going. It's like one thing after the next. But that's the gist of what it's done.

Kit Heintzman 00:19:06

Thank you so much for all of that. Would you say something more about who your father was?

Stacy Laravie 00:19:14

Yeah, um, my father. His name was Andrew Laravie. His Panca name {speaking native language} which means walking strength. He was the great great grandson of Chief Standing Bear. Huge knowledge keeper. I've learned so much from him. Not many Pancas. Unfortunately, not many Pancas had the opportunity to live traditionally, I guess, in a sense sense of living off the land and being brought up within the language. My great grandfather, who was his grandfather raised him up here along the rivers in Panca Creek. And I was able to be raised as well by my great grandfather. And at that time he was in his 80s he could speak flute Panca. So my dad too, he knew this land like the back of his hand. And I got a lot of my knowledge of plants and, you know, trapping and living off the land from them both. And he just knew so much about the culture, and there was just so much that I wish I could still ask him, he was doing my job before it was even a job. He was doing repatriations, he was doing nag press stuff before the tribe had NAGPRA. He was he sat on in the 1990s, I don't know if you know, the history of the Pancas. But the tribe was terminated in the 60s, for federal recognition. And a group of Pancas got together and started a restoration committee in council, and my father sat on the first council to fight to get our recognition back. And so he was on the first tribal council for that. He was a brave man. He had a fishing pole everywhere he went, even when he was in the nursing home, I kept one in my vehicle for him. So we could just stop and you know, if there is a pond that we couldn't climb around, like we normally would and go for long walks through the, you know, down the river and all that, but if there was an area where he could fish off, you know, we would stop. So I would always make sure I had his fishing license and, um, but even then, he was teaching me you know, many things. He was just a good good, good man. Big Heart. Yeah, he's irreplaceable.

Kit Heintzman 00:22:58

I'd like to follow up on your invitation to speak more about mental health. And how really anything you'd like to say about that I'd be really grateful to hear.

Stacy Laravie 00:23:12

Um, I guess my personal mental health story. Before the pandemic, I was always the Per Well, I'm the go to person, I guess. I'm for my family. And now that dad's gone, and when I was his caregiver, I took on that role. And I guess I'm the kind of person where I'll be okay, as long as everybody else is. So when dad passed away, you know, that just, you know, I'm like, I, maybe I didn't do enough. Maybe I didn't, you know, that guilt sets in. And it's almost like going into battle. And you're a warrior. And you come out and you lose so many. I just, I don't know, like, especially after, it was already taking its toll, seeing everybody pass away and seeing my Panca relatives. So sad and just so much grief. But then when it happened to me, my whole world stopped. And there was a point where I couldn't even get out of bed. But I have children. So I have to, I have to get a bed and I call my, their father and I'd say, you know, I just, I can't get a bed today, I'm not doing good. And him and his wife were very encouraging and helpful, you know. It's just been, I'm finally starting to get out of the cloud a little bit, and the haze is starting to lift a little. But it's still I have my days where it's hard to even just get up. And it's almost crippling. I've lost probably about 30 pounds, not in a healthy way, just from lack of appetite, or, you know, I'm, I'm fine. And then something will hit. You know, and it's high new, I have so many people that I have to take care of. And my uncle, he calls me the, the family cornerstone. And when you have such a role, people don't really check in, on the person that's, you know,

taking care of everything. And I think it's because that person looks like they have it all together. And they're strong. And, but people don't really check on those people. And so I had to advocate for myself. And I had to reach out to people. Which is hard. Because I don't like people seeing me that way. Because I want them to know that I'm there. They're steady, and they're rock if they need me to be so how could I be if they see my weakness? So that depresses me too. Because I'm like, Ah, but I'm not. I'm not. I'm human. So that was a humbling experience, though. I've learned a lot just from that, in my own mind, in reprogramming that, you know, like, you need to humble yourself down a little bit, you're not Superwoman. So it's just been me reaching out to people and doing therapy and counseling and doing more ceremony. You know, go to my ceremonies, whether it's a sweat or my church is the land.

Stacy Laravie 00:27:55

So just trying to get back into that. I'm an avid gardener and outside of work, I focus on traditional food ways and indigenous foods and food sovereignty. Last year, I didn't garden I just had a little pot with like, maybe some tomatoes. And every year a grower Panca corn, and I couldn't even do that. For me, it was kind of its symbolic, you know, our pocket corn has been with us for hundreds and hundreds and hundreds, maybe longer 1000s of years, you know. And I just, it was almost like when we I was in mourning and grieving, um, during our powwow last August, so when you are grieving and mourning, you don't dance. And I didn't dance. And to me is almost that same thing with planting our corn. I was grieving and mourning and I was like, I cannot plant the seeds. So this year, um, you know, I'm already I'm starting to, you know, make plans to plant those seeds. And that's the type of healing you know, like, no, I need to my daughter. She's so wise. She's like, you know, you always talk about resilience. She's only 12, You always talk about resiliency. Do you think that maybe we could garden this year? Because you're showing that you're resilient? Just like our corn that you have to grow it mom. And I'm like you are so Oh, you're right, you know and so this year we're planning our garden and I'm really going to push myself for that healing but yeah, the my depression and anxiety and everything it just last year, I just could not do it. And it's okay. I just want people to know it's okay to reach out for help. Even if you think you're I dont know. A giant we, you u you know, even David slayed a giant, you know, it's, it's, it's okay to reach for help. There's nothing shameful or wrong about that. And that was something I had to realize, too. You know. So, that's one thing I want people to know is that it's okay to reach out. Whatever that looks like, and to reach out before it gets really bad, or it's too late. So

Kit Heintzman 00:31:19

How's the land where you are been doing?

Stacy Laravie 00:31:21

The land? Um, it's been, we need moisture. That's sure. It's been really dry. Um so I mean, that's really the big thing is we just need moisture. So I'm anxious to see if we don't get moisture soon what, you know, this springs gonna hold for us. So yeah, other than that, I mean, it seems to be steady. But right now everything's sleeping.

Kit Heintzman 00:32:11

I'd like to move back to some of what you were talking about in terms of what you've been doing in your work. It sounds like you do a lot. Talk to me about busyness, pre and post pandemic.

Stacy Laravie 00:32:31

Um, pre pandemic, things were balanced. I mean, I've always been a busy person. And that was always my fault for biting off more than I can chew usually. But there was always a balance, you know, things remained open, everything was like everything was routine. You know, um, during pandemic, you know, a lot, just kind of stopped.

Stacy Laravie 00:33:19

Post pandemic, I think I'm busier now than I was pre. Just because we are now within my position. I deal with government agencies. And a lot of the projects were postponed, so I'm catching up with all those and everyone's like, well, we can't meet in person here. We're gonna postpone our meeting till spring. So I'm like, everyone's the spring, the spring, the spring. I'm like, Wow, I'm going to be really busy this spring. So and then, you know, we as a culture department, we couldn't go in and like visit schools and, you know, give our culture classrooms or whatever it was our outreach. Now that things are open, people are wanting that again. Um, and then my personal life I do a lot of projects outside of work. I'm an artist. I have a business outside of work. I write I utilize podcasts, I do all these different things. And it seems like after some of those projects that were put on hold that I'm contracted to do, though, for my business, I make cookies And I cater. So during beforehand, it was like steady business, it was a balance. You know, I had my clients, everything like that, well, everything got postponed. So then post everyone's, you know, doing their parties or they, they had a small little wedding during the pandemic, but like maybe just for people, and then they're gonna have their parties this year, you know, or this summer. So it's like, I'm busier now than I have been in a long time. So it's now I'm almost too busy. And I need an assist. But, yeah.

Kit Heintzman 00:35:54

When things were closing down, who was making those decisions about closures?

Stacy Laravie 00:36:01

When things were closing down?

Kit Heintzman 00:36:02

Yeah.

Stacy Laravie 00:36:03

Who was making the decision?

Kit Heintzman 00:36:04

Yeah.

Stacy Laravie 00:36:05

Um, well, usually the now for the organization, tribal organization itself, that would be our government. So our tribal council and such and they usually go off with like guidelines, and we have our own COVID team and things like that, like a bunch of advisors. We have our own advisors and such. So um, they're the ones that make that decision. But yeah.

Kit Heintzman 00:36:47

How have you been determining what feels safe for you?

Stacy Laravie 00: 36:51

Um, usually, it's just knowing my boundaries during the social distance thing. You know, wearing a mask and not I haven't been to a concert in a very long time. A lot of crowds and stuff. But I have noticed, I've been kind of introverted. I, I've always been introverted, but I had to be extroverted. Within my, throughout my whole life. Um, what I have noticed, because of being alone all the time, I do have anxiety worse now than even before. I always had some anxiety with large crowds and stuff like that, or a lot of people. I noticed it's even worse now. And I think a lot of people are finding that out. I've had that discussion with a lot of people, how their anxiety is even worse, being around a lot of people. And whether it's, oh, I'm gonna get sick, I don't want to get sick. Or it's just, you know, being around to me, humans, you're not used to that. So yeah.

Kit Heintzman 00:38:24

Going back again, to earlier aspects of your answer. Would you talk about the process of deciding to get vaccinated once the nursing home had put in the requirement but also access to vaccination?

Stacy Laravie 00:38:41

The tribe has the nursing home, you know, we found out that, you know, they have their regulations and everything, along with a lot of people outside of the tribal government, the federal government and such had and state governments have their own policies and guidelines and what have you. Um, so I did not get vaccinated the first go round the tribe has done really great at like when COVID first head and the CDC was doing all this stuff, like I really commend the council, they really gotten there. They're like, Hey, this is happening. Um, we need to start a committee for this. We need to you know, we started our own COVID team, kind of like federal government did. And they were very good at making sure that the people got access to vaccines mask cleaning It is, you know, cleaning supplies, a lot of our outreach, and a lot of our departments, depending on what department they were, they were very good at making sure if you got COVID, I got COVID Before I got the shots, um, I got COVID twice. And this was like early first time was early on, when no one knew was going on. And the second time was we didn't announce the shots just yet. So it was all like before the shots were really out there. So, um, but we did have departments that did like kits, and they're like, Hey, we're gonna go to the grocery store, what do you need this and that, and this and that. And during that time the policy was, and the Health Department during that time, if you had COVID, and you've had children, they needed to isolate the whole family need to isolate together. And then we had COVID. Pay, so that was awesome. Um, so we all could isolate together, but they had people that came out to conquer members and drop baskets have what they needed, groceries, whatever they needed on their doorstep. Which was amazing, especially if it couldn't go anywhere. So along with masks and cleaning supplies, and whatever you would need COVID related. And, you know, information on COVID, whatever. Um, we had a COVID team, the lead of that COVID team. She's the Community Health Manager, and she would coincide with like, what's health department, you know, it all just worked very well together. So then the test came out. And we have clinics throughout Nebraska. So we have our own pump of clinics for Leroy, we have one that was just built in Lincoln. But that wasn't out during that time, that was still in

construction, but we have one in Norfolk as well as close to me. So we could go and get the shots, you know, as Ponca members, and then I keep they offer IHS to Indian Health Services to other tribes, as you know, anyone that's enrolled to a tribe. So that was refreshing, but then the test came out. And so they made sure like our people thought we had the setup for ample testing. And I swear, I think sometimes I was there, you know, you just didn't know like, you get a cold and you have all the symptoms, like everything was a symptom, you know, of COVID. So it's like, you call the team, you're like, Hey, should I get tested?

Stacy Laravie 00:43:30

You know, and so, I mean, we have a lot of access to test. We have shots, we still do test shots. We have COVID team and care. Yeah, I think the tribes doing pretty good with that. And they still and they also have home health kit or home health or home test kits now. So yeah, I was able to get shots. no hassle, no line. Really. You just go and get it.

Kit Heintzman 00:44:23

What was your what were your early reactions when you first found out you had COVID?

Stacy Laravie 00:44:28

Well, the first time I had it. They didn't have testing out yet. And I'm pretty sure I had it. You know, and at that time, you know, you just during that time, you would just call the health department and I call our COVID team and I was like these are all my symptoms. And they're like okay, we're pretty sure you have COVID So I mean, the unknowing and hearing that people are dying, and then started, you know who your family members and like the Panca people like in you see on the news to like people were dying from it. So that was scary, because you just didn't know what to expect. You see healthy, healthy, healthy people dying. And so I was scary. I was like, oh no is this there's that anxiety? They're like, Oh, no, is this gonna be what kills me? Like, am I going to die? You know, and then the aftermath, you know, once it progressed a little further, like, more information was out there about COVID people started realizing they're having side effects from it. Like the kiddies and you know, what have you. And then the second time I got it, I'm like, well, I already had it. So, but it was different the second time, I actually lost my taste and smell. And so that was scary. And then I'm like, there's already trauma to my body, what else is going to happen like more trauma? So at that point, then I was like, you know, I have so much trauma to my body, if there is side effects from the shot. Might as well get it, you know. But yeah, it was scary. It was really scary. Especially that first time because there was so many unknowns. Like no one really knew much about it. And even my kids, you know, they had to isolate with me and I was worried that they would get it.

Stacy Laravie 00:47:00:

They were saying people who have a, you know, lung issues to begin with, my daughter has asthma, and you know, just all these different things. And my son, he has, like a slight heart condition and I, you know it just as a mom, I think I was more worried for them than myself. I think that was the big thing. Like, I can push through this I, I fought cancer twice, I can push through this, you know, and it was just I did not want them to get sick. But

Kit Heintzman 00: 47:39

Do you remember when you first heard about the pandemic?

Stacy Laravie 00:47:47

The first time I heard about it was I was actually watching the news. And you know, it was during the time of the the cruise ship that came in. And everybody was sick. And the irony was like, that week, I actually got sick. And at first, I didn't think much of it. But then I was still sick. A weekend came and I'm like, Wow, I feel like death right now. And then a lot of stuff came out about COVID. And then I'm like, Okay, I think and then work started, like, hey, we have this COVID team. And then I'm like, Wow, this has to be serious. And then, you know, it was all like, within a few days of me getting sick run. That's when I called that weekend. I was like, Hey, I have all these symptoms, you know. But that was the first time I heard about was when that ship came. And then I remember when they started isolating people at UNMC. Um, of course, that was a big deal. But yeah, it was scary to kids are like, Oh, no, don't bring them here. You know, like, don't bring them to Nebraska. But it's because no one really knew what was going on. So

Kit Heintzman 00:49:31

What does the word health mean to you?

Stacy Laravie 00:49:34

Health? Um, I guess for me, it means I mean, not only is it a nurturing and taking care of your body, in healing, it's also your mind, your spirit, it all plays together. Because we know what depression can do to a body and immunity, health and then the spiritual side, we know what that can help aid in with mental health. So to me, that's what health means.

Kit Heintzman 00:50:39

The past two years have been a lot more than just COVID Even within sort of like a broad political spectrum. I'm wondering if there's what other things have been on your mind in the last few years that have been going on with but not necessarily the same as COVID?

Stacy Laravie 00:51:05

Um, I guess for me, I feel like even just politically, I think that's all tied together. I'm not a conspiracy theorist. But I mean, I think it all plays together. And I feel like there are things within the government that we could be doing better, or they could be doing better. There's a lot of contradictions with between the politics and COVID It's so and you know, even just the economy how things They're being handled. There's just a lot of contradictions. But that's about all I can say about that.

Kit Heintzman 00:52:09

Just a very quick clarification question, and that's a discussion of the federal government. Yes?

Stacy Laravie 00:52:16

Yes, yeah. Yep. Yeah. Yeah. Yep. My tribal governments awesome. So great.

Kit Heintzman 00:52:24

I just wanted to make sure that

Stacy Laravie 00:52:27

In fact, I think that the federal government should take some pointers from tribes, though.

Kit Heintzman 00:52:35

Do you think that we've. What do you think, if anything, we've learned from the pandemic and take WE at like, any scale, you want to.

Stacy Laravie 00:52:46

Um, I guess, you know, I guess to cherish and not take for granted those that are in your life that you love and love you. cherish them and I guess humble yourself, be good to yourself, be kinder to yourself, be kinder to others. I've learned that unity is the best opposed to all these differences and opposition's. Not to trust the government to appoint I don't know, I guess the biggest thing that matters, what it all comes down to is what matters is just you know, cherish those that you love. I mean, that's the biggest thing, you know, is love, just don't take for granted. You know, the people in front of you know

Kit Heintzman 00:54:27

What does the word safety mean to you?

Stacy Laravie 00:54:34

Safety, um I guess I can take that on different levels. Safety, as in a secure, feeling, you know, secure physically feeling secure mentally and spiritually. But being an indigenous woman. Safety also means, you know, there needs to be a cultural safety.

Stacy Laravie 00:55:13

We, as indigenous people need to be able to practice, you know, our cultures and beliefs and traditions, and not be judged upon those. So, cultural safety is probably the biggest one. Because a lot of my cultural beliefs like my father, he wasn't able, I wasn't able to do prayer with him. Like I wanted to, um, which involved me going there taking him out side on our walks, or whatever it was, and being able to do our smudge, our sage and our ceremony in our prayer, like we would do. Um, and that was a religious and cultural identity that was taken away. So in a way, I kind of feel like someone was like, history is repeating itself, in that sense, and I'm not just speaking about you know, the cultural and you know, being indigenous our ceremonies, but there were a lot of people that weren't able to practice their religious beliefs and go to their church because not everybody's church was and you know, they would always have I think some of the church Is the ministers would come in and do a little service for the residents. He wasn't able to do that, you know, a lot of people didn't have want to do it online, you know, it's they want to be. For them. It's comforting knowing that their minister or whoever's right there praying for them. But yeah, just that cultural safety needs to fall in line with safety itself, especially as an indigenous person, and, you know, that's what, that's who we are. And to be able to pray in our way. And I really think that took a toll on my father. You know, it's, it goes back to the boarding schools, I'm not trying to go off track, but it's all connected, goes back to the boarding schools, you know, when all these babies and these young children were have the language, and their ceremonial cultural ways of practicing their religion, stripped from them. And it's just a history that's repeating itself. That's why I mean, the federal government needs to do better. There should have been to restrict, and it's not, not so much the nursing homes fall, like they had their state and their federal

guidelines, they had to follow. And I would go in, you know, like, when I finally was able to go, or the conversations I would have, I was able to zoom with my father or, you know, zoom with him and stuff, but I'd have conversations with nurses over the phone, and they would just be in tears, because they know, to, they know that their residents need to be with their families, they know how important that is. So I know, it's taking a toll on them as well. And especially for my father, you know, he, my, my dad would these, they caught him one time, and one of the nurses This was after he passed away. Um, when it was lifted, you know, things were lifted, he passed away, I was able to go to his room. And he was laying on the bed, and I was able to he was a pipe carrier. So technically, I was not, I'm not a pipe carrier. And so another pipe carrier, and a couple other pipe carriers will come in and do a ceremony. But I was the only one allowed and my sister was the only one allowed. And so I asked them, you know, I got permission to do it.

Stacy Laravie 01:00:15

And now I'm holding his pipe for my son, but it's like, that wasn't even allowed. I'm glad I was able to be there. But even his ceremony with the connecting of like, all these, the medicine, in exchange of smoke was not able to be fully done. And I, one of the nurses after he passed, um, told me that he miss, and she was in tears because she knew how important it was. She got it, she understood that there was nothing they could do when the restrictions were really high. And she'd walked by his room and he had his feathers. And he had his sage. And he would pretend that he was praying to any goal and all the directions and he pretend just to you know, be able and I think that was his last grasp of trying to hold on to something.

Stacy Laravie 01:01:35

And so for me and then I also do you know, part of my job is I do a lot of like, repatriations and NAGPRA and we're, you know, there's all these boarding schools of all these little indigenous children and babies and, you know, that's something that they had to do in secret It was they would mimic and pretend that maybe they would find like a rock or something, and they pretend it was something else that they would do ceremonial. And you know, that's not hearing that from my father, or about my father, it just reminded me of that, that he had, he didn't have to do it the secret, but he couldn't. He, he couldn't, you know, release that smoke. And we believe that that smoke lifts our prayers, you know, it helps clean the air and stuff. And he would call me is like, there's so much death here. There's so much sadness and death. And he was a very positive man. And you know, and I tried to be positive, and he was just like, there's just so much. He's like, I can't clean the air. I can't clean it. I can't protect myself. So he's like, can you please drop off some medicine bags? And like, yeah, so he would like have medicine bags in his pockets and stuff, just any kind of, you know, that breaks my heart. And that's what the pandemic did, there wasn't cultural safety. Like, they didn't think of things like that, when they were forcing these nursing homes to. They didn't keep in mind, people's spiritual safety and cultural safety, on what they needed. In their religions, and their ways of keeping their soul and their spirit and their minds healthy. And being indigenous, you know, that's, we're very spiritual people. You know, we have kinships we believe everything has a spirit. And we say we call the Creator will conda. And he's the creator. He's in everything. And so, when the federal government, again, federal government put these mandates on, there was no advising, saying, Okay, what about this practice, or that practice or this? Like, and that is such a colonial allies to viewpoint, that everything is just this is how it is, like, so patriarchal and colonial alized like, well, as long as no one gets sick. You know, I just, ah, that's why I feel like they needed to do better. They needed to listen should tribes they need to have advisors who are saying there are indigenous people within the government now and I'm grateful for

that. But we still need to bring in people who are advising on these things for cultural awareness and safety. So that's

Kit Heintzman 01:05:37

I want to assure you that there is actually no off track in a oral history interview. So I just wanted to carve a little more space, if there's anything you'd like to say more about the weight-iness of history and its connections to just invite that space.

Stacy Laravie 01:06:02

The weight-iness? Um Well, I just mentioning that history repeats itself. If you know, the colonial alized population, and when I say colonization or colonialism, I do not mean one specific race or group. It's a mentality. It's a mental status. It has nothing to do with skin tone. When I say that, if they would be more aware of the true histories. You know, they could look back and say, oh, we need to do that better. Let's not do that again. Because over and over and over again, history has shown how important the spiritual illness in our ceremonies in our traditions and our families in our kinships are to us so I mean if it wasn't important then why did they try and take it away you know so it's like come on let's do better don't so if they would just listen to the histories you know and what it's like learn from your history let's not do it. So, I really hope that from this you know, this will outreach to whomever and that will open up their eyes to this you know that hey, you know, we need to also be thinking about the spiritual side I mean, you can have all the mental health experts, you can offer help for people I mean, look at all the different mental health things that are popping up on you know, virtually, you know, the different companies now. I mean, that is not like coincidental. So, you can do you can you can get therapy and you can talk to somebody as much as you want but unless you have your some part of your spiritual side intact, I mean, it's not going to do much you know, I talked to my father every day and he had his counselors that he talked to and stuff but it wasn't enough so especially for indigenous people or even ethnic people you know, it's Yeah

Kit Heintzman 01:09:24

How are you feeling about the immediate future?

Stacy Laravie 01:09:28

I'm trying to be hopeful I'm I'm exhausted. So exhausted on so many levels. Um, there's a lot of work to be done. And it can be overwhelming. But I am hopeful. So and that's all I can be is to take each day as it comes, do my best and right now I'm just trying to survive the day opposed to the future and I'm hoping what I do today will help impact the future but in order to do that, I just take it day by day

Kit Heintzman 01:10:25

Could you share some of what you'd like for those futures?

Stacy Laravie 01:10:32

Um, I would like healing for us to be in a space of healing and cultural safety for my people and indigenous people I would like you know, my family to be healed I know we're resilient. And I just want you know, everyone to see that resilient resiliency within themselves going to plant my garden this year but yeah, I just want everyone to be okay. That's my hope. My goal is just I want everyone everyone's be okay.

Kit Heintzman 01:11:38

What are some of the ways that you've been taking care of yourself over the last year, you've stressed a lot sort of supporting others?

Stacy Laravie 01:11:47

Um, it has taken a lot to get to that point to actually be kinder to myself, and put in that effort that I put into others. So it's, it's a learning moment. Um I guess first off is recognizing, you know, that I needed the help. I needed support. So reaching out and finding that through my, you know, my mentors within the tribe, other spiritual leaders, and just the work I do even is healing. And, you know, just taking a step back and realizing what is actually important, and you know, and reaching out just getting help through counseling and therapy. That was very, very scary for me. I never did that before. And I guess just like I said, taking it one day at a time, I'm an artist, so you know, picking up that brush again, even if it's just setting up my art table. And I'm not going to pay that day, at least it's set up and then you know, they're slowly taking little steps towards the things that I love, whether it's my music, or, you know, my writing or getting outside on the land, or whatever it is. I'm just taking those small steps. And accepting that that is enough. For now.

Kit Heintzman 01:13:54

Would you say something about making art during a pandemic, or being an artist, and creative during the pandemic?

Stacy Laravie 01:14:02

Um, during the pandemic, it was very, um, I guess I was in a very dark place. You know, slowly I started getting things just started disappearing out of my world, including things that I love to do. It might inspiration just was not there. Because there was just very much a just sadness. No, I am somebody I can find beauty and dark things. But in this case, I'm just now starting to see the outcome of that. So I really didn't do much art, or music or anything. It was very much survival. Yeah, it was very much survival mode. And that was the only thing I was focusing on. So

Kit Heintzman 01:15:23

I'm curious, what's motherhood been like to you during the pandemic?

Stacy Laravie 01:15:28

Motherhood? Um It's been tough. You know, you're, you're going through so much as a mother yourself. And you're in charge of your own mental health. You're like, how am I going to get through this day? This is overwhelming. How am I going to do it. But then you're also in charge of your little ones. You're also in charge of your children's mental health in guiding them to cope. Giving them the tools and the guidance to cope with what they're going through. And to express their emotions and their feelings of not being able to do their normal day to day and routine. You know, when the school shut down. It was chaos. I'm like, I cannot do math. I know. So there's that. You had to be a teacher. You had to be so many things, but that's all baseline stuff. But it was tough seeing my kids go through fear and it was a fear that you had yourself. You shared that fear And it was, it was really hard as a mother to shield them, my kids are teenagers, so it's just really hard to shield them from that. So being a mother, I felt like the only other option was to just have a

lot of communication, a lot of talking, a lot of communication, even my children started going to counseling, because of all this, my son, he, he's got on medicine as well, which I, he has ADD, and he has other, he's slightly on the spectrum, and he has a lot of learning disabilities. So you tie all that in together with having to learn from home, and you know, it's just a lot. And so I know with him, he became very, very overwhelmed. And as a parent and a mother it this whole, and Demmick my patients, I'm a pretty patient person, but my patience was stretched. And meanwhile, you're trying to deal with your own mental health. And yeah, but at the same time, I just wanted my, my children, I just wanted to hold them close. I just wanted to, you know, let them know, give them that safety. make light of the situation, whether it's joking, or, you know, whatever it would be, we do a lot of memes in my house. So but yeah, I was very, very, very stressful and exhausting. And I just, I feel like I am on the hangover from it all. And I'm trying to find my way back. And they would see me, you know, laying in bed, you know, just an I tried so hard to just get up and, you know, be there for them. And I think that was the hardest was when they see me at my, in those moments, but at the same time, I've accepted that it's healthy for them to see that. Because they're seeing someone cope, seeing someone deal with things in a healthy way. Whereas the alternative for some people is the wise that they use, whether it's alcohol or drugs or whatever it is. The can be very, very different. So yeah, I had to change my perspective as a mother to that. You know, I humbled myself down and I'm like, Okay, I have to look at this as a teaching moment for my children. So

Kit Heintzman 01:20:21

How's your relationship to touch changed since the pandemic started?

Stacy Laravie 01:20:26

Touch? Um, well, my love language, one of them is physical touch. So, I am a hugger. I'm a patter I'm, uh, you know, I so that that was hard. Um, you not being able to like greet my father and like, just touch him. We all we would always even when we're just sitting there talking or even just walking, whatever, we'd always hold hands. Um so even you know, like, other relatives, especially during you know, small funerals and stuff like that, that we did. You know, I couldn't hug them or I couldn't you know, cut their hand or that was hard so,

Stacy Laravie 01:21:38

yeah, during the pandemic, I I mean, it's led up a little bit, but now I'm finding myself I'm really not that much of a hugger now. I'm not and I it's just it's so weird. It's like a long for but I just can't I don't know. With my children I am but with other people, I just, it's kind of like yeah, don't touch me thinks you know. And it's really hard. Like, how that has changed. It's like I longed for, but I don't practice.

Kit Heintzman 01:22:23

Do you happen to remember the last time you touched a stranger?

Stacy Laravie 01:22:35

Um I guess I shook some people's hands the other day in a meeting so, I mean, things like that, you know, just little, the gestures like that. Yeah.

Kit Heintzman 01:23:00

How'd it feel?

Stacy Laravie 01:23:02

Um, it felt different. But at the same time, I wanted to get my hand sanitizer. You know, just like I quickly like it changes your mind like you. Like I don't want to get sick. I don't know where your hands been. You know? Yeah. So, yeah, strangers. I don't I just don't go anywhere too much anymore. If I am, it's very whoever I'm with, you know, it's not it's very isolating. social distancing is a whole different. It's just crazy. Like, I feel like everyone has imaginary bubbles. And we some people don't some people are like, all about, you know, being on people and just flew. Yeah, I can't i

Kit Heintzman 01:24:05

I'm nearing the end of my questions. And all of these last ones are a bit odd. I'd like to start by asking what it is you think people in social sciences and humanities should be doing to help us understand this moment right now?

Stacy Laravie 01:24:29

Well, I think they need to better communicate what they're doing. Because there is a lot of contradictions within information. And then you have states doing their own thing. And then you have federal government and then you have you know, it's just, I don't think anyone really knows what they're doing. Like the mask wearing thing, it's like, okay, so we wear masks, or we don't. So we can give COVID Or we get COVID. Like, what is the whole mask thing? You know, it's just, there's a lot of contradictions with all the masks stuff. I do feel like there needs to be Yeah, more mental health awareness. Suicide levels have gone up significantly. Due to, you know, probably a trauma. And some people are social butterflies. So to not have a human interaction, that's probably devastating, you know, I mean, there's so many suicide levels have gone up. And for anyone that says they haven't yeah, it's that's a lie. Um salaries be better mental health, which includes there needs to be some spiritual healing as well. I think they need we are the United States, we're a melting pot. So if they want to be inclusive, and they need to be inclusive, and they need to think we have you know, laws that say we are able to practice our religions. But then a pandemic happens and we're not able to practice them. It doesn't make sense. So, yeah, I just think they need to be more inclusive and more honest and open.

Kit Heintzman 01:26:54

I'd like you to imagine some historian of the future someone at least just far enough in the future, that they have no experiential knowledge of this moment. What kinds of stories would you tell them, they have to remember about those pandemics, that things, things that cannot be forgotten or get lost.

Stacy Laravie 01:27:20

I think everything I've discussed, um, how there was a huge failing in people's mental health. Um, I see, they need to be aware, in a way, it's almost, I feel like a genocide of a generation. Um I think from a parental standpoint, they need to be aware of, you know, life is precious. Um, there was a, there was a lot of failings during the pandemic, that I would like to point out to that person that I'm sure won't be in history books. Because those never are. I mean, I won't go into detail what those are. But yeah, I would probably point out all those failings and again, we would be, you know, someone would be advocating and trying to preserve

that history in saying the history books are wrong, this is not what happens. You know? I know, I just feel like, you know, things could be done better. So

Kit Heintzman 01:29:11

is there anything more you would say about what you mean by genocide of a generation?

Stacy Laravie 01:29:19

Um, I guess because there were so many failings with I guess I'm going off on my own personal experiences, you know, I mean, and seeing how many tribes were hugely affected. And tribes were hugely affected. In this pandemic, we lost so many people within tribes. And to me, I just feel like it's another or it's the, the lower class, or the minorities who, you know, had more to lose. And I don't feel like I think in my mind, I feel like it's just a way to kill off you know, the I guess that's a harsher word, but I just feel like it's a way for it's just crazy how things turned out. Like, why? Why was like, I think tribal governments probably did the best at trying to prevent this pandemic. I mean, there were tribes who had border controls within the reservation boundaries and I feel like I'm Why were we most hit? You know, there are a lot of feelings. So I feel like that's just one more way for us to cast genocide on people who are not rich. Um It all comes down to money. And then I feel like Yeah, I mean, I guess So that's kind of what I mean is, you know, it's like a termination of peoples that just don't fit in the class.

Kit Heintzman 01:32:14

I want to thank you so much for the beautiful vulnerability of your answers. And those are all of the questions I know to ask at this moment. But if there's anything else that you would like to speak to, please take all the space you would like.

Stacy Laravie 01:32:37

I'm here, don't think I really have too much to say. I'm just, I guess what we can learn from this is to be kind to each other. Be kind to yourselves, learn from each other. Ask questions. I think different perspectives can teach others how to be stewards of their own mind and soul and spirit. Sometimes there's insights that we can learn from others.

Kit Heintzman 01:33:26

Thank you so much.

Stacy Laravie 01:33:28

Yes, thank you. [speaking native language] Thank you.