

Smokii Sumac:

Kikiʔsuk kyukyit. Huqakʔik, Smokii Sumac, and this is the ʔasqanaki Podcast, where we tell two versions of the same story. Here on ʔasqanaki, we understand that colonization is the breaking of relationships. It is our original instructions to hold relationships at the center of everything, whether that be relationships to our lands, waters, children, plants, animals, or to each other. In the spirit of respect for our relations, I send out a prayer for ʔa·kxam̄is ǰapi qapsin , all living things. I hope that you, our listeners, are finding space to breathe, rest, and find joy and pleasure today. May this episode bring you something needed.

Greyson Gritt:

This episode contains conversations about adoption, grief, funerals, northern lights, masculinity, archival work, cultural connection, reconnection, photography, short stories, indigenous literatures, ceremony, medicine, love stories, bad timing, and trying to be a good man or person. The episode outtakes includes stories about sexual miseducation during Richard's childhood school years. If you are impacted by any of the following content, please be gentle with yourself and reach out to someone safe for support. You are not alone. Thank you for listening to the ʔasqanaki Podcast.

Smokii Sumac:

We opened with an excerpt from today's guest, Richard Van Camp, storyteller, and one of the first indigenous writers I've had the privilege of spending time with. In this excerpt from his short story, Show Me Yours, in the collection, The Moon of Letting Go, published in 2009 by Great Plains Publications, Richard offers a teaching that I've often heard him tell about the Northern Lights.

Richard Van Camp:

Saw Northern Lights last night. Nice and big across the sky: 1:30. Green. We saw baby ones trying to swim like little faint feathers so we helped them by rubbing our fingernails together and whistling and they swam, boy. The Northern Lights swam and reached across the sky, and it was the stairway to heaven kind. The kind that you can see the spirits of those who have passed on walking up, up.

Smokii Sumac:

The story I want to share with you, our listeners, is one of my Grandma Sabina. In my other life, I facilitate workshops on indigenous knowledges, reconciliation, 2S LGBTQ conversations, and more. In one of my talks, I share that I used to believe my grandma never taught me anything about being Ktunaxa. This is because I had grown up believing stereotypes about indigenous people. I thought that because I hadn't learned my language, nor how to bead or make a drum, that I wasn't learning how to be indigenous. Now, so many years later, as I have learned about Ktunaxa teachings of generosity and care, of feeding each other, laughing more than we cry, I realized that my Grandma Sabina taught me everything she needed to about being Ktunaxa. Grandma taught me my first word in our language as well.

We were out picking huckleberries and I asked her the name of the berry in our language. "ʔawiyaxʔ" she said. "What?" I asked, realizing that learning Ktunaxa, a language isolate, would be less simple than I had considered. By the end of the day, I could say, "Yunaqa'ni wiʔaxa ʔawiyaxʔ" lots of big huckleberries. The story I want to share is of my grandma's funeral. This was one of the first Indian funerals I had been to. I think the first was for her sister, my Auntie Jenny, who had passed a few years before Grandma.

What I remember most about Jenny's funeral was when we placed her casket in the basket of the truck, her last drive up the res to the cemetery, with all of us falling behind in our cars, the horses in the fields greeted us and ran alongside the procession as far as they could, stopping to bow their heads when they hit the fences at the edge of the road.

I remember when my grandma left us, she had been sick for just a little while. She must have been sick before then and in a lot of pain, but we didn't know until right near the end when she finally went to the doctor. I remember how amazing the nurses were as we got the extra room at the end of the hospital. They honored my family's need to be around our matriarch in those last days, I remember Grandma laughing. I remember telling her, "You've always been the best grandma," and her saying, "Oh, I know." And I remember the Northern Lights came. We'd been up late at her wake. The thing that's so different about Indian funerals is that we eat lots. We smoke lots. We sit around laughing. I was young and tired and I had decided to go home to rest for a bit. We were just pulling onto the highway when I called to my friend who was driving, "Hey, pull over. Pull over!" Startled, they pulled the car over and I jumped out, wandering past the ditch into the field, looking up in the sky.

I called my mom and said, "Are you outside?" and they were. Someone who had gone out for a smoke had come in and called to everyone, "Come outside. Look, look!" The Northern Lights were dancing for her. Taking Ka titi, my grandma, up, up just like in Richard's story. For me, it was so special because we are from pretty far south. Growing up, I only remember seeing Northern Lights one other time, and they were such small ones way up in the sky, faint. You really had to strain to see them. But that night, for my grandma, they took up the whole sky. Greens and blues and purples. I still miss Ka titi. But when I do, I think of that entrance she made Star World, and I know that she was welcome there with all our Ktunaxa family, with everyone she'd known and loved that had gone on before her. I know she sometimes still visits. I try to make sure I get out and taste those huckleberries for her. And I'm grateful to know that those Northern Lights, they danced her into the stars.

I met Richard Van Camp years ago when I was an undergraduate at Simon Fraser University. What struck me then was the way he could make me feel like I was the only person in the room. I mentioned he had taught my sister, and immediately upon hearing her name, he remembered her and had a funny story for me. Richard is actually a big part of my story when it comes to indigenous literatures. When I went to university, I was ashamed of my indigenous identity. I went to study the British canon. I went to study Shakespeare. It wasn't until indigenous literature profs like Deanna Reder and Sophie McCall introduced me to so many brilliant writers, including Richard, that I even knew that we, indigenous people, wrote books. And it wasn't until I read these works that I really started to see myself. That is the heart of this podcast.

As Dr. Adrienne Keene of the All My Relations podcast says on her blog, [nativeappropriations.com](http://nativeappropriations.com), representation matters. The story I chose to feature today, Show Me Yours is from Richard's short story collection titled The Moon of Letting Go. This next excerpt has me feeling seen as both an adoptee, who spent the first two months of my life in foster care, and as a trans man, trying to sort out what masculinity and being a good man means to me.

Richard Van Camp:

We now walk around town with our baby pictures taped or glued over the pictures of the saints around our necks, with leather ties. And so when you see someone with a leather necklace, you take your baby pic out and show it to them, and they marvel at how beautiful you were when you were new, and they do the same. And then we praise each other. "Oh, you were such a beautiful baby. Look at the dreams in your eyes. Oh, look at your hair .just like a bear's pelt in spring. Oh, you are so beautiful. So, so beautiful. Have a lovely, lovely life." That's how it is now. I am proud to say I started this after everything fell apart.

It just happened. I woke up and I was in a bad place with bad people, and there was little hope for me. And there was my grandfather's leather necklace that the priest gave him with a saint I didn't know. And there was my favorite baby picture of me on top of the fridge covered in lint and dust. And so I cleaned it and took some glue (that we had been sniffing) and I glued my face over St. What's His Hump's. And I wore that necklace, tucked her under my shirt over my heart. Two nights later, I got rolled. And as Franky and Henry were going through my pockets and were holding me upside down, they pulled the necklace out. Henry stopped and said, "What's this you?" Franky squinted and dropped me. I told them it was a picture of me when I was a baby. They looked at each other and shook their heads. "Take it easy," as if they weren't mad. They were just, well, I don't know. They let me go and threw my money back at me. "Go home, Richard," they said, "You're not a man anymore." "I'm trying to be," I yelled and walked home, rubbing my jaw, stuffing my pockets back in. "I'm trying to be."

Smokii Sumac:

Hu suki-ꞗukni Richard. My heart is happy to have you on the show.

Richard Van Camp:

[Speaking Tłıchq] My friend it's so good to see you.

Smokii Sumac:

It's great to see you too.

Richard Van Camp:

Thanks for having me. I'm sad everyone that's listening isn't with us right now.

Smokii Sumac:

I know.

Richard Van Camp:

This is good visiting.

Smokii Sumac:

Great to have a good room full of people. Someday, someday. So I wanted to start right off in the piece, Show Me Yours, with the phrase, "I'm trying to be," when it comes to being a man. And for me, when it becomes to being a good man, your work has always spoken to me as a two-spirit person and as a transgender man. And I'm wondering if you can speak to me about how your work honors this experience of trying to be a good man.

Richard Van Camp:

Trying to be. Yeah, I think my whole life I've been trying to be. And I really want to thank you for having me. This is a huge honor. You've worked really hard on doing things in a really good way, Smokii, in a gentle way and a loving way as always. And I say huge mahsi cho. Can I tell you how I wrote Show Me Yours?

Smokii Sumac:

Yes. Please do.

Richard Van Camp:

Because it was a flash, and a short story cannot be forced. I don't think anything can be forced. I think people sense pretty quickly that you had to satisfy a book deal and it's something you whipped off. So what happened was I was one of the founding members of the Northwards Writers Festival in Yellowknife. And our first official year, I think 17 years ago, we hosted an open mic at the Wildcat Cafe in Yellowknife in [inaudible 00:11:56]. It was a complete success. I believe we had Michael Kusugak and several writers who were no longer with us and several storytellers, and it was just a wonderful evening. Great food, incredible food.

As we were leaving, always the bottleneck at the door, I looked over at my friend, Jennifer Nolan, and I just had this flash. It was just this divine strike of lightning. And I just saw us all walking around with our baby pictures around our necks, and I thought in a heartbeat, "My God, how beautiful would that be to see the people we know and we think we know and strangers with these little baby pictures around their necks?" And also with your love and your own children and your parents, if you were to see that, you would never take them for granted as divine human beings. And I said to Jennifer, "Wouldn't that be really cool if we all just started wearing our baby pictures around our necks and I could see what you were like as a baby. You could see what I was like as a baby." And she was like, "Oh my God. You need to go home and write that story."

I went home and the voice came to me. The timing was right. And I think I wrote that in several days. And then of course, you spent 18 years honing it and rewriting it. But basically, the spirit was there. And so that's the joy, the beauty of Show Me Yours and it could only have happened ... For a short story to happen for me, so much has to line up. It's where you live. It's who you're hanging with. It's the humor of the day, the accent of the day, the strut of the day. It's the spirit of the time that you're in. Eden Robinson says, "As a writer, you have to find your sweet spot and whatever that means to you." And it's where I am. It's who I am at the time. But I think I'm continually falling down in one way or another. Maybe I'm nervous about learning my language. Maybe I'm nervous about being a father. Maybe I'm nervous about being a son. Maybe I'm nervous about being a brother or a human being. And so that line, "I'm trying to be," I think speaks volumes.

Smokii Sumac:

Thank you. I think this story I chose for a couple of reasons, and one of them is that honoring us as babies and sacred. So for myself as an adoptee, I was in foster care for the first two months of my life. When I read this story and I think of that moment of holding that baby that was me, that didn't always get a chance to get held. I know the foster mother, the notes say I was very hungry, and I'm like, "Of course I was hungry. I was seeking that love." I think of that love being given to each other and witnessing each other as babies. And I also think of when you say, "Remembering the sacredness," how we treat each other. If we are considering that child within, it changes. I think, "How do we keep that at the forefront of being a man, especially in this world where it's so fraught?" I do see you write about masculinity a lot.

Richard Van Camp:

I think I explore what it means to be masculine quite a bit. But Smokii, if we're going to get into the heart of this, this podcast where you refuse cameras. I was busting your hump just a little while ago saying, "We should have the cameras so we can see each other and celebrate each other." But you were like, "This is a podcast. This is a podcast."

Smokii Sumac:

Of course,

Richard Van Camp:

"Oxford defines a podcast. There's no cameras allowed." But Smokii, I really want to thank you because what people need to know about our time here is you and I had the most wonderful conversation, and I know CSIS records everything that I do because I'm an enemy of the state. CSIS, if you could just lend us that recording, that would be great in the name of reconciliation. Because what was shared in that 45-minute phone call that you and I had, setting up this podcast today, you shared with me something deeply profound. And I'm going to put you on the spot a little bit because I think about what you shared with me all the time now. There's a reason I gave you this hoodie today. I brought you a gift.

Smokii Sumac:

Thank you.

Richard Van Camp:

So you shared with me that one time, you were talking to someone very special about the sacred child inside of you, and this person shared something. Do you remember what you shared with me?

Smokii Sumac:

Yeah. So I was working with a somatic therapist. Actually, Kai Cheng Thom, she does this work. She's amazing, trans, diasporic Chinese writer as well. Make sure you look at her kids' books. But I was working with her and we were talking about this inner child and she said, "Do you think you could pick up that baby?" because of course, we all have this baby inside of us, and I've spoken as an adoptee, and I went, "No. I'm scared of that baby." She said, "Well, do you know why you're scared?" I said, "Well, that baby's angry and babies aren't supposed to be angry." Kai Cheng, I love her, she sort of laughed and she said, "All babies are angry at some point."

I was able to have this incredible experience of thinking about what stories I've told of all those inner children at every age, and to think about that baby in a new way and honor that. And your story does this as well, to have me think of those baby pictures where I don't just have pain and, "Can I have love and compassion?" and, "Can I understand that child as needing what they needed at the time?" And so I thank you for that gift. I mean, your words have given me that, and Kai Cheng, and all of this work as an adoptee throughout my life.

Richard Van Camp:

Well, didn't Kai Cheng also invite you to pick up and hold and hug that baby?

Smokii Sumac:

Yes. Yes. And at first, I couldn't. In my world, I couldn't. And now, I think of it often and try to do that.

Richard Van Camp:

So you know Keavy and myself and Edzazii, our family, we gave you a hoodie today so you feel held.

Smokii Sumac:

Thank you.

Richard Van Camp:

I brought you that specifically for that story that you shared with me. Because underneath anger is fear. You were afraid.

Smokii Sumac:

Afraid.

Richard Van Camp:

And that was just a big cry, right? To be held and nurtured and loved and supported. That's what we're all looking for. I really do believe that we're all looking for the three Cs: culture, community, and connection. And I think there's a force, and we cry our heads off when we don't get it.

Smokii Sumac:

There you go. I think so. And I was always a loud kid too. I think about that now, and the ways in which I get to express myself now, and take care of all those little children. I was talking about one of them where I was 12 and sort of going, "Oh. Well, all I can think of at 12 is what happened to me." And then I realized that I was doing what everyone else did to me. Your trauma, defined by trauma. And then at some point I went, "Wait, at 12 I also used to paint," and so I've been learning to paint again, which is very, very fun. I just put paint on the canvas and see what happens. And I think reconnecting to those pieces and, like you said, feeling held, allowing myself to be held, that has been a journey in my life.

I think that when we talk about indigenous literature, I think what I love about your work is that you center it on indigenous love a lot of the time, and laughter and joy. We just had Orange Shirt Day here, the Day of Truth and Reconciliation. And I think too often we're only telling those difficult stories. I remember when you first walked into my classroom at SFU as an undergrad. You had me laughing, you had me crying, and you talked about things that I had never heard anyone talk about, from the sexy stories to the love stories, which this one also is, so thank you for that.

Richard Van Camp:

Thanks. Mahsi cho. So Smokii, is this podcast about how you define yourself now?

Smokii Sumac:

Yes. The podcast is Asqanaki, to tell two versions of the same story. And I'm hoping our listeners start to understand what we all know and what Daniel Heath-Justice talks about, why indigenous literature matters. But I talk about the representations, and so how indigenous literature and the stories that I've read, the stories that we share here have helped me understand myself. And so whether it's the honoring the baby or trying to be a good man, trying to be, I think we're all doing that.

Richard Van Camp:

We're all trying to be. I was really sad when I was in Vancouver and, before I met my wife, there were these cuddle parties. And I'm really sad I never went to one. I think the world needs a good cuddle party right now.

Smokii Sumac:

Yes.

Richard Van Camp:

I think we all need to be held and I think we all need to hold. Do you know what I mean? I think that this is just a base. We have something called skin hunger. I think the great cost of the pandemic is we need to stay away from the ones we love the most. I mean, what a curse to keep them safe, right?

Smokii Sumac:

It's been devastating and ...

Richard Van Camp:

And desperately lonely. Desperately lonely.

Smokii Sumac:

Incredibly lonely.

Richard Van Camp:

Yeah. I feel for people who don't have children, I feel for people who are on their own. How do you feel connection? How do you not feel invisible in the world? You can only look at your screen for so long. You can only watch the extended versions of Lord of the Rings for so long. Do you know what I mean?

Smokii Sumac:

Yeah, definitely. There have been times where I've been more alone or I've moved to a new city and I go to get massaged just to simply have someone touch, and I think that's such an important part. And when we talk about that baby, to hold ourselves in that way and to hold each other. I actually just had a family gathering where I got to hug probably 10 people. It was the most people I've hugged in so long, and what a gift.

Richard Van Camp:

What a gift.

Smokii Sumac:

What a gift it is to be connected in that way.

Richard Van Camp:

Yeah. Yes.

Smokii Sumac:

When we talked earlier, you told me you don't consider yourself a culture keeper, but maybe a culture collector.

Richard Van Camp:

Yeah, a culture gatherer.

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Smokii Sumac:

And I was thinking about culture connector because I think that ...

Richard Van Camp:

That feels nice. I'll wear that.

Smokii Sumac:

Talking about baby pictures, which by the way, we are going to put Richard's baby picture and my baby picture online, and we invite listeners to come and join our social media.

Richard Van Camp:

Please do. Please, everybody, upload a picture of yourself. You were all so beautiful babies. I want to see you. I want to see those cheeks.

Smokii Sumac:

Yes.

Richard Van Camp:

Show me those little, sparkly eyes. Show that little feather hair.

Smokii Sumac:

Give us all that smile. We'll want to pick you up and hold you.

Richard Van Camp:

Yes.

Smokii Sumac:

And can you tell me more about the Fort Smith memories, the photos?

Richard Van Camp:

Oh, okay!

Smokii Sumac:

Because we're going to build off this, but I wanted to hear how you do that.

Richard Van Camp:

Sure. So please know, everybody, that I was born and raised in Fort Smith Northwest Territories. We are the beginning of Highway 5. People say, "You're the end of Highway 5." No, no, no. I like what Tim Gochi says, "We're the beginning of Highway 5. We can go anywhere in the whole wide world. We're basically hobbits." And I always say that Northerners are the hobbits of Canada because all we want to do is cook for you and treat you right and just gift you and honor you and pamper you. That's what I love doing. I was born to honor, born to celebrate, born to uplift and cheerlead and mentor, and just celebrate what it means to be a Northerner and a Fort Smither and Tłıchq Dene. So as I got on in my years, I'm 51 now,



what I realized is what I really loved doing is recording elders and knowledge keepers and transcribing their stories or uploading their photos, their stories, their videos, tea dances, drum dances, Canada Day, game celebrations.

And if you go to Richard Van Camp on YouTube, you can see hundreds of hours of old-time tea dances, drum dances, Canada Day celebrations. You can see my grandmother, my late ehtsɛ, Melanie Washie, singing a Tłıchǫ Dene love song. You can see my Uncle Eddie sing Tłıchǫ Dene love song. And I have permission from John Gon to do so. He recorded hundreds of hours and he just said, "I'm retired. I don't know how to do this. You do it." And so I'm not a techie, Smokii, but I do have a lot of friends that are great technicians. And Lese Skidmore here with BearPaw Media, I got in touch with her and I said, "I have all these DVDs that John Gon recorded in '91, '92, maybe even '93 in Behchokǫ and Edzo, Northwest Territories. I don't know how to take these DVDs and upload them to YouTube." And she said, "I'll stop by tomorrow. Give them to me. I'll do them for you. And then I'll give them back to you on thumb drives, and then all you got to do is click upload."

I had probably two months of just this exquisite squealing joy, of knowing that I was about to return something that was just about lost. We have a little website called Memories of Fort Smith Northwest Territories, and one of the things that I always love doing is I love haunting archives. So the Roman Catholic Diocese in Yellowknife, for example, has thousands of photos from the 40s, 50s, 60s, 70s that have been donated. Many of the priests that came up were incredible photographers. And so whenever I go to Yellowknife, and I'll actually be there tomorrow, I will probably end up at the diocese uploading photos and digitizing them and then entering that information. So if you want to see what Fort Smith looked like in the 70s, 40s, 50s, 80s, 90s ... Man, we had big hair in '84. I'll tell you that right now. It is my exquisite joy to upload and find photos for others, and so one of the greatest things I've ever done is I uploaded a photo of a mother holding her baby and it says Untitled.

Last time I was in Yellowknife, I probably uploaded 70 photos from the Roman Catholic Diocese archives in Yellowknife. And then that night, my phone just blew up. Things were tagged, things were shared, comments, comments, comments. But the greatest accolade of all was there was a mother holding a baby, and this lady says underneath in the comments, "Oh, mom. Is that us?" and the mom says, "My God. Was I ever that young?" and they started laughing. And I just thought, "There you go. That was a photo they've never seen that they will have forever." And that's what I love, as much as the writing and storytelling and everything else I'm up to. When I can find some medicine for others, then I feel good. I feel like that's my rat root. That's my sweet grass. That's my sage. This feels like ceremony to me, for me to go and gather some magic for you and your family and your community and your nation and for future generations.

Smokii Sumac:

Thank you. When you told me that story, it stands out to me because, again, as an adoptee earlier in this episode, I tell a story about my grandma that raised me that I got to be around for a long time. And I also have my biological grandmother who is Patsy Lewis, and she passed very young so I never got to meet her. Just a few years ago, I started to move home. I connected back. And at one day, I found myself with the Elders Advisory Council. My grandma had passed. My auntie had passed. I didn't have any Ktunaxa elders. And there I was, sitting with 20 of them, some of the oldest language speakers.

And of course, they all go, "Who's your grandma?" That's how they immediately, when you come in. And so at the time, I was saying Patricia Sam, because that's what I thought her name was. And finally one of the old ladies said, "Your grandma was Patsy Lewis because they changed our names in all these ways." And so it was such a gift to have her name. And then another one of the women went, "Oh, I think I have a picture of her," and the next day came in, showed me. And I only have two photos of my

grandma, and so this was the second one that she brought to me. And so I can say that work, that medicine you give, I can say as somebody who's had that happen, just the feeling of getting to see her, of seeing the connection, seeing myself in those photos, it's an incredible gift. And I think you do that with your words as well. It's all medicine and I'm deeply grateful for that work.

Richard Van Camp:

Thank you.

Smokii Sumac:

And I think this story, I love the capturing of that. The pictures and how you're actually doing that in your life as well. And we did talk a little bit about the love story, but I wanted to know. Tell me about telling love stories.

Richard Van Camp:

What do you want to know?

Smokii Sumac:

Well, what do I want to know? Well, this one is Shawna.

Richard Van Camp:

Yes. Yeah.

Smokii Sumac:

And there's sort of a timing. Timing is the question.

Richard Van Camp:

The timing issue between these two because when the narrator has a nichimos, Shawna is on the outskirts. I have a friend, and it doesn't matter if he's married, divorcing, doesn't matter if he has a baby on the way, there's another person on this planet that they can't be in the same community together because they hate how much they love each other and they love how much they hate each other. And he will get up and leave if he's in church and she walks in. It doesn't matter who he's with, "No, no, no, no." He just can't keep doing this. They can't keep destroying each other's marriages and lives and new loves. But yet, they can't survive more than a couple of nights together. By the way, which is heaven. It's like a dog fight in heaven. It's so incredible. Anyways, so that I think was part of the inspiration for this, was that this couple that was doomed from the start, but they just keep trying. And this is Shawna and this narrator, and I really love that. "If we only have tonight, let's make this the greatest night of our lives."

And to my surprise, Shawna came to see me. I had no idea she was back in town. I really missed her. How sad. When I'm with someone, she's single and vice versa. So now we finally got our timing, and I held her hand and we walked down to the rocks, and we saw the baby Northern Lights trying to swim. And she showed me how to call them. "You can do it! Give'er! Go, go, go!" And those baby lights, they swam out little by little. And Shawna and I rubbed our fingernails together and whistled. And soon we had shadows because the northern lights were so bright. Soon it was like rolling rainbows across the sky. "You are so beautiful," she called and then looked to me. "Did you know it's the exact opposite in Nunavut?"

Even though she had a new kind of haircut, she still had fox eyes. "What's that?" "They rub their fingernails to send them away." "Hunh," I said, looking up, starting to shiver, but not because I was cold. "Maybe they're just glad we remember halfway what to do." "As long as we honor them, hey?" she said. I could tell she was going to be a great teacher. I could tell after she said that, and we walked across town holding hands back to my place.

Smokii Sumac:

Thank you, Richard. One of my great teachers. I'm so grateful that you have those conversations of healthy sexualities and love because I don't think we see it enough and I think there's so many devastating stories in our communities. And lately I've been like, "I want to be like Richard and Keavy," or I look at the couples that have been together forever and ever and what a gift that is. And you know they've been through hell and back, but what a gift it is. A friend of mine, her parents just celebrated 50 years of wedding anniversary and I just think it's amazing.

Richard Van Camp:

Beautiful. Good for them. Bravo.

Smokii Sumac:

I don't know if you know this, but one of my siblings, who the character Dove is modeled after in the new Amanda Strong stop-motion animation. He said to me one time, he said, "Doesn't it sometimes feel like we're just living in a Richard Van Camp story?"

Richard Van Camp:

Oh, that's so sweet.

Smokii Sumac:

And I have to say some days, it does.

Richard Van Camp:

Oh, that's very sweet. Thank you.

Smokii Sumac:

Yeah, and I wanted to share that this isn't the only story. And as we're talking about two-spirited conversations, I think about Dove and that quote, "Sometimes I wake up a boy. Sometimes I wake up a girl. I do not question it anymore." And I think sometimes, you've given me language that I didn't ... It was one phrase that I could use at the time when I was sort of coming into understanding myself. And then of course, Aliens, which is this beautiful, beautiful trans love story, two-spirit love story.

Richard Van Camp:

Thank you.

Smokii Sumac:

And I think what you give us is this version of ourselves that we can aspire to be that trying to be and to believe that that love is there. I can't say thank you enough. Mahsi cho.

Richard Van Camp:

Mahsi Cho. Smokii, thank you.

Smokii Sumac:

We say [inaudible 00:32:24]. I did want to just talk a little bit about the Northern Lights here in this story, this teaching of the Northern Lights. And actually, that piece where Shawna says, "It's different over there," and you say that, "As long as we're honoring them."

Richard Van Camp:

Yeah.

Smokii Sumac:

I remember one of my uncles saying to me, "Isn't that the goal? We just want to make the old ones proud." And that was when I was very happy that one of the old people had noticed that I had been practicing the language and the sounds. And so I wanted to just say last words about that, or anything you want to share about that space, that, not enough, we're trying to be, we're trying to make them proud, and this story gives us a piece of that.

Richard Van Camp:

Wow. I can tell that you're making your ancestors very proud, Smokii. Yeah, I'm glad you're home. I'm glad you're close to home. Because when you're not, you're just kind of homesick all the time. And that's why I write, and that's why I honor, and that's why I am digitizing all these interviews I did when I was the handy bus driver back in 1991. One of the smartest things I ever did. And for anyone who's listening, who's really getting low in the gas tank or starting to run on fumes, I always say volunteer. Volunteer. There's a lot of elders out there who are just waiting for someone with a good heart just like yours to show up and help.

Yeah. Isn't that the truth? And every time that I've been low, I've always volunteered. So yeah, I was the handy bus driver in Fort Smith, NWT. Smartest thing I ever did. You can go on YouTube. And actually, it's probably better if you go "Richard Van Camp SoundCloud." You can actually hear the interviews that I did back in '91 and '92 with some of the greatest storytellers. I spent the beginning of the pandemic, digitizing those little microcassettes. I had this little recorder I bought for \$23 from Radio Shack in Fort Smith when I realized that I was the luckiest person I knew to be able to go into elder's homes, and to be welcomed into feasts and stories and songs and prayer and all the bingo runs. It was a lot of fun. All the tea sessions, the tea and bannock sessions. Love is never wasted. It is not. And so if anybody who's listening right now, just pick up the phone and start asking, "Who needs help? Do you need to volunteer to drive somebody around?"

Trust me. There's a whole lot of people right now looking for good people to reach those that are often marginalized or starting to feel invisible themselves. You could be that bridge for somebody, or a group where they suddenly get to do what they've always wanted to do out of isolation. That's really, really important. But Smokii, I really want to thank you for having me. I love how much you love my work, and I feel like I can retire now. I feel like my work is done.

Smokii Sumac:

There you go.

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Richard Van Camp:

Mahsi cho. Thank you very much.

Smokii Sumac:

Thank you.

Richard Van Camp:

I wish you the best on this journey you're on because I have a feeling your listeners are going to be going. There's a whole lot of me in what Smokii's doing and I'm glad Smokii's breaking trail for so many of us, so I raise my hands to you with utmost respect. What a joy to see you happy and hungry and searching. Stay hungry, baby. Stay hungry.

Smokii Sumac:

Thank you. Hu sukiꞑꞑukni. Thank you. Richard. We say, taxas. That's it.

Richard Van Camp:

That's it. There's the door. Mahsi cho, everybody. Thanks for listening. Thank you.

Greyson Gritt:

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