An Evening with Cowlitz Tribe Members Elissa Washuta and Christine Dupres

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[0:00:40] **Chris Higashi:** Good evening. I'm Chris Higashi program manager of the Washington Center for the Book at the Seattle Public Library. Welcome to tonight's event with Elissa Washuta and Christine Dupres. So first we thank Elliott Bay Book Company for co-presenting the evening, The Seattle Times for generous promotional support for library programs, our author series sponsor Gary Kunis, and finally this event is supported by the Seattle Public Library Foundation. So now here's Karen Maeda Allman from Elliott Bay Book Company to introduce the rest of the evening. Thanks.

[0:01:22] **Karen Maeda Allman:** I'm pretty excited about this evening. I have to say it's not often that we have two young Cowlitz writers on the same stage coming from very different perspectives, but yet with much much in common as well. And so I'm very excited to hear what they have to say. So with us this evening is Christine Duprey Dupres. I'm sorry. So Christine Dupres is going to be speaking about her book Being Cowlitz: How One Tribe Renewed and Sustained It's Identity and this is newly published by the University of Washington Press. She's a faculty with the with the American Leadership Forum. She's the owner of Radiant Life Counseling. She's a folklorist and ethnographer and she has written a book that's in part of memoir, but in large part a scholarly study about the transmission of heritage - how heritage is passed on to the next generation and and also shaped by contemporary context also speaking tonight is Elissa Washuta whose book My Body is a Book of Rules has been very well received in this community.

[0:02:34] She's an advisor to the Department of American Indian Studies at the University of Washington. She's also on the nonfiction faculty in the MFA program at the Institute of American Indian Arts. She's also a longtime teacher and faciltator in this area teaching creative writing at Hugo House and is involved in many many programs. So she her book is in larger part of memoir and she speaks also to the issue of Cowlitz heritage and her own her own kind of making her way as a young college student in the context of kind of contemporary life with their particular heritage and so her book, Comes from a comes at some of the similar material, but from a little different perspective. So

what they're going to do today is speak a little bit and read from their books, and then they're going to have a conversation at the front table, and they're going to invite you from the audience to then ask some questions. So on behalf of Seattle Public Library and the Elliott Bay Book Company, please welcome, Christine Dupres

[0:03:51] and who will be speaking first. And, then Elissa Washuta.

[0:04:01] **Christine Dupres:** Good evening everybody and thank you for being here. I'm very pleased that you're here. You know that I'm Christine Dupres and that I'm Cowlitz and I'm going to back it up a little bit and have you do something because you may not know the person you're sitting next to even, in questions of identity, it's very complicated. I was riding home with a fellow faculty for the American Leadership Forum where I work and what we decided after a very long drive into Josephine County in Oregon is that every single person we meet we ought to ask them how they identify and who they think we are or who they think they are. Now, this could be any sort of identity. It could be psychological. It could be ethnic or racial. It could be occupational. But take just a second. I'll time you so and ask the person next to you. Ideally it would be somebody didn't know but ask the person next to you. How do you identify? Like - who do you think you are? Yeah, and it just just do that for a minute. I'll keep the time

[0:05:22] and then I'll move right into a passage from my book. How does that sound? All right. One, two, three go. Who do you think you are? How do you identify? And if there are three of you or it's an oddball group just go for it. And if you think you know who the person next to you is you should really ask them. All right, and if you haven't switched partners go ahead and switch and ask that question of the other person. All right. Thanks for indulging me. If you haven't wrapped up go ahead and wrap up. Did you learn anything about the person? Yeah. Yeah sitting next to you. I learned something I decided I would wander over, and ask that question, did you learn something? Yeah, so some things surprise you some things affirm or confirm your ladder of assumption and yet if we did this with every person we met it would open up certain continuities and we kept doing it with people that we know because what we think about ourselves and what we think about others is very dynamic. So thanks for indulging

[0:06:34] me. I appreciate that. I, without a lot of context or preamble, I'm going to read to you from the first chapter of my book. We've been tasked Elissa and I with thinking about identity. And so I hope that what I have to read you sets the context for the talk tonight and also illuminates a little bit about what I've been thinking about. Everyone has a story, this story is both mine and that of others the members of my family and of my tribe, the Cowlitz. This is a story about stories to about how people use stories to Define who they are. The story is partially mind and partially there's my book began as a hunt for stories a personal journey to discover the lost songs and histories of my grandmother's of the Cowlitz tribe. Along the way, I realized that these stories were not just my auntie's or my grandmother's but they were the stories of the Cowlitz people themselves, and in finding the stories, I was finding the identity of a tribe scattered across various states, a tribe until recently

[0:07:58] without a land, a tribe whose sense of identity was constantly in danger of dissolving into the blankness of unrecorded history, except for the very heroic and sheroic efforts of numerous of its people. So my search took me to reservations in Washington state it had me going to cemeteries and doing gravestone rubbings, which my children to this day hate - they hate cemeteries because I took them to so many of them. It took me to the living room of a dying linguist in Canada. It made me some good friends among my family and by an odd twist of fate it got me an administrative job in the Cowlitz tribe. As I searched and as I learned I was in museums. I also was falling in love with my grandmother's, with my ancestors Now I always had questions about where I came from, but they became more urgent when I was a young mom. Once I had children part of what you want to pass on is what you believe to be true about your family and yourself these questions became pressing when I was a grad student. Early

[0:09:16] in my Graduate Studies, I befriended a guy named Andy, and Andy seemed to have a really good handle on being Indian. He just you know, He had flaxen hair and he had icy blue eyes but he was connected personally and socially and politically to the Siletz tribe of whom he was a member and this identity for him was a launching point for a lot of things he accomplished in graduate school and a lot of the people he alienated. He fought the racist policies at the institution where I went to school and he walked the walk and he did the ceremony kept up the Native practice. I, on the other hand, felt like I was really bad at being Indian. I always knew that I had native blood and I was always told that I was Cowlitz and Cree. My grandma lived on the Siletz reservation, all of my relatives were enrolled in the Cowlitz tribe, but my mom didn't participate and didn't enroll her kids, right. So she didn't take the time either to demonstrate what being Indian meant, though later, I was to understand that how she

[0:10:30] lived, and the way in which she lived, help me to understand what it meant to be a Native woman and to realize how deeply culture is actually embedded in our daily practices and our lives. In my early 20s I took it upon myself to enroll myself in the Cowlitz tribe. I called the tribal office and I put together the genealogies and the application for membership and I was excited. Accepted in 1990. It was in this context that Andy my Siletz cohort and I had a long talk one day and I confessed to him how diffident I felt and how awkward I felt about being a Cowlitz and Cree woman, but he asked me, he sat me down, he had a lot of empathy and he said what is it for you? And, I told him that I felt physically palpably pulled to remember and to hold that memory, what does it mean to be a Native American person to be a Cowlitz. And, he smiled and he said that since I felt like I ought to remember that I was probably or maybe even definitely an Indian of sorts and it was this sorts that made me start looking

[0:11:43] at my heritage. And, what I found was that in 1841 my Cree ancestors came to the Cowlitz prairie in Washington territory. They were voyagers, fur transporters, and they were the in the employ of the Hudson Bay Company. They traveled the prairie from the Red River area in Manitoba and then they came down, like a lot of Cowlitz people's ancestors, from that area into Washington territory. And, they settled and they quickly intermarried the Cowlitz people and the Cowlitz tribe welcomed them and even in legal processes recognized them as part of the Cowlitz tribe. They also intermarried with a Cowlitz ancestor, or Hakurei, so I come from the Cowlitz and I come from the Cree. My great-

grandmother Rose spoke French Cree, and she also spoke lower Cowlitz, but she censored herself and even when I would I would beg her, actually she, my great-grandmother, had a lot to do with raising me and she wouldn't speak Salish to me. She would occasionally speak a little French. So while I learned

[0:12:55] amore - I didn't learn the language of my tribe. So the story that's mine. Now is this mix of histories, it's my own ancestry and the history of the Cowlitz tribe since both histories are closely intertwined. And that's how this journey began. I wanted to know what it meant to be Cowlitz and Cree and how not just me, not just myself, but how we all belonged. Because the Cowlitz tribe had no land base or reservation until January of this year. Its people are scattered over Southwestern Washington and other areas of the United States. Cowlitz General Council, which is held twice annually provides an important venue and a gathering where people present and also communicate and so I started going regularly to General Council meetings. It was here that I became interested in the content for my book and also in the key question of my book, which was about matters of voice and authority. I started paying attention to whose voice was heard in General Council meetings. And whose story seemed to me

[0:14:06] to be ultimately being told and how these stories and storytellers shaped for me and others at the council meeting a tribal identity. I would write a book to more fully understand these narratives, thinking about how Cowlitz leaders articulate and understand themselves and their history and hence by means of their authority they bring understanding to the crowd to the rest of the Cowlitz who are gathered there. I started taking notes and watching how the tribal leaders use different rhetorical strategies to demonstrate tribal priorities, and I wondered what did these strategies tell me about group making and identity. Think of Fox News folks how many people are profoundly influenced by Fox News? And then they sort of take on an identity or a way of speaking that reflects what it is that they're hearing. I in no way want to compare the Cowlitz to Fox News - let's just let's make that clear and yeah a content in a place where you gather and you want to find out more. It's a very important venue and place

[0:15:17] to be, you will absorb the information, and you will internalize it and you will reflect it back. And if your identity is Cowlitz that begins to happen almost magically, but for the people who led the tribe very intentionally I found so the Cowlitz people have had to endure and surmount the forces of erasure that are common to all tribes of the United States. They suffered fatal disease and lost their numbers by the 1850s up to 80%. They were removed from their land and because of economic necessity they had to move into jobs, right, different from the jobs that they may have once had. They also had to suffer the cultural loss created as a result of cooperation with dominant culture, which was often racist in policy, if not in deportment. Given these pressures one way the Cowlitz could articulate and maintain their identity was by defining themselves as different from prevailing or white. culture. They did this in part by maintaining an attachment to their land and through a reliance on their

[0:16:29] leadership, a leadership that had both or who has both engaged the federal government at every turn and who is also carefully marked and rehearsed. Cowlitz collective memory, and I'm going to break from this reading for just a second to say, has anybody had the pleasure of being a tribal

leader or in connection to tribal leaders? Just a show of hands. I know a whole bunch of you are sitting right in front of me, right? Not only do you have to know what the heck about your tribe, but you also have to be a generalist and yet an expert in so many things whether it's housing or poverty or education or government. You have to know that, and get yourselves together speak compellingly and interface with the federal government. So this engagement and this requirement of tribal leaders is tremendous, right? It's like if you swooped into a town of 3,000 people and decided that everyone there could, you know, engage with the federal government real complexities and do it well, but tribes do and the Cowlitz

[0:17:45] tribe has. So I, I was fascinated by this engagement and by how that formed, bolstered who the Cowlitz people were. So, I'm going to go back to attachment to land. This attachment is especially important for the Cowlitz tribe who, though it has tribal sites in Longview, the Seattle area, and Toledo all in Washington state - hadn't until January of this year a formal land base or reservation. And, its people although they were concentrated in Southwestern Washington are scattered over other areas of the U.S. and because of this lack of centrality, the Cowlitz general counsel, which I mentioned is held twice annually, is an important venue for gathering and communicating. I started going regularly. The first meetings I attended were very overwhelming for me personally. I sat among probably about 200 Cowlitz people and I looked something like them right down to the round tea colored eyes. I heard the chairman John Barnett speak of the trials of his people, my people, and how they prevailed. I saw history

[0:18:58] finally alive in front of me on this modest stage at general counsel and I saw the old ones sitting quietly. I saw ceremony and I heard their voices raised in, and I was very very potent and very powerful. I'm intellectually curious. Yes, so I was inclined first to look at books for what I needed but books can only do so much, and quiet myths upon a page can't live in the way that a myth or a story told in context truly can, so I listened carefully to the spiritual Elder Roy Wilson as he told stories of coyote or the deer sisters or other mythical figures. I wondered as I sat there a young woman curious and impressionable listening to the leaders talk, and watching the panel of tribal council members who sat before me intellectually, I understood the complications of my position as a woman of European and Native American mixed ancestry and descent. I understood the implications of claiming space and place as my own and I understood as I sat at general counsel and even though this was swimming

[0:20:14] in my head in my heart and in my body, I felt utterly totally at home. It was during general counsel watching chairman Barnett and Roy Wilson lead the proceedings that I became captivated by articulations of Native identity that existed aside and along the more formal articulations of Native identity that stemmed from anthropological research, which I was finding super inadequate as I was doing my research. My project of discovery began not so much with a concern for a cultural Renaissance, as with a need to hear the stories of the elders and the mythology of the tribe. What was our inheritance? I wondered. What did we tell one another and why, right? How do you identify these questions? We find themselves as I emerged as I immersed myself deeper into the research. I listen to the leaders and through their guidance shared knowledge. I began to make sense of the

political struggle that Leo Heart of Cowlitz history and hands of Cowlitz identity. I began to question the way in which Cowlitz tribal

[0:21:24] people and especially the leaders understood themselves as enduring enduring against the constraints of the government in during against the passage of time, against erosion, against all odds since time immemorial. And again, I'll back up until January of 2002 the Cowlitz were not a federally recognized tribe and to stick together, and to make it happen, and to do the work it requires to become federally recognized required tons of time and effort and you know the kind of resources that tribal people often don't have, but they did it as I studied my focus narrative the question of the contemporary response to the historical pressures created by the Cowlitz relationship to their own history. This history occurred both in relationship to the federal government through cooperations with its mandates and its processes as well in it. As in other more somber place has a fragmentary memory of an elder story or a last Captain word whispered what I would ask repeatedly did the leaders seem to know that

[0:22:38] taught them how to be Cowlitz was that the stories learned at the knees of Elders 70 years ago. The education gained by traveling back and forth to Washington DC to deal with Congress and with select committees. Was it about the time spent in the woods or at the medicine wheel or the time spent pacing before a senator's door hoping that you get five minutes with that person. And the answer is yes, and yes, it was all of these things. Where, I wondered, did tribal leaders get their understanding and what do they know about their ancestors and being Indian? What did they, many of them multiracial and multicultural like me? Why did they choose to identify with their native heritage rather than other ones? As I learned more about the Cowlitz tribe I began to filter my own experience through the new information that I received. And I discovered that I've been raised to do by my mother and my grandmother, it was rooted in learned experience and experience shared with other Cowlitz and Cree people.

[0:23:46] So as I began to do my research and talk, I realized that my family was not isolated and its life ways and it consisted of cultural practices that were transmitted really informally over time. There were certainly a case to make for Native identity existing and the motions of my life. Life for my many summers that were spent in the Cascade Mountains picking berries or digging clams and harvesting muscles by the Pacific Ocean. You know, I used to grumble because my mother would drag us out to the most kind of haggard and remote logging roads where the breyers were grown over and the very special blackberries. There was a very specific sort. I can't even talk about it. But we had to you know, you just get the hell scratched out of us when we have to pick these berries for hours, and it was really scorching heat. And in any case that was my life. I thought that's what all kids did but it was not what all the kids did though. My working-class parents lived really comfortably. Our trips to the grocery

[0:24:48] store were only slightly more common than our forest trips that yielded a harvest of venison and berries. Not long ago still thinking about how place and the motions of everyday shape and reinforce identity. I wrote these words, words that America is a state, but I and my people are a state of being, I am born here and I grow here and I find that being American occupies being both Native

American and European. I have at least those identities and many more. Being for many Native Americans is being upon the land. And again, if you think about it, if you are in place for any amount of time, you began to relate to that place, you know where the food is or if you're in the city, you know where the coffee is right and you know how to get around and your life begins to shape and respond to the environment. And imagine if you did that for ten thousand years, right? Gives Starbucks a whole new meaning. So critic Arjun Appadurai contends that locality or landedness is always vulnerable not merely

[0:26:11] it because, it becomes under siege in modern societies, but because being local is inherently fragile in the most intimate spatially confined isolated situations locality and being in place must be maintained very carefully against the odds because things in life and seasons change. In America, the land is regulated for the common person and certainly for the ancestors and the people of my Cowlitz tribe the categories of regulation imposed by land claims. For example were a violence to be negotiated but not avoided. It it is only by force that these sort of lines, these arbitrary lines, are drawn upon lives. My great grandma Rose was raised in Southwestern Washington during the time of a great European influx. She welcomed strangers who newly dwelled on the land beside her, but she also didn't accept the artificial categories of land ownership imposed upon her. During the Fish Wars - does anybody know about those? Some of you know about that. She would fish because you could be arrested for it. If you

[0:27:26] weren't, you know in the right place at the right time. And, to feed her family she would secret the fish inside of her waiters and then just weighed out weighted down with the fish. So while she was a very welcoming person right as she intermarried with the settlers. She also wasn't always, she was a great rule breaker as I think probably many of us are. So she chose instead to assert her own set of rules and what I call traveling stories, across the lines of maps. She strode rivers, swam paths and pick the forest fern for a livelihood. She spoke languages to and these as well travel across the lines of maps. Like my great-grandmother Rose, I find the rules of state often don't map to my personal understanding of rightful inhabitants. Upon the land. I refused conceptual categories that confound or discount my lived experience and I would refuse them on your behalf as well. I continue as my great-grandmother dead to thrive on the land and I gladly welcome new strangers who also dwell here. And,

[0:28:35] while I eschew a romantic spiritualism or spiritual environmentalism that's very often associated with Native people. I do feel that the relationship to the land is as rightful as any law. Those of us who love this land wander deep in the woods and wade in remote ancestral rivers, and when we do so we remember and imagine who we are and who we were and we act accordingly. Thank you. [Applause]

[0:29:14] **Elisa Washuta:** Christine thank you so much for that wonderful reading. I just love Christine's book. It's really really important to me. I want to thank all of you for coming thanks to all family and friends who are here. It's good to see you. Thanks so much to Karen and Chris for that warm welcome and thanks to you UW Press and especially Natasha for getting us together, getting us here. This is just a really special event for me. It's just really wonderful to be here talking with

Christine. So again, my name is Elissa Washuta, I'm going to read to you tonight from My Body is a Book of Rules. It's my Memoir. I'm going to read some sections from the book that are they are little, little tiny sections - a page or two at most, and they come in between the other chapters of the book. And each one is titled: A Cascade Autobiography. I don't want to talk too much about them. All you really need to know is that I'm enrolled Cowlitz, citizen of the Cowlitz tribe. I'm also descended from the Cascade people. And, you

[0:30:30] should probably also know that I was born and raised in New Jersey, and I've been I've actually been here in Seattle for about 7 years now. But, at the time of this writing that when the book is set, I had just been in Seattle for a year or two and had just just started being an active citizen in the Cowlitz tribe. Tumulth begat Mary, who begat Abbie, who begat Kathleen, who begat Leslie, who begat Elissa. I look white. You might think that means I am white. You are wrong. I have a photo ID that says official tribal and above my official Indian grin, you know, it's a legit tribal ID because the photographer didn't tell me to wipe the smile off my face. I suffer from gallbladder disease of which Indians are at particular risk. I look vaguely Indian when I wear maroon and grow my hair long. Why can't the one drop rule apply to me? I don't have just one drop of Indian blood, half my skull is Indian, or my two hands, one neck made of the same doomed substance as Tumulth. When I tell people I'm Native they

[0:32:04] often ask how much? It seems to be a reflex the way when I'm asked how I'm doing. I always fib that I'm fine. I don't know why anyone cares to know my quantum, but I never want to be rude. I am 3/32 Indian 1/16 Cascade and 1/32 Cowlitz. since the Cascade tribe has been split into pieces. I am enrolled Cowlitz. When the Cascade leaders were hanged all the other Cascade Indians were rounded up by Lieutenant Phil Sheridan and put on an island and told that they would be shot if they tried to leave. You know, Sheridan because you've heard the only good Indian is a dead Indian. And he was talking about me because he was talking about Indians like my great-great-great grandpa Tumulth whom he hanged on March 28 1856. Tumulth was survived by his wives and daughters. Mary Will-wy-ity, or Indian Mary is the daughter whose blood eventually became mine. If you're asking me who the Indian was who made me Indian. I guess you're asking about Mary because she was the last full blood in my family line. Her second

[0:33:29] husband Louis, Abbie's dad was Cowlitz. He was born to Lucy Skloutwout lower Cowlitz woman whose descendants fill many chairs at council meetings. Mary was a very young girl when her dad died. Her sister Whylick Quiuck, or Virginia was about nine at the time when their dad was hanged those little girls were enslaved and the world was upended never to be set right again. When I was 5 the kindergarten teacher split the class into pilgrims and Indians with construction paper costumes to teach us about our National Heritage. My parents had explained to me that I was Indian and the classroom taught me what this meant. When I was 6 my dad taught me how to spell Cowlitz and I wrote it at the bottom of my drawings. When I was seven, I became obsessed with mermaids certain that I could fuse my legs into a fin if I press them together firmly enough under my modest [inaudible] plaid. At 8 I created dioramas of buildings where other Native peoples' ancestors slept and though the teacher told me that this

[0:34:59] was my heritage. I was not certain that I believed in cacti or masas having never seen them. In college, I tried telling stories that weren't mine. I showed up pale and brilliantly bear limbed to my honors dorm toward the end of a hot Mid-Atlantic summer and when word got out about my scholarship - kids said, "Haven't the Indians already mooched off this country enough with their casino building and slipping loose from taxpaying?" I burrowed into the library and made scattershot efforts to learn what I could It about Indian things- languages, histories, stories and I created my own fictions from them. Hoping to prove myself that way if I carried no proof within me. I thought I was a full half Native and a full half Ukrainian until I was about ten. How the simple question of how much wish to split someone's ancestry into neat compartments can actually tear a person limb from limb. I wouldn't know it until reaching graduate school, but the tendency to divide Indian ancestry into numerical parts is

[0:36:19] far from natural. It has been written into American law since the colonial period. Now as a condition of enrollment many tribes require individuals to demonstrate a minimum degree of ancestry known as blood quantum. Once I figured that out it took me even longer to understand that blood-quantum has nothing to do with blood. There is no such thing as Indian albumin Irish hemoglobin, Ukrainian leukocytes or French platelets. The veins and arteries do not split in those who are mixed and the blood does not contain the oily and watery liquids of disparate ethnicities. Blood is just a metaphor and it's not much of one. Looking beyond the fractional diminishing from generation to generation. I began to wonder whether the blood does contain something real an essence that cannot be neatly halved. I learned in science class that some genetic material is passed down through the mitochondrial DNA which live in women's eggs. This was the limit of my understanding instead of researching this nugget's

[0:37:40] veracity, I chose to seize upon it. Believing it meant that my core had been formed by elements handed down from woman to woman through the generations like a scepter. I reasoned that something in me holding court in every cell was truly Indigenous. How that hidden key code manifested in my outward form though was hard to say. In summer my skin tanned easily. I would admire the contrast between my fingers and the white flesh between them because by December I'd be even paler than many of my of the Euro American kids at my school. Especially the ones whose families had come over from Italy a few henerations back. The only Indians I'd ever seen were the ones I was related to the ones in the movies and the ones who danced at the powwows how every summer of my childhood on the grounds of a winery 10 minutes away from my house. My mother, brother and I would spend all year being the only Indians around as far as we knew. In July Indians from all over would converge at the local powwow bringing with

[0:38:58] them beads and feathers, suede and abalone, weave and fringe. I wondered what they had been born with that I hadn't. Since we were all Indian yet they had these steps in them, these rhythms, these fur wraps and plumes that made them seem part bird and part otter. I wondered whether I would grow up to be Indian like that. I thought I might be part animal too - part guinea pig, hamster, crayfish, cat - all my pets because we got along so well together. Then we played and they understood me better than any of my classmates. Still before I was old enough to know what Indian meant. I knew we were produced in at least two varieties. I was unlike the powwow people who came

from elsewhere. I asked my mother where I could learn to dance like that and she said she didn't know. Toward the end of college after some of my peers had learned about the Buffalo Massacre and Wounded Knee and the Trail of Tears and experienced the liberal arts awakening. I began to get tired of hearing, "Oh, you're Native American

[0:40:27] and I'm so sorry for what my people did to your people. It really sucked." As though that thing were so far in the past that people could solve it through apology claiming the guilt that they thought no living person really bears. On the upside, after enlightenment, nobody gave a shit about my scholarship. Tumulth was the first Chief of the Wal-lal-lah Band of the Tumwaters also known as the Cascade Indians a band of survivors left behind after an 1829 epidemic of ague fever that killed off most of the area's Native population in a single summer. In 1855 at age 25 or so Tumulth signed a treaty in which he and many other signers gave up much of their land. They would move to the Grande Ronde reservation and although the U.S. pledged to provide food and supplies and even education Tumulth didn't live long enough to see the rapid trampling of these promises. A year later, the Yakima's attacked the white settlement at the Cascades of the Columbia a single action in an ongoing war and

[0:41:47] the Cascades became entangled in the fight despite the treaty, because they lived there and they were pissed off, and whites had been settling where they didn't belong. Mary and her sisters, daughters of Tumulth would insist that their father was wrongly accused. But still he was hanged. His family was enslaved by the Klamath Indians later freed by during a US Army attack and taken to Fort Vancouver. The soldiers in a baffling gesture took up a collection of gold for the girls. Feeling bad about what happened to their dad.

[0:42:36] I try to picture Tumulth, but I will never find his gleaming eyes in a sepia portrait or his last words transcribed in a mass market paperback. I can make guesses about the aches of his guts as he stepped onto the scaffold ready to leave a world quickly emptying itself of familiar men. His daughters and granddaughters would grow into a world full of settler men who would roll into the women's lives for a fertilization, or a marriage, for long strings of nights dappled with whiskey and cards. For his wife's trust land to be tossed into his debts as though it were a bag of beads. For the wife's shotgun stationed at the door to bar her hard-partying husband from entering. For her threats of suicide by knife and his wrangling for the blade. The women and the men stared each other down across a deep gorge novices at every day armistice. Five generations after Tulmulth was hanged for being Indian, being in charg,e and being around, I took for granted my undergraduate university's commitment to cultural

[0:43:56] diversity and wailed about my schoolmates' bigotry. Tulmulth had to leave his girls in a land of true discord. I cannot know even a sliver of it. The story is in the details, the traumas, the histories, not the titles and labels we apply and tried to pass down without context. I've been searching for the story, the whole beast, the blessing, the burden. Thank you. [Applause]

[0:44:40] **Christine Dupres:** Elissa and I were asked to come up with a few questions for each other and I actually want to scoot in a little closer to her so I can look at her while I talk to her. And we

agreed that I would ask her the first question which is this: and that is oh dear Elissa books stop, writing stops, but we do not. So, since the time that you wrote your book My Body is a Book of Rules, how have you changed? How do you identify now?

[0:45:18] **Elissa Washuta:** Well during the time of the writing of the book it takes place mostly during my early 20s and I am 30 now. So when I wrote the book I had a very fractionated sense of my ethnic identity. I thought that I had to identify myself by you know, every identity every ethnic identity I knew of myself. So, I was Irish, Scottish, Polish, Ukrainian, German, Dutch, Cascade, Cowlitz, Welsh, French and I thought that's that's what I was ethnically. But, I've really let go of that idea of fractionated ethnic identity because I realized I don't know what it means to be Scottish or Dutch, that that really

[0:46:07] doesn't mean anything to me. I do know what it means to me to be a citizen of the Cowlitz tribe. I know what it means to me to be ascended from the Cascade people, and I know what it means to me to be descended from Eastern European immigrants, to Pennsylvania's coal region. And, that you know learning has been a very involved process that has spanned my entire life of you know, growing up being around my grandparents in New Jersey who have told me so many stories of the coal region. My dad and my uncle have told me lots of stories of the coal region. Participating in Cowlitz tribal life as a citizen these past two years out here, you know learning more from my mother and my aunts, hi aunt Linda, about about you know about what it means to be Cascade and what it means to be Cowlitz. And so I've also learned that you know, the definition of my ethnic and national identities is an ongoing process and that is important to me. It is not something that was frozen, you know at the time of conception

[0:47:29] this creation of my DNA that I can you know, I can go to 23andMe and and find my breakdown and that'll be me forever. That is not how I feel about myself and It's a process that also has had a lot to do with the work that I do. I'm an advisor in the department of American Indian studies at University of Washington. I taught there for several years, and I'm now teaching at The Institute of American Indian arts in Santa Fe. And so forming relationships with with other Native peoples and with the creation of knowledge and those places is so important to me in learning who I am. So, so I have a question for you. You write in your book about the awkwardness of being a Cowlitz and Cree woman while feeling pulled to remember. So, I'm wondering how the process of writing the book changed that sense of being?

[0:48:39] **Christine Dupres:** So we've talked about this a little bit too. Essayist Roger Rosenblatt once answered the question - why write? This way he said, to make suffering endurable, to make evil intelligible, to make justice

[0:49:01] desirable, and to make love possible. And, while that's a grandiose list, I love it. And I'd add that I write, and probably all who write, write to make the complex intelligible, and to make our own thinking visible, in such a way that we create ground. And then from that ground things can grow, many things emerge. Writing really helps to lay out a sense of things. I began my book as a person really unsure whether to inhabit the Native American self, to which I felt so palpably powerfully pulled

and really unsure about what inhabitants even met. For example. I didn't yet know the name of our language which turned out to be languages. I couldn't repeat a tribal story. I pulled smelt, but I didn't pull smelt in ceremony. And the list went on and on. And, and I wanted to know because I was told that I was Native American, but I wanted to know what it meant to be that thing, instead of feeling apologetic about who I was. After I finished this book was like like something that have been filled, like a vessel that

[0:50:32] had been filled. And then I felt entitled and I felt articulate in a way that I had not before, and it fell really good. And, in the place of an absence of story having written the book there were many stories and many people and many histories. So in exchange for the book, I got a voice, a new voice. You ready for the next question? All right, you write in My Body is a Book of Rules that yes, I am Indian. But, I am also very very white. I'd like to know more about that. Tell me more.

[0:51:15] **Elissa Washuta:** Well, it's winter time so you can see my winter skin.

[0:51:23] So I'm an enrolled member of the Cowlitz tribe I am so I'm a full citizen of the Cowlitz tribe and so that means that I feel that I inhabit my Indigenous identity in one in one way. That's one part of it. There are many parts, you know, really a lot of kind of complex moving parts to my Indigenous identity. But but that's one of them, And, you know, at the same time physically, I do have the appearance of being being very pale. And so that's kind of part of what was going on in the book at at the time of the writing, at the time the memoir takes place. I was having a lot of confusion around trying to negotiate that the fact that to the outward world, I looked white and I completely passed as white and as a young person forming her identity, ss you heard about in the selection that I read, that was really not just complicated, but troubling. When I sometimes felt that there was judgment associated with that but I later came to learn a lot about the privilege associated with that as well. And there

[0:52:43] are, you know, certain things going down to Santa Fe and teaching there. And learning, you know, how much different it is for me to take my rental car to Taco Bell in the middle of the night that it is for some of my colleagues. When there's, you know, a lot of police around waiting with speed traps very different experience because of the way that I pass as white. So but then there's kind of more layers to that because it doesn't affect, that that passing does not affect the fact that I am, you know, completely tribal citizen. It does not affect my citizenship in any way because indigeneity has is not affected at all by this notion of purity. There is this notion of purity has no effect on indigeneity. I am completely an Indigenous person regardless of this outdated and ineffective notion of blood quantum. I have a question for you.

[0:53:57] **Christine Dupres:** I just love to hear you say that by the way, amen. Yes.

[0:54:05] **Elissa Washuta:** So you write about the threat to Cowlitz tribal identity brought about by the scattering effect of becoming landless. So how do stories help to protect this tribal identity?

[0:54:18] **Christine Dupres:** I love that question. Also, I want to clarify first that when I think of storytelling I'm not necessarily thinking of lore or legends or myth, I think of stories as metaphor for transformation. I think of stories as the way we use narrative strategically and as a means of relating experience and history that moves across minds. So, because I think of storytelling this way I think of stories as very deep and also really cagey, very slippery. Vi Hilbert, an upper Skagit Elder activists and linguist, we also talked about her today, said that storytelling allows you to hear the soul and spirit of words, and I agree. Plus stories build relationship and understanding perhaps most importantly when you are, to your question more directly, minorities in this culture are so often isolated and deliberately systemically kept from

[0:55:28] one another, or kept from their tribe and their history, right? This is structural racism at work. And, so stories, when we can get together and we can tell and share them, unburden each of us from this isolation. If we have stories that we share in common, or we discover in common, or strategies that we use in common, then we get to tell our truth and this truth is both incredibly powerful and very disruptive. So it's also super reparative. There's just nothing like a great story. So when you ask whether stories will continue to help protect tribal identity - emphatically, you know, and I give you an unqualified, yes! Kenneth Burke said that stories are equipment for a living and that's how I think of them. They lay the architecture for our behavior and they also help to clarify and articulate what we really think, and what we really feel, and what we want to represent and share. So as long as stories live, we live.

[0:56:37] **Elissa Washuta:** It's a really exciting answer. Thank you.

[0:56:42] **Christine Dupres:** Thank you. It's a pleasure to be up here with you.

[0:56:46] **Elissa Washuta:** It's wonderful to talk with you. Yeah. So do any of you have questions for us? So the question was about whether we participate in wearing regalia.

[0:57:01] **Christine Dupres:** I can answer that and I'm not the least bit offended. Absolutely. I participate in digging, root digging and digging ceremony with the Yakima. And I also participate in berry picking with the Yakima and that culminates in ceremony where you wear, well in this case, Smokehouse or Longhouse dress. So a winged dress and the conical hat. I have one that's woven and moccasins and lots of jewelry. It's absolutely beautiful and you dance right to celebrate and let Creator know that you're grateful for the Earth's bounty. You bet I do. And, then another way that I wear regalia is I, for a long time, was in the employee of the Native American Youth and Family Center, which is a big nonprofit in Portland. I was on their directors team and when I left I was gifted a gorgeous honor blanket and so on certain occasions, I'll bust out the honor blanket with my hat and I'll wear that as well as well. In urban settings, do you all know that Seattle and Portland are huge? They have huge Native populations and not just of

[0:58:17] people who are around here. Portland for example has 40,000 Native American people from like represented by 380 different tribes. So when urban Native Americans get together, it's very very

complex, right? And heterogeneous. And yet there is regalia that we wear. There are things that we celebrate in common. So thanks for asking. How about you?

[0:58:42] **Elissa Washuta:** Yeah, it's a good question. I do not wear regalia. It's, I really like your answer that you began by talking about ceremony. The ceremonies that I have participated in are not not in association with any, do not have regalia kind of like the demonstrative regalia, associated with them. And so I so I just don't I don't have any regalia that I wear yet, but I'm a very young Cowlitz person and so I see that there will be a time in my life that I will. Once I begin doing those ceremonies that that are associated with regalia. Other questions.

[0:59:32] **Christine Dupres:** That's a tricky one. Are there any Cowlitz in the audience who want to try? Yeah, I'm feeling like fishing and hunting is kind of a big deal. But Phil, what would you like to take the mic and answer that? It'd be kind of exciting to hear from another Cowlitz person.

[0:59:49] **Elissa Washuta:** Repeating the question? The question was about the single greatest betrayal, broken promise, to the Cowlitz tribe from the federal government.

[0:59:59] **Christine Dupres:** It's an interesting question. It's hard to pick only one, right, probably for tribal peoples nationwide, worldwide.

[1:00:07] **Philip Harju:** [Indigenous language spoken.] My name is Philip Harju, I'm the vice-chairman of the Cowlitz tribe and it's it's an honor to be just here to listen to our young Cowlitz that have are so well-versed in our history and our culture. I think one of the history of the Cowlitz is a lot of betrayal by the federal government and by the United States and and by the British way back when. So you've heard some of the stories of some of the atrocities. The biggest, one of the biggest betrayals, is some of the atrocities that Cowlitz, and I know a great hero to the Americans is Abraham Lincoln. He has the

[1:00:48] biggest betrayal for the Cowlitz people in 1863. He opened Southwest Washington to donation land claims and extinguished Cowlitz aboriginal territory. The, you know, there was no treaty with the Cowlitz. So the Cowlitz land was taken without compensation in 1863. And Cowlitz off of some of the prime real estate that they occupied, at that time were removed relocated, killed, their land was taken. So the betrayal I think was taking their lands without compensation or without a treaty and it's taken the Cowlitz hundred and sixty years to try to recover from some of that and we're not all the way back. But the Cowlitz have succeeded, and it and as they have said in their stories the I think when they write the modern history of Cowlitz it is just short of a miracle that so few people, with so few resources, were able to regain some of their land, some of their culture, their identity and their recognition. And so as I like to say, we are retaking Southwest Washington one parcel at a time.

[1:01:55] But we, so the betrayal, I think, was back in the time when when my ancestors and their ancestors - they were killed and their land was taken from them. And promises were made to them to stay out of the Indian War, that they would receive a reservation all of those promises were broken by the federal government.

[1:02:14] **Christine Dupres:** Thank you. You have a question? One of the hardest things was really heartbreaking for me. When I worked at the Native American Youth and Family Center, I would tour people on a daily basis and inevitably someone would come in and say, "I know that I'm from a tribal people. I know my grandma was of descent, but I don't know anything." Right? And it's heartbreaking because that's not an accident. That is a very deliberate series of policy, right, removal and erasure that occurs for so many of us. So you're right. I feel incredibly fortunate that there are people who are still living who would you know talk to me or talk to us. Do we have time for one or two more questions and then we should

[1:03:08] wrap? Okay. Yes? So Michael asks first, he says that it's a very exciting time for the Cowlitz and could we answer something that we've noticed that you know excites us? Yeah, you want to take that one?

[1:03:28] **Elissa Washuta:** Yes. I like we have a lot of occasions to come together to celebrate now, and I love that. I love getting together for in late December we had a celebration, you know surrounding, bringing the land into trust, and everybody under a big tent, and you know telling stories, and just excitement, and songs, stories, celebration. And, just having a place for that and we've had a place for that, but just knowing this is our land and being able to stand on, on it, and and knowing what that means, was absolutely tremendous, and having more occasions to celebrate. Xelebration is just such a special thing in a tribal community. It's it's incredibly meaningful because there are the stories and songs and the stories have such history to them. I just love that we have more occasions for that and they are so joyful.

[1:04:50] **Chris Higashi:** That was a wonderful note to end this part of the program on. So please do visit the Elliott Bay Book Company table and come down and meet and talk with Christine Dupres and Elissa Washuta. Thank you very much.

[1:05:12] **Podcast Announcer:** This podcast was presented by the Seattle Public Library and foundation and made possible by your contributions to the Seattle Public Library Foundation. Thanks for listening.