You First Podcast Episode 47: Disability and Indigenous Identity

Maddie Crowley: You're listening to "You First," the Disability Rights Florida podcast. In this episode, I'm chatting with Jen Deerinwater about the experiences of individuals who identify with both disability and Indigenous communities.

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Maddie: Hey, everyone. I'm Maddie.

Keith Casebonne: I'm Keith. We're the hosts of You First.

Maddie: Today, we're happy to have on Jen Deerinwater. Jen is a bisexual, Two-Spirit, multiply-disabled citizen of Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma and an award-winning journalist and organizer who covers a myriad of issues her community faces with an intersectional lens.

Jen is the founding Executive Director of Crushing Colonialism and a 2019 2019 New Economies Reporting Project and a 2020 Disability Futures Fellow.

Keith: Jen's writing is included in anthologies such as "Disability Visibility," the forthcoming "Crip Authorship -- Disability as Method," among many other things. Jen is the co-editor of the anthology "Sacred and Subversive" and is currently hard at work on her own book.

Maddie: Jen is a vital advocate and change-maker within disability, indigenous, and environmental justice movements. During the conversation, Jen discusses paving the way to create a native media organization combating ableism and invisibility and highlighting upcoming opportunities and new resources developing for disabled Native folks.

Keith: This episode is sure to be a thought-provoking and informative discussion that you won't want to miss. So grab a cup of tea, sit back, and enjoy the show.

Maddie: Hi, Jen. Welcome onto the podcast. We're so excited to have you on today. Just take a few moments to introduce yourself.

Jen Deerinwater: Hello. Osiyo. I am a citizen of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma. I'm a freelance journalist. I'm the founding Executive Director of Crushing Colonialism, which is a small, indigenous-created and -led 501(c)(3). We're a nonprofit organization that works on indigenous media and storytelling.

I'm also openly bi and Two Spirit. I am multiply disabled, with chronic pain and fatigue and autoimmune issues and a whole host of things. [laughs]

Maddie: Thank you so much for that introduction. It's really wonderful to have you on the podcast today. You hinted a little bit at your role as the Executive Director of Crushing Colonialism. Could you tell us a bit more about that org and other work that you like to center at Crushing Colonialism?

Jen: Yeah. I started the organization in 2016. That's when I began working as a journalist. I just felt like there were a lot of supports and resources that I needed as a multiply marginalized Native journalist that I wasn't finding in any space, not in professional journalist organizations, writing organizations.

I just wasn't coming across it. In every space I'd go, one form or another of isms or oppressions were coming up, coming to bat, basically. I started talking to other indigenous media makers, other storytellers.

Something that's interesting about our organization is that we do straddle this divide between arts and media. We recognize that indigenous storytelling is a traditional value and that it comes in different forms. It may be beading. It may be oral storytelling. It could be pottery.

I spoke to different people across disciplines and just listened to what do they feel like they have needed, either when they were first starting out or mid-career or their later in life. I heard a lot of the same things. We need representation. We need money. We need this. It was the resources that are out there but that Native people just aren't getting.

That's how Crushing Colonialism came about. We got our nonprofit status last year. We did a ton of virtual programming in 2020. We took some time off to just work on getting a really solid base, building our board of directors, doing some more fundraising work, the things that you have to do to really get up and running before you can go on doing successful programming for years to come.

We are going to be announcing some really big programming. I'm really excited about where things are going to go.

Maddie: I'm excited to hear more about that. I'm a huge fan of Crushing Colonialism. DRF has shared some of those videos that y'all have done, whether that's over Zoom with different folks sharing their own lived experiences. There's different blogs. There's artwork on your site and on your various social media.

If folks aren't yet following Crushing Colonialism, that's really where disability and indigeneity and so many other identities come to collide in such a meaningful space. What does it mean to you to start that, such a needed space? I feel like that's such a huge but so meaningful responsibility. How does that feel to you?

Jen: It's a mixed bag. I'm going to be honest. If I had realized just how hard it would be to start a nonprofit when you don't have seed money, I might not have done it....

Maddie: [laughs]

Jen: ...to be honest. It's been a lot of work. A lot of that responsibility has fallen on my shoulders because there just wasn't money to pay people. There still isn't. We still don't have staff. We have some money to pay contractors and consultants to help us out with some projects, but we're still growing.

I'm really fortunate that I get to do this. Despite the marginalizations that I have, I do recognize that I have a certain level of social capital. This is one of the ways that I can put that to work to bring resources to my communities. There are times though when, I will say, I get frustrated. I'm tired. I want to just sit and read a book for fun.

Maddie: [laughs]

Jen: I want to be able to actually take time to just recover from a surgery and not have to think about how things are going to get done for Crushing Colonialism while I'm in bed. It'd be nice to have more energy and time to focus on my own writing, but this space is needed.

As long as community wants it, I'm going to continue to try to put as much energy into it as I can to build it up and have something really stable that I can then pass on to other relatives to do the work.

Maddie: It's an incredible organization. All of your hard work has really shown through. I can't recommend it enough if folks aren't already checking out y'all's work. It really is some super-fantastic stuff. Thank you so much for that beautiful background on how Crushing Colonialism has come to be and your role in it. I think it's super-interesting.

I appreciate your transparency too. I think sometimes folks really have an intention of building a really meaningful space or a meaningful organization, but they just don't necessarily...You can't fathom how much labor is going to go into it until you actually get into it. I just appreciate your transparency on that.

I kind of wanted to jump to another new and forming involvement that you're getting into, which is the NDRN Intertribal Disability Advocacy Council. Disability Rights Florida is termed as a protection and advocacy agency for folks with disabilities living in the State of Florida or what is now Florida.

That label essentially gives an organization like ours a lot of procedural and logistical legitimacy to be able to support folks with disabilities in our area. There's different ones all over the country. There's one in the Four Corners region near what is New Mexico anyways.

The Native American P&A formed this Intertribal Disability Advocacy Council -- just giving background before I ask you questions on it -- and sought out some folks, some disabled Native leaders, to be involved in the council. You recently joined, which I'm sure they were thrilled about because you're a huge get.

The program is really striving to center Native voices in disability spaces. I'm curious, just based on your experience in the beginning, can you tell us a little bit about what the program is striving to do and how it's been meaningful for you so far?

Jen: Yeah. I'm really excited to be a part of IDAC, the council. Part of what led to its formation is that American Indians and Alaska Natives have the highest rates of disabilities, per capita, of any ethnic or racial group in this country. Yet there's very little statistical data on us.

We're very rarely included in studies. We're rarely included in policy. Our needs are pretty much almost entirely ignored by the non-Native disability community and by the able-bodied Native community. The federal government keeps our hands tied in many ways, as tribal citizens and as disabled people, but then also our own tribal governments don't advocate for us the way they should.

This council, we all came together. We come from different parts of the US, different tribes, urban, rural, different types of disabilities. We all came together so that we could put together listening sessions.

We're going to start holding listening sessions beginning in June, running through August, giving the opportunity for deaf, disabled, chronically ill neurodivergent native people to sit and talk with us about what some of their most pressing needs are.

What do they feel like they need in order to have a good quality of life? Where do they feel like things may be lacking, and where do they feel like maybe things are good and things are going well? Because that's really important too. We need to know the good and the bad.

Then the council is going to take all of this data and it's going to be crafted into a study, and that study is going to be presented to the federal government. Let me get into a couple other points I want to make sure I make that kind of relate to IDAC.

Maddie: Sure.

Jen: There has been somewhat a growing awareness amongst non-native, non-indigenous disability community of the needs to include disabled, native, and indigenous people. There's a very tiny beginning kernels of knowledge within native community about disability, but there's still a lot of disconnect.

Disabled natives still don't have a seat at the table at either table. Within disability community, we're often brought in last minute. We're not brought in for leadership. We're not brought in for our ideas at the beginning of any kind of project, it's always an, "Oh, we need to check that box."

What we have to say as native people is never listened to. It's never listened to. I've left several disability spaces because I just in the end was like, "I am just nothing more than a token to you all and I'm out." Then within native community, and there's some various reasons for this, one, disability as we know it in this colonial context it's not really an idea.

It's not a way of being with any Native Nations that I'm aware of anyway. Health, ability, disability, and things are looked at differently. The value at one another is looked at differently because we think about us as a collective group of people, not just the individual.

Everyone has worth, and everyone has value, and that's a very different framework to start with. That's the traditional way anyway of a lot of tribes. Disability is just looked at differently. Also it's been really frustrating to see native organizations that have more than enough resources to do the bare minimum of disability access not doing it.

Or including voices on disability, but those voices are not native voices. In one instance, it was a white able-bodied woman coming in and speaking on native disability issues. That's just mind boggling to me. We still have a long way to go.

That's why I'm really happy IDAC, why this council exists and why I'm so excited to be a part of it because it's actually disabled native people coming together and doing this work and leading the charge.

Maddie: Yeah, definitely. Thank you for that background on IDAC and for setting the groundwork for some of the other conversations we're going to continue to have throughout the podcast. Could you maybe speak a little bit more to what conversations IDAC is going to continue to hopefully address when it comes to specific needs of native disabled folks, whether that's housing, economic access, or physical access.

Jen: I think it's going to depend on what comes out of the listening sessions. I can say what I need, what resources I'm going without, what changes I would like to see both within my own tribe, Cherokee Nation, and then within federal government, local government.

I live in Washington, DC. I can always say those things, but the ideas to listen to what other natives have to say, we want to hear what they have to say. We'll see. My experience as an urban native living in DC is going to be vastly different of even another Cherokee Nation citizen living back home in a rural area of our reservation.

Where we go with this is really going to depend on what happens with the listening sessions. We are all really committed to getting this study put together and not just having it sit on a shelf somewhere, but actually using it to make change.

Maddie: Yeah, I know. I'm really excited to see how the listening sessions go into center native folks, more so within the disability community and hopefully be able to transform that study.

Things to be more publicly known and for other disability organizations who want to be better about centering native folks and including them that they're hearing from native folks themselves about what they need and what their hopes are for the community.

You mentioned the disconnect between disability and native identity and how things are just viewed differently from "American disability identity". I think there's an interest on a want and a need for disabled organizations, whether it's organizations like mine, other orgs outside of the PNA network that really do or think they do want to center disabled native folks.

There is understandably some distrust in native communities to trust non-native and disabled native, non-disabled native like orgs. I was just curious if you would be willing to speak a little bit to how non-native disability orgs can start to better center native disabled folks?

Whether that's starting with the listening sessions and supporting the study, but also like how maybe they could go about forming relationships and meaningful relationships with the nearby native folks.

Jen: I would say that my advice is going to be very similar to what I actually told you maybe a year ago when you first reach out to me is that, one, it's about relationship building. It's not just about a one and done ask, "Oh, we want you to do this talk and now we're out".

If you really want native people, then you need to build relationships with us. That takes time. You need to understand, just like you said, we are a fairly distrustful people for a lot of very obvious reasons, and then some that may not be so obvious to people.

I also want to see people coming in and offering something, not just looking for something. It really frustrates me to have non-native disabled organizations come to me asking me to sign on to letters, letting crushing colonialism to sign on to letters when they did not have a single native person involved at all in any of the organizing.

Sometimes the excuse I hear is, "We didn't have time". What do I say to that? I don't feel I even have a professional response to, "we didn't have time".

Maddie: If you wanted to do it, you would. If you have time, there's no excuse.

Jen: Exactly. Also, there are times where there are quick turnarounds on maybe a letter to Congress or something, but that's also why you should be working on building relationships with us. You already know us, we already have solidarity together, but that is not the way a lot of people operate particularly within the disability rights community. I will say I have some frustration as well with the idea that "Oh, any indigenous person will do."

They don't even have to be indigenous to the US. As long as we have the one, it's OK. It's not OK. It's not OK. We are all different. You need to learn the local tribes, you need to learn the different indigenous people within your region, but you can't just grab in any one of us expecting that will be OK.

I really often feel like in many cases, I just have people coming to me with their hands out, or like I said before, they come to me asking me to join committees, and calls, and things, and then when I speak up and give my opinion as a disabled native, it's not listened to.

That happens within able-bodied native spaces and non-native disabled spaces. If you don't want to hear my opinion, then don't invite me. If you haven't figured it out by now, I'm going to tell you what I think.

It's so frustrating to even have to say that, but if you really want the beauty, and the pain, and the struggle, and the reality, and the ingenuity of disabled natives, then you need to come to us in the right way, and that can't just be coming to us with your handout, or when you need to check a checkbox for your funding applications. There's a better way to come to us and there's a better way to do things.

Maddie: Certainly. I know like you mentioned, native folks aren't included or if they are, it's an afterthought. To put it in perspective and not to compare, but if you thought about any other marginalized group, and you went across the world to find somebody of that marginalized group to then invite them to a council or a board that's in the state. That doesn't make any sense at all.

Maddie: It's unfortunately, like you said, a lived reality of something that you've experienced. I'm sure other disabled Native folks have experienced. It's just to really recenter what local and nearby Native folks to really ensure that the needs are being met and the voices are being heard of folks. I appreciate your insight into that.

I was curious. Is there necessarily a way that you would hope that in orgs, non-Indigenous or maybe disabled orgs, instead of coming to you with their hands open, what would it look like to you for that to actually be a meaningful engagement?

Is there an experience you've had in the past where nobody expected anything of you? They just came to you with resources and support without the expectation on anything back.

Jen: I don't want to say no because I'm sure there have been. I'm just not thinking of those moments right now.

There are absolutely people in my life, "Hey, I saw this grant and thought of you. Saw this call for submissions. Now maybe this is of interest to Crushing Colonialism." People do come to me sharing resources and such, sharing fundraisers.

I have a fundraiser going right now for Crushing Colonialism. June is my birthday month. It's also too LGBTQIA Pride Month. So we're doing a fundraiser. There are people and spaces and community that are genuinely there to help.

Something that I would like to see more of...I know this is hard when we're all in many ways so exhausted. We're all spread so thin. We're all under-resourced.

I really appreciate in those rare instances where people come to me like, "I know of you, and I'd like to get to know you more. Do you want to do a virtual call? Do you want to get a coffee if we're in the same place together, and it's safe with pandemics and such?" I appreciate that. I like that.

I think it's always good to get to know each other on that kind of level. That for me is where the work begins because, yeah, there is this non-profit world in which some of us have to operate. That does very easily get us lost within just getting the work done.

I don't do this because I want to be a non-profit director or executive. I hate the non-profit industrial complex. I just couldn't come up with grassroots funds to do it without foundation money. It was what I had to do.

[crosstalk]

Jen: For me, it's about that community building. It's cross-movements, cross-community, cross-solidarity. It's just building up and coming together because we're going to need to be there for each other and it can't always be just within this nonprofit context of, "Hey, we need you to speak on a panel." Or, "We want you on a committee."

Sometimes it needs to be, "Hey, such and such, they need practical on-the-ground support. Do you know people? Can you help me resource this?" We're going to have to do more and more of that as this world becomes more and more unstable due to a variety of issues. Rise of fascism, climate crisis, take your pick.

[laughter]

Maddie: I think that's a good point to end this "section" of the conversation that we're having because, in the end, just reframing folks' perceptions on different intentions, whether that's going in with intentions of supporting native folks or centering them, or whatever it may be, if you're going into it without a non-native value of community, and support, and finding meaning in each individual.

Distancing yourself from some of the individuals we have in different organizations in American society, if you're not going into it honoring native values, it's not necessarily going to resonate with the folks that you're going to be in contact with.

Thank you for elaborating on that. I think the theme of community and intention with native values in mind, the main takeaway of what I would sum up your answer.

[music]

Andrew Gurza: Hello there, and welcome to "Disability After Dark," the podcast shining a bright light on disability stories. I'm your host, Disability Awareness Consultant, Andrew Gurza.

This is a podcast where you sit down with your close disabled friends and talk about things in the disability experience that we never ever get to shine a light on. That's why it's called Disability After Dark.

Each week, we'll explore everything from disability to ableism, to sexuality, and so much more, including things like disability grief, disability joy, and so many different conversation topics around the disabled experience.

We even have special bonus content like "Quarantine & Chill," a podcast within Disability After Dark where we explore the effects of the ongoing pandemic, or "A Bump'n Podcast" where we talk all about sex and disability and sex toys on the show.

Tune in wherever you get your podcast and let's shine a red light on disability stories. Thanks, everybody. Bye.

Kathy O'Connell: Dating with a disability can be hard. I know that [inaudible 26:21] for years to date successfully with a disability. Having [inaudible 26:32] , I encountered many people not even considering me as a potential partner, and when they did, there were judgments and attitudes.

Successful dating and finding out the joyful relationship is entirely possible. I finally figured out how to do that, and I have been with my husband for over 14 years now. The key is indeed keep trying. Continue to go for what you want despite the heartbreak and rejection, and believe in your potential as a dating and relationship partner.

I know that sounds very simple and that's not. That's why I created Dating Made Easier, the monthly membership that will teach you how to get the results you want, feel more comfortable and confident dating, and give you consistent support with monthly workshops, brainstorming, and networking. Go to radiantabilities.com/datingresources and join today.

[music]

Maddie: Let's talk a little bit more about some other work that you're involved in. In addition to the Intertribal Disability Advocacy Council, or we refer to as IDAC a little bit, you sit on the planning council for an urban HIV and AIDS care equity study for urban natives.

I would love for you to tell us a little bit more about this, and how centering native folks in healthcare and health equity conversations is so essential to not just native folks, but everybody's wellness.

Jen: This group is part of a study being done by John Hopkins University and Native American Lifelines, which is a small Indian Health Service reimbursement organization. They're under Urban Indian Health. They're not a full ambulatory IHS clinic, but they do get some IHS funds to do reimbursement out-of-pocket healthcare for enrolled sub-tribal citizens in this country.

The studies we've put on between those two organizations, those of us on the council, we're all within Urban Native Community within Boston, Baltimore regions, and so we're all coming together and helping to put this study together.

It's like with the IDAC, we're figuring out what questions, how to reach people, but also similar with IDAC, there's just not a lot of data taken on native people. We're always left out of data collection. Always. We're always left out. There's just so much that we don't know on a data level.

On the individual level and the community level, there's a lot that we do now that's going on, but we don't have any definitive hard numbers, or they're quite old, or the studies were not very good. They weren't complete.

We don't have that data to take to tribal leaders. We don't have that data to take to leaders in various parts of US government. That's part of why these studies are so important.

We're looking specifically at the equity of care around HIV and AIDS for urban natives in Baltimore in Boston. Neither place has Indian Health Service hospitals or clinics. If you are a native and you are eligible for IHS, you either have to travel a great distance to get to IHS or you're going to use non-IHS health services.

There's a variety of issues with that. You could be talking to people who are not only non-native but don't even know that you exist. It's pretty shocking some of the things I've had healthcare providers say to me over the years, including at health centers when I lived in Boston. Including Fenway Health, which is the LGBT health center.

Spaces that should especially be doing HIV AIDS and safer sex education and care, they have literally zero competency to work with native people. They know nothing about us. They don't even think we exist. There's a lot of problems with the level of care that we can get.

Then within native community, for a variety of reasons, we just don't talk a great deal about sexual health. We don't talk a great deal about reproductive health. We don't talk about safer sex. We don't talk about HIV and AIDS. There's a lot of stigma around it, and that has to change.

This study is to see, what are we missing in our community? What do our people need? Because you can't address a problem, you can't fix the problem, if you don't know exactly what that problem is.

Maddie: Yeah, both of these projects is such meaningful work that are honestly going to have impact probably beyond our lifetimes as far as laying the groundwork of research and data collection that, like you said, hasn't been done yet.

I think this work is incredibly meaningful to ensure that we're starting to lay the foundation of how disabled natives can get the care that they need. Was there anything else related to that study that you wanted to highlight? Is there ways for folks to get involved to hear more about this?

Jen: I would say, I hope we have a list of the IDAC listening sessions ready and online for me to give you to go out for June 8th. I'm telling you that now in the hopes that I don't forget. [laughs]

Maddie: I'll make a note. I'll have a note about it.

Jen: We should have that ready any day now. There's a couple of things I'd like to add about the HIV study. I'm in my 40s now, and I was quite young when the AIDS epidemic began, but I do remember it. I remember the things that were said about people who had AIDS.

It was all quite derogatory, [inaudible 33:44] , things that showed not only just complete ignorance but also a complete lack of concern for people who were struggling with addiction. There were a lot of things that I just grew up hearing that I knew was wrong and that was also inaccurate.

I came of age in a time when you had TLC, with Left Eye covering an eye with a condom. [laughs] I grew up with, "Wrap it up or die." That's not the healthy attitude that I wish I had grown up with, but also, that's what I grew up with.

Even though HIV is not necessarily a death sentence anymore, as long as you're able to access care, and not everyone is, it's still something that we need to think about, we need to be concerned about, and we need to work on prevention.

I think a big part of that, it's not just about care and prevention and research. It's also about thinking that the people who are the most likely to get ill actually have value. Part of the reason the AIDS epidemic was allowed to run wild the way it was because we don't value gay men, or men who have sex with men, regardless of what their identity is. We don't value people who are IV drug users.

Just like with COVID. We don't value the majority of the people who have gotten sick and died or been left with Long COVID and without the resources they need. For me, HIV and AIDS, it's a pandemic. It's no different than COVID, to me. It's a pandemic that we allowed to impact certain communities of people because we just don't value those people.

For me, these studies are really important and they're crucial, but they're a first step. They are one tiny step in a very long line of what we need to be doing to ensure...

I don't care about a rights-based and inequality-based framework. I want justice. This is just a tiny drop in the ocean working towards that. That's the other place we have to get to. It's not just knowing what the problems are exactly. It's living in a society where we actually value everyone.

Maddie: I think the idea that every person has value, every body has value, no matter who it is, no matter what their experience is, what their life looks like, who they love, what's their background?

The fact that like saying, "Oh, I think everybody should have access to care, no matter who they are," is like a radical thing to say, I've never understood that. I've never gotten that, but it highlights all of the stigmas and such embedded systems of oppression that exists in the US.

That is just so passive in people's minds of people that live in the US. Your value or your moral value on that community is not the same as mine, and shouldn't override how we view them as individuals and how we find value in people.

I just think that's such an important point that is definitely needed to happen in "health equality," "health equity," because even folks in those spaces sometimes don't always address those internalized stigmas against the folks that they're trying to help. That's such a huge takeaway from this conversation.

Jen: One of the other things that COVID has especially highlighted for me, is that those of us in the so-called US, regardless of who you are, what your background is, we have a very low bar for what we're willing to accept.

We are just in many ways so psychologically beaten down and conditioned to accept nothing but scraps, that the thought of anyone having their basic rights met, somehow seems so radical. When the quarantines first began with COVID, I remember people fighting to be able to go back to work.

I remember thinking, "Why are you fighting to go to work and die for a company that doesn't care about you?" You should be fighting the government to pay you to stay home. You should be fighting the government to give your healthcare because you do need to live.

You're right. You need to live, but why are we not fighting for that? Why are we accepting so little? I recall when Obamacare was first going, it was being debated and going into effect and everything.

One of the things that I was excited about, even though there was a great deal about it that I did not care for, was that students coming out of college weren't going to suddenly lose their health insurance.

I did lose my health insurance. When I graduated from college, I was on my mom and stepdad's plan. I lost my health insurance. We had no health insurance plan in this country, and I graduated into a recession. I've spent my entire post-higher ed life living either unemployed or underemployed.

There have been no good jobs. There have been no benefits to be had like health insurance, or 401K, or god forbid a pension. Those things don't exist anymore. Like someone, I remember them saying on one of my social media feeds, "I had to go without health insurance. Why shouldn't these other people?"

I was just so shocked by that. I was like, "Yeah, I did too," but I shouldn't have had to. That's the point.

Maddie: It doesn't mean that you would want to wish that onto somebody.

Jen: Maybe you think that because you suffered others should suffer. No. I don't know. We just have this very...I don't know. I don't quite have the words to describe it, but man, things are messed up in our thinking over here in the US.

Maddie: Messed up. Yeah.

Jen: It's just wild.

Maddie: It's very much the idea that everything has to be "earned" and merit-based. For folks that are not employed or, like you said, underemployed, who may not have access to health insurance, like "Oh, well what did they do wrong?"

It's like, what? How did we get there? It just goes back to how the whole system is structured, that you have to do a certain amount or be born into it, to be able to access all the things that you need, where in the majority of the world, that's not how it works. Like you said, it's mind-boggling. I definitely resonate with that.

Switching gears from a bit of the doom and [laughs] gloom, talking about COVID, talking about healthcare, talking about the need to include people, and all that stuff, I really like to end my conversations with centering joy and centering care.

This is something that I didn't do myself. I have to credit some folks that center dream building and futurism, which are primarily black feminist psychologists who I had the pleasure of knowing where I went to school. Finding joy in your life while navigating such an oppressive system is such an act of resistance to that system.

Ending conversations in the podcast and in my own personal life recentering the good and the good that brings value to your life and radically challenges all the systems that exist is a really good way to end these conversations, instead of just saying, "OK. That's it. We just talked about Native disabled trauma, how people are included," and end there.

That's what, unfortunately, a lot of people do. They just throw up their facts and figures, and they're done. Like you mentioned earlier, you want to know what's not so good. You also want to know the good, like what's going well, so we can center on that while addressing some other things.

Anyways, that was a long-winded way to ask this question. What does disabled Native joy look like to you? How do you find joy while resisting ableism, racism, and other forms of oppression?

Jen: I'll say that I feel like every time I get asked these questions along this line, I'm always like, "Man, I don't know what to say." I don't know if it's because I'm a journalist that I'm just the harbinger of doom. I don't know.

Maddie: [laughs]

[crosstalk]

Jen: I feel sometimes like I'm way too mired in the ugly of the world to get to the joy part, but I'm working on it. I'm trying to find more of that. What is [inaudible 43:22] ? [laughs] I don't even know.

Maddie: Do you have any pets? Do you have any hobbies, things like that...?

[crosstalk]

Jen: Yeah. I feel like I'm supposed to give this big, grand answer about what disabled Native joy looks like. I'm like, "I don't know, exactly."

Maddie: That's OK.

Jen: I'll say what some of the joyful [laughs] moments are for me. I have two cats. I love them dearly. I am a proud, queer cat lady...

[laughter]

Jen: ...by choice. Sometimes it's just as simple as just sitting down with them. They don't have to do anything but just be cats, expecting me to take care of them. They make me happy. It's sitting with books. It's when I get to go to book stores and I get to see books by cool people that I know. That always makes me really excited. I get very excited when that...It's like, "Oh, I know them."

[laughter]

Jen: It's time with my friends. I have a really good group of people in my life. They're spread all over. That's a little bit of a bummer. I wish we were all closer to one another physically, geographically. I did a little Zoom happy hour, Saturday evening, with some disabled Native friends. That was wonderful. It's getting on the phone and just chatting for an hour.

I'm planning a day at the lake with some friends for July. I do have to really be very intentional about trying to fit joy into my life, as well as rest. If I didn't really try hard to put those two things into my life, they just wouldn't be there.

I wish I had some grand answer about what the future would look like and what I want it to be. I don't, exactly. Joy is important. It can't always be trauma. It can't always be doom and gloom. There's got to be some moments of reprieve in there.

Maddie: Definitely. I was not expecting this grand answer. I think folks listening can connect with the things that you mentioned and be able to reassess joy in their own lives and center, whether that's their pets or their community, just to be able to take a step back, like you said, and really be intentional about the care and wellness and rest that they bring into their lives.

No big earth-shattering responses needed I think. Even the simplest answer of just being able to sit with a pet is really important and has so much value. Thank you so much, Jen.

I was curious. For folks listening, can you tell them a bit about how they can support you, how they can follow and keep up with you, and if there's other Native disabled folks that you want to highlight so listeners can keep up with them too?

Jen: You can follow me and Crushing Colonialism on all of the social media. Very easy to find, Jen with one N Deerinwater and Crushing Colonialism. Go to crushingcolonialism.org. On the bottom of the home page is a newsletter signup. We are going to coming out very soon with a regular really nice Indigenous creative publication.

Maddie: Oh my gosh.

Jen: That is a good way [inaudible 46:47] for that. It's a good way to find out about some of our exciting upcoming programming that we're working on. If you are in the position, we always appreciate donations. That's always very helpful.

In terms of other disabled Indigenous people to follow, there are so many. I know I'm going to forget some. So I'm just going to start naming names as they come to me: Johnnie Jae, Sarah Young Bear-Brown, Jules Edwards, Sharon daVanport, Héctor Ramírez, Hoskie Benally.

Kera Sherwood-O'Regan, she is Maori from Aotearoa, known as New Zealand. She is wonderful. There's John Gilroy. I don't know him personally. But he does a lot of really great work in Australia.

Man, I know I'm forgetting people. But we're out there. We're doing work. We're in these communities doing the work. Anywhere you will find Indigenous people, you are going to find disabled people. So get to know us. Start following us and supporting our work.

Maddie: Perfect. We'll include those names. We'll have a transcript. We'll also link to some more folks in our show notes and highlight them on social media as well when sharing the podcast.

If you're listening and you didn't catch those names or your reading [inaudible 48:08] can't navigate online, we'll include those names in the show notes and on social media. You'll be able to easily find Jen with one N, which I thought was clever, and some other really great folks.

Thank you so much, Jen. It's been an absolute pleasure to be able to share space with you. I appreciate all of the time that you've given in planning this podcast. I really look forward to working with you some more.

Jen: Same. Wado. Thank you.

Keith: Thank you, Jen, for being on today's episode and for sharing your lived experiences, insight, and resources with us.

Maddie: Yes. For a list of resources along with a non-exhaustive list of Native disabled folks Jen provided at the end of the episode to follow, visit our show notes to get that info readily available.

Keith: Our podcast come out every other Thursday. Please like, rate, subscribe, and share the "You First" podcast with your friends, coworkers, and family. We want the important work of people like Jen to reach anyone interested.

Maddie: Let them know that we're on all streaming platforms. For more information and the transcript, visit disabilityrightsflorida.org/podcast.

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