

Dignity and Joy - Season 1, Episode 1

Building relations: Black and Indigenous land and food solidarity with Jaelyn Jarrett

Episode 1 keywords: Inuit, people, food, land, community, sharing, youth, Black, Ottawa, Indigenous, Toronto, workshops, grandparents, conversations, pandemic, art, experience

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Episode 1 transcript:

Intro 0:01

You're listening to Dignity and Joy, a podcast from FoodShare.

On the pod, we confront the systems of oppression that impact who has access to food and the land it's grown on, and who doesn't. Achieving something better will take hard work from all of us and can only be done if we listen closely to the people who are already leading change in the way we think about food. In this three-part series, FoodShare's Sheldomar Elliott delves into the connections between food and justice with folks who have their fingers on the pulse and their hands in the soil. Together, they dream in color, and consider what it would take to build a just and hopeful city – a city where everyone can feed themselves, their loved ones, and their community with dignity and with joy.

Sheldomar 0:43

Hi, I'm Sheldomar Elliott, and welcome to this episode of Dignity and Joy, a podcast from FoodShare. Today, our guest is Jaelyn Jarrett. Jaelyn is Afro-Indigenous and grew up in Nain, Nunatsiavut, a small Inuit community, with her grandparents. When she was nine years old, she relocated to Toronto to live with her Guyanese side of her family, and later to Ottawa, where she received her double honours degree in law and Indigenous studies. Today, she lives in Ottawa with her 11-month son, Khari, and works as a manager for Canadian Roots Exchange, and consultant for her own business. Welcome, Jaelyn.

Jaelyn 0:52

Welcome. Thanks so much for having me.

Sheldomar 0:59

Absolutely. I'm so excited to be chatting with you today. And I imagine that we have lots to talk about, and I look forward to asking you about it all. But before we get into it all, I do want to start by acknowledging that I am currently here in Toronto, sacred land that is the traditional territories of the Wendat, Haudenosaunee, the Anishinabeg, and the Mississaugas of the Credit, and that this is territory covered by the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant. And at FoodShare, we think it's important to start any conversation on this land by recognizing the



many nations of Indigenous peoples who presently live on this land, those who have spent time here, and the ancestors who have hunted and gathered on this land. I also want to acknowledge the many people of African descent who are not settlers, but whose ancestors were forcibly displaced as part of the transatlantic slave trade, brought against their will, and made to work on these lands. At FoodShare, we believe advancing Indigenous solidarity is deeply and inextricably linked to Black liberation, and we remain committed to advancing both. So I just want to pause here and Jaelyn, and pass it to you to perhaps acknowledge where you're situated.

Jaelyn 2:38

So I'm currently in the traditional unceded, unsurrendered territory of the Algonquin Anishinabeg people, which is also considered Ottawa. I guess I'm a guest here, and I've been here for about six years now. I love it here. It's an honor to be able to be here and to live here and to experience everything that it has to offer. I actually live in a community in Ottawa with a, they have like a nickname for it, which basically means in Inuktitut that this is where all the Inuit live. So I live in like a hub for for Indigenous peoples and people of colour in Ottawa, which is really amazing.

Sheldomar 3:15

That's really beautiful. And I can imagine that's powerful. I imagine we'll also be touching on that. But, you know, before we jump into this conversation, I really do want this to be relatively easy going and informal, to say the least. But also I'm sure there'll be drops of knowledge here and there.

Jaelyn 3:32

Yeah, for sure.

Sheldomar 3:33

If it's alright with you, can we jump into maybe some icebreakers to kind of, you know, get some things going? And I guess, keep it easy.

Jaelyn 3:40

Yeah, for sure.

Sheldomar 3:41

Awesome. So, of course, they're going to be food related, because what else would they be? But I'll start with a quick one first. So of course, what is your favorite food, Jaelyn?

Jaelyn 3:52

Okay. Honestly, this is a really easy question. I actually have two. So my first is chicken and rice. And I say chicken and rice, because I feel like every culture has a rendition of chicken and rice. So there's so many different ways to make it like my family is Guyanese for example. So we will do like, you know, chicken curry, you can do – I really like Indian food too, so – butter chicken and rice, like I feel like it's so versatile.

Sheldomar 4:18

Very.

Jaelyn 4:20

And then my second favorite food would just have to be like probably my traditional traditional Inuit food. And we'll get into that a little bit later. But like, some of the things I like are like muktuk which is like whale blubber or like tuktu which is like caribou meat. So yeah, those are my two favourites.

Sheldomar 4:39

Awesome. That sounds great. Of course I got to hear the other side of this which is: what is your least favorite food?

Jaelyn 4:45

My least favorite food? I don't like vegetables. I'm honestly not a fan. Because when I was up north, and I grew up up north, we didn't have – I mean vegetables are so expensive, right? So I didn't have a lot of like, fresh vegetables and fresh food growing up. Actually one of my other favourite foods is strawberries and they're strawberries because in my community, strawberries were like \$10-15. So my anânsiak would never hardly wanted to buy them for me. So that and strawberries and raspberries – love them.

Sheldomar 5:18

I love that.

Jaelyn 5:19

Not a fan of vegetables, but I'll eat them because I have to.

Sheldomar 5:23

(Laughs) Of course, yeah, and I guess, to continue favourite foods, how about your favourite condiment? What would that be?

Jaelyn 5:31

Oh my gosh. That's a good question.

Sheldomar 5:35

It's a bit more deep.

Jaelyn 5:36

Um, I don't – I don't know. I don't really – I feel like I cook with such flavorful like spices. And, you know, I don't really use a lot of condiments like that. I feel like, if you season your food properly, you don't really need condiments, like I hate when people like you'll make a nice dish and people put ketchup on stuff all the time. I hate that.

Sheldomar 6:01

I feel that I mean, yeah, not out here to yuck anyone's yum. But I feel strange sometimes with

the condiments where they don't need to be. So that's real. Well, I'm glad that we're able to get some icebreakers out and people now know if they want to give you food that chicken and rice is the way to go.

Jaelyn 6:20
Periodt.

Sheldomar 6:22

But, um, maybe just to jump into some of your backstory and your journey to where you are now. I know you said that you grew up with your grandparents. Do you want to maybe share a little bit about your upbringing and everything around that?

Jaelyn 6:36

For sure. So I was actually born in Ottawa. Ottawa's a huge hub like I said, for Inuit. A lot of Inuit from Inuit, Nunavut, which means like, the place where Inuit live, so the four regions – Nunatsiavut, Nunavik, Nunavut, Inuvialuit – especially people from Nunavut. I guess I'm from Nunatsiavut, but they come to Ottawa because it's like a, it's a good place for education, job opportunities. Some people come down here for medical. There are a lot of Inuit here and there's a lot of mixed Inuit here. So my anânsiak she came down here for, to pursue education at Carleton University. And she was also working with the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People. So RCAP is what we know, what a lot of people call it. And so she brought my mom here. Yeah, I was born here in Ottawa, and then my anânsiak went back up north. And then when I was not even one years old, my mom, we had a like, we grew up with a lot of poverty, and a lot of issues. So she decided to send me to live with my anânsiak. So yeah, she sent me up north and my anânsiak and my atâtsiak, were really all I knew. I remember actually, like, I hadn't actually officially like met my mom from what I could remember until I think she came to see me when I was like three years old. So my anânsiak and my atâtsiak, which are my grandparents, have had a huge impact on who I am and my life. On my maternal side they're Inuk. So I grew up and when I say up north, I'm referring to the community I grew up in, which is Nain, Nunatsiavut, which is one of the four regions of Inuit Nunavut, also known as Labrador, northern Labrador, the most northernly community in Labrador. And so yeah, I grew up there with them. I had an amazing childhood. Every spring, they would take me to our cabin. And we, I guess, we lived pretty traditionally, like my grandfather, me and my grandfather and my grandmother, we would hunt. And then we would eat the food. And that's really what we lived off of. There was nothing else around us, really. And I lived with them until I was nine years old. And then when I was nine, I was sent to go live with my other side of my family in Toronto, who I actually I had never met them before. It was just completely different. And it was a huge culture shock for me. I remember coming to Ontario, I lived with my aunt in Toronto, but I remember coming to Ontario for the first time and seeing like, we used to call them skyscrapers. So like, just apartment buildings and stuff that I was just so fascinated by. I remember like my first time going on like a huge elevator, my first time going on a huge escalator, like it was it was a culture shock for me. And so yeah, I lived there with my aunt and my grandparents who are Guyanese until I was 18. So like my most formative years, and I grew up actually right outside Toronto in Ajax. And it was really hard for me because I am visibly what I guess everybody in Toronto

would call light-skinned, right? So I just pass as being mixed. But people didn't realize like I had come from a small Inuk community up north and I had cultural needs that needed to be met, but because I was mixed and a lot of people just saw me as like she's Black and white, nobody even really took notice of that or tried to, you know, nurture the culture that I that I had come from. And so I grew up with in Toronto with like a huge identity crisis. Actually, a lot of people thought I was Asian and Black, because Inuit can look kind of Asian. So everybody thought I was Asian, but I'm not. And when people ask me my background, because I get that question all the time, I would just say, you know, I'm Native, I would really dumb it down for people, because that's just what was easiest for me. And as a kid growing up, nobody wants, you know, I was just tired of overexplaining myself, to adults especially, it's exhausting. So, I think after a while, I was just, I also was starting to become ashamed. I remember, I didn't want to call my grandmother, I was just embarrassed, almost I would tell people of my experiences up North and I would get people were just so ignorant, especially you know, how, like, kids are and teenagers are, people are so ignorant, they would make fun of me, I was completely shamed. And so I stopped speaking Inuktitut. And I had, I would just kind of speak like, broken Inuktitut So it wasn't fluent. But I grew up with it so I could understand and I could conversate and like, you know, the very basic ways, but I lost all of that. And then I think when I was 16-17 years old, I was like, I want to get out of Toronto, like I, I don't want to be here anymore, because there's not Inuit here and I missed that. Like I missed that feeling of being around Inuit and feeling you know, accepted. And so I decided I'm gonna go to Ottawa for university. So I went to Carleton. And coming here was much easier than living in Toronto, just because like I said, Ottawa is a huge hub for Inuit, right? So, for instance, right next door, we have the Ottawa Inuit clinic called Akausivik. right up the street, we have a children's center that actually went to when I was really small, called Inuuqatigiit. And so when I would go into the Inuit community, there were a lot of members who were like, "oh, my gosh, Jaelyn, like, I haven't seen you since you were such a small baby." And, you know, it was just like a feeling of belonging that, that I really needed. And so, I stayed here, I graduated, I actually when the pandemic hit, I went back to Toronto for a little bit. And then I ended up getting pregnant. And then I came back to Ottawa, and I stayed here and I had my son. So that's just a little bit. Yeah, a little bit of background of how I ended up here and how I got here. And where I come from.

Sheldomar 12:17

Yeah. Thank you for sharing all that. Yeah, that's a lot there. And I, I really resonate with what you're sharing around, sort of like trying to understand mixed race identity, you know, and I can't say that I fully understand you because your experience sounds unique. But as a mixed race Black man myself, it is a weird thing to try to figure out your place in the world and where you fit and society sees you one way, and you know that you're not necessarily exactly what they, they think you are, try to place you in a box. And I know for me, it was arts and music, specifically, that was able to keep me feeling connected to my Jamaican side, and then food to my Portuguese side. And I know, I was reading an article you wrote for the Inuit art quarterly. And I was sort of struck by how you spoke about rarely seeing yourself represented in an art and how that creates a sort of distance from it. And I think you just spoke to this now. But there was so much power, it seems from you being able to see your identities reflected in an exhibit by the

artist Katherine Takpannie? And it seems really powerful. Can you can you speak to that? And what was what was that experience like for you?

Jaelyn 13:26

Yeah, so um, I was actually in an English class, it was a fourth year English class. And we, as part of it, we had to go to this museum. And I'm gonna be honest, like, I'm not the, or this art gallery. I'm not always the biggest fan of art galleries just because I find them to be sometimes very, like colonial and just completely, I can't relate, I'm completely disconnected from what they have on display. But this one, I was actually really surprised about it. It was, as soon as I walked in, I saw it. So it was curated by Cozy Nebbe. And she, sorry I'm just – I'm not sure if I'm saying that correctly. So just don't quote me on that. And so I remember walking in and kind of walking around and my English professor was like, Jaelyn, are you okay? You're really quiet. And I was like, yeah, I'm just, I'm just observing. And so I was walking around. And one of the art pieces that stood out to me was Katherine's piece because I noticed both of my cultures in one just like one artwork and one display and I have I've never seen that before. It's either I'm either I'm Inuk, or I'm Black and Guyanese. There's no, I've never seen them amalgamated in one piece of art in, in any book, anywhere, really. And so I just kept staring at it. And I was like, this is so interesting. And it came from, I guess, a gathering that had taken place in Ottawa and somebody had bought a bottle of sorrel. And if you're West Indian, you already know, like, yeah, with you know, it's just like Christmas time, like, the first thing that comes to my mind I think of sorrel first of all, is the smell of my grandmother making it. And then just like the festive Christmas time and, you know, feeling so much comfort. And then I also saw that they had country food and colic, which is like an Inuit lamp that you light. And so we had been taken around, through the exhibit and the person who was giving us a tour said does anybody want to comment on this? And usually I'm very quiet in these types of scenarios, everybody was pretty quiet. And I was just like, yo, like, I have to say something like, I've never been in this situation before.

Sheldomar 15:47

It's a must.

Jaelyn 15:48

I basically, it was just like, yeah, like, this is what we're seeing right now. And this is like the significance of it. And this is why food is important. And this is how it brings people together. And then I was really like vocal in a moment, I was really confident. And I think that's the first time I've been able to really, I guess, take up space in that type of way, when it comes to art and when it comes to any form of like an exhibit. And so that was like really powerful. And later on the person who was giving this tour came and talked to me, she was really nice, and, and then we ended up connecting. And then I did some work for them. And then Inuit Art Quarterly, they ended up reaching out to me asking me to write that article. So yeah, it was it was powerful. And I honestly, I think there needs to be more of that. Like, I would love to see Inuit art and like the Inuit women represented in art with like curly hair, you know, and I would like I feel like it's so important. And it's like I said, my article is not just important for me, it's important for the younger generations. They're – I live in Vanier in Ottawa, and there are so many Black and Indigenous

kids running around here. Like I see them all the time. And I always think to my experience when I was younger, I never saw myself, I never saw anybody who looked like me. So for me, it was like how am I supposed to visualize myself in certain spaces when there's no representation of myself? And some people may say, well, your Indigenous side, your Inuk side is represented or your Black side is represented, but it's not the same. It's not the same as seeing me as a whole person because my identities aren't separate, right. So yeah, that was that was really powerful. And Katherine Takpannie, she is an amazing photographer. And I'm really hoping to be able to see more of that.

Sheldomar 17:35

Yeah, absolutely. Art just has that effect on people, right? It really can imagine the future, it can be revolutionary. It represents so much that we don't see. And um, yeah, that that really sits with me, so thank you for sharing that. You know, there's something else you wrote in that piece that reflects a lot of the questions that we're often thinking about at FoodShare. And we've even, you know, reflected it in our land acknowledgement, where you wrote, "what does it mean to understand Indigenous people, and people of African descent, as Indigenous to their own lands, and displaced from it in very different ways? And what are the ways in which we can hold space together?" And personally, that is something that I'm constantly thinking about and it's something I don't have the answer to, and I think it's a really sort of complex thing that may require time for Black and Indigenous communities to come together to see what that looks like. But I'm curious from you, and sort of what you were just speaking to before about where you're living – what are the ways in which we can hold space together? And where do you see folks coming together to build these relations? And before you go ahead with that, I know that you work at Canadian Exchange, CRE, correct, the Canadian Roots Exchange? So maybe you can even touch on some of the work you do there. But um yeah, what does that look like for you in holding space with, with each other?

Jaelyn 18:59

So I think, in order to hold space between, like between Black and Indigenous communities in order for it to happen, I think that we need to really rethink history and rethink how we see the relations between each other. I think there's this understanding that Black and Indigenous people are only just now coming together, or they're only just now having conversations or only just now acknowledging each other. And I think that's so completely false. There's a long history of – a long, long history in Canada of relations between – in North America – between Black and Indigenous people. It for instance, even when I tell people that I'm Inuk and Black, it's like "Really? Wow, that's so amazing." And I'm like, is it though? Like, would you say that to somebody who was Inuk and white or somebody who's Black and white? Probably not. But we didn't like you know, like Indigenous people and Black people didn't just start coming together, start having kids like, there's a there's a history. I was actually looking through some archives recently and I, it was at a residential school and I saw a kid who was clearly like, Afro-Indigenous, at that residential school. I've actually been told stories from Elders about Black people coming up north. And this is like, a long time ago, this isn't anything recent. And so, for instance, the name in Inuktitut for Black person, what lot of people say is "Puatugi". And I asked my anânsiak, like, why do people call me that? And she started laughing. And she's,

she's like Inuit are so funny, that means Portuguese. And I'm like Portuguese? And then we got to talking and she told me that she heard stories of whalers going up north, and bringing Black Portuguese people with them. And that's where that name came from. Or that's what she suspects at least. So there's a lot, just because we're not written down in history, or the relations between us doesn't mean it doesn't exist. There's lots of oral storytelling, I think that because we're so I guess, just used to having to go to like history books and do research in a very, you know, academic way. We don't look to like hear stories, and we don't look for those traditional ways of, of understanding, you know, are like, of histories between Black and Indigenous people. So I think that would be the first step, I think the second step is just really coming together and having conversations. A perfect example is through gatherings with food. Food, I think food is a great foundation for having these conversations. For Inuit and for Black people, like, I just think about how integral food is to both of my cultures. And, and we don't even realize how food holds space, not just as you know, as individual cultures, but together. When I think of memories, when I think of, you know, some of my most fondest memories, food is the first thing that comes up. So I really think just like having conversations, having gatherings, having programs for our youth, having, you know, some of these, some of these conversations are also really hard to have. And so creating safe spaces where we can come together and have these conversations and unpack some of the things that have gone on between, between, you know, our communities because of colonization and, and like what that looks like so...

Sheldomar 22:24

Yeah, no, absolutely, I think those are all super strong recommendations. And I imagine that youth should also be at the centre of that, as you know, as cliché as it sounds like youth are the future. And there's so much I actually, you know, I think over the past few years, we've really seeing youth lead a lot of these movements and momentum for change. And I think that'd be really incredible. But I, I kinda just want to loop back on what you were talking about food. And I would love to kind of explore that a little bit like, what are some of those earlier memories you have with food, either with your grandparents or perhaps even like, in between both of your families? Like what, what are some of those experiences, if you don't mind sharing?

Jaelyn 23:08

That's a great question. So Inuit, we call the English word for our traditional food, we call it country food. So it's country food is just the term that we use to describe Inuit food. So it honestly it plays such an integral role in Inuit life not just by producing like nutrition, but also it acts as like a, almost like a spiritual connection to land and to family. And unfortunately, environmental and social economic changes have kind of threatened food security, and has made it really difficult to harvest and on top of this, I live in the south. So the access to it is even more difficult. But when I think of some of my earliest memories when, as soon as I eat country food it's like nostalgia. Country like country food and our traditional food, it really brings like a sense of nostalgia, like when I take a bite of muktuk, which is whale blubber, or nipku, which is like dried caribou or tuktu huoc which is like frozen caribou. Like I said, it's just straight nostalgia. It's really special because it connects me to a lot of the memories that I have, especially with my atâtsiak who passed away. Like I just think about even the smell of it like it, I just think about when he when we would go out to our cabin and me him and my anânsiak

would go hunting together and then he would you know, harvest the food and we would eat it right there. Like it, it just really, I think it connects you to the land so much because there's no in between. It's just you harvest the food, you eat it. All those, you're connected to the food, you know where it comes from. So therefore you're connected to the land. I feel like we don't, when we go into grocery stores, we don't even think about where our food comes from. We don't even think about how like sacred food is or we don't think about the animal, we don't think about where it's been. We don't think about really even what we're putting into our bodies. And so when I think about food, it just like those, it's just so important. So because of environmental factors now, for example, in my community, they don't get caribou anymore. They don't get tuktu anymore. And so I just also, I'm so thankful that I was privileged enough to grow up with that. My anânsiak actually shared a picture on Facebook, I think last week, and it was a herd of caribou running past her house. And I think, you know, in 2000/1999, that was normal. You don't see like, that's not a thing anymore, that doesn't exist. And so, now our youth, people who are, I don't know, 10-15 years younger than me, haven't even tried caribou, haven't, they haven't even tried tuktu before. So it's like, what does that mean? And how does that look in terms of their disconnection to land and therefore culture? What does that look in terms of their disconnection to like, you know, ancestors and grandparents and, and sharing that? When I also think of eating country food, I think of you know, my atâtsiak harvesting it and cutting it up so that we could share it with other people. There's so much like, that goes into that, like that's sharing and, and being generous is like a huge Inuit value. And so that's also learned through food. Also, I think of sitting down how we eat our country from for the most part from growing up, me growing up, we would put like a cardboard box down. And my anânsiak would sit there with her her ulu which is like a, I guess, traditional Inuit knife. And she would, you know, chop up the meat and me and my siblings would just sit there and wait for like the, wait for the meat and we would talk to each other and laugh. And so it really creates like a, it connects family as well. So like what happens when that goes away? I don't know what I don't know what that looks – actually I do know what that looks like because I moved to the south where I didn't have access to it for like a good five, six years. And even like when the pandemic happened, when I did get access to it, I was like, I want to share it with people. It's just not the same just eating it by yourself, right. But I'm lucky enough and to have an amazing Inuit community here. There's an organization here called Tungasuvvingat Inuit. And every Wednesday, they provide me with country food. And when I was pregnant last year, they also came through for me, which was amazing. But yeah, in terms of like those early, early memories, those are everything to me, like those are, every Wednesday when I get my country food, and I eat it, I think of like my grandfather, I think of my atâtsiak and my anânsiak and just those memories that, you know, are one of a kind. And I think that's like the one way that I'm able to remember them. And sometimes I just, I'll just, like, close my eyes and eat it. And I'll just think about those memories that I have with them.

Sheldomar 28:00

That's – my heart is so full right now. Honestly, as you're sharing it, that was so vivid, like, I can literally imagine your grandmother doing all these things and sharing it with you and your siblings and your family. Yeah, that's so beautiful. Thanks for sharing that. And, you know, it really makes me think more about this disconnection that young people have who, you know, young people who are part of a diaspora or part of communities that they're no longer

connected with. There's this longing for belonging and connection. And I think that's really special that you got the opportunity as a young person, to grow up in your community and be connected to land. And I really want to ask you like, how has that impacted you now as an adult, having those early memories with food and your family, but specifically on lands? And reason I ask this is because I'm curious as to how that kind of plays a role or informs how you'll teach this to your son Khari, who is very young, as I imagine, and what are some of those lessons or takeaways that you want to sort of instill with him, if there's any.

Jaelyn 29:15

Yeah, I think those early memories that I have of hunting with my grandparents and being able to see where my food comes from, and just like the richness of knowing where your food comes from, and the process of being able to like harvest your own food. It really so when we used to hunt, my atâtsiak was very clear, very, very clear: you never take more than what you need. Don't be greedy. Like that, that was always always something that he instilled in me. And so that's something that always that I always think about, like don't be greedy. Also sharing like just like what seem like very small, like basic, I guess principles, but they're they're really not because if you don't have I feel like a foundation for, you know, what does it mean to share and to provide for your community and provide for your family? What does it mean to only take what you need and not to, I guess, over-harvest, and like the gluttony that comes like, I guess you can almost put it back to the gluttony that comes in this world where we're just over-producing, and just, it's just, we need this, we need that, it's just the consumer culture. You know, it's just, it's disgusting. And I didn't grow up with that. And I'm so, so fortunate to have my grandparents who instilled some of those values in me through food. But at the same time, you know, I do live, I did live in Toronto, I do live in Ottawa, like, so I do sometimes participate in consumer culture. But because I had those experiences, they always bring me back to, like ground zero, and they always, it's just, it's humbling. It's extremely humbling. And so now that I have my son, I thought a lot about these things, because, my son is, um, is like, Black presenting, and he's, he's gonna be seen in the world as a Black boy, right? And so I think about that, like, what is that gonna look like for him? But he, he's gonna grow up like with his mom who's Inuk, and also his grandmother, my anânsiak, who's Inuk. And how do I teach him some of these values without being able to give him the experiences of going up north, because it's not cheap, to be able to go up north, one, and two, it's like, hunting and harvesting is also not cheap. I actually, um, this summer, I'm going to sign up for a little, I feel like it's a step. It's like a little plot of land where you can go and like harvest your own vegetables and your own food. And so it looks different. Being himself and doing that. But I still want him to get a sense of, you know, this is this is what it means to like, harvest food, this is how long it takes like, so that he understands the connection to his food. And I also, when I was pregnant with him, I ate a lot of country food. And my anânsiak told me to do that, because if I don't she said he won't like it. And so whenever I'm here and I have country food, I give it to him, I let him try it. So I let him try, like, what would be frozen caribou, huoc is what we call it. And he loves it, he loves it all. And I actually made him a little, because I just got a sewing machine. And I made him like a little felt ulu, and I have a little little piece of seal skin, I just put on his little play area, and I let him play with that. So yeah, living in the south, and also, you know, the complications that are going to come up with his background and how he comes into that as he gets older, I want to make sure at least, you

know, I can provide him with some sense of where I came from, and some sense of where he comes from, in the best way that I can. And I have to be really creative with it, I have to be really inventive, but I really try my best because I mean, I'm not sure what it looks like to provide these values to him without being connected and physically on our land. And without having to or without having the experiences of hunting and the experiences of language and what I grew up with. So this is something I think about on a daily basis, and it's going to be ever evolving and ever changing, I think, really.

Sheldomar 32:37

Yeah, no, that's, that's so real. And I, I'm a firm believer that food is a vehicle for change, like really, and truly it connects us to past, present, future, ancestry, land, like all this stuff. So I I really think Khari is in good hands. And I'm sure he'll he'll grow up with some really, really beautiful values.

Jaelyn 33:57

Thank you.

Sheldomar 33:58

So you know, I, before we jump into these last few questions around food, I kind of just want to back up again and hear more about your work at the Canadian Roots Exchange, and maybe just share a little bit about the programming that happens there because I I believe it's it's centred on Indigenous youth. Is that correct?

Jaelyn 34:15

Correct, yeah. So I started the job in 2019. And I originally started as a training and development manager for the what was called the youth and reconciliation initiative. And so what I did there, and what I was supposed to be doing is I was supposed to be going into our programs and kind of auditing them and creating workshops and whatever needed for the youth and for our employees. But what I actually ended up doing was managing one of the youth reconciliation initiative teams. So I had at the time I think it was five coordinators. Super Amazing people. And what our program did is we provided youth with the tools to be able to put on community workshops or community programs and whatever reconciliation looked like to them. So for instance, if we had a group of five youth from Iqaluit, Nunavut, and they wanted to put on a sewing workshop, because that's what reconciliation looks like to them. For instance, reconciliation looks like teaching Inuit youth how to sew and therefore, how to be connected to our traditional values, our traditional ways. We will provide them with the funding to buy the materials, we will provide them with workshops, and how to create communications, how to create a community event. And so it was really amazing because we actually before the pandemic hit, got to bring all these youth together from all across Canada, and we got to teach them the skills and then they will go back to their communities. And we would watch them from afar put on these events, it was just it was really amazing to be able to watch that. And so what I did is I helped with some of the workshops, I oversaw the coordinator team to make sure that we were giving the youth these tools that they needed, I was creating some internal programming as well for our team. And I was supposed to be, again, the pandemic hit, but we

were going to put on be putting on another cohort, and we were supposed to be going all over Inuit, Nunavut because we really want to focus on Inuit communities, and then the pandemic hit, and it kind of all got shut down. Our program was very much so based on youth meeting and youth being connected with one another. And so we really had to rethink what that look like once once the pandemic hit, for a multitude of reasons. I mean, you know, if you're trying to reach youth up north, chances are the Wi-Fi is not always going to be the best. So the pandemic hit, and then the program actually ended up being dissolved. And I went on maternity leave. So that was like the first little leg in my, in my employment with Canadian Roots Exchange. And then when I came back, which was only a month ago, I've only been back for a month now, I went back when my son was 10 months old. Now I actually work as a manager for the policy school. And so what the policy school does is we have a few programs, and we put on workshops, and we do virtual learning for youth to learn what policy is and how they can transfer their need for change for as individuals and their communities into policy. And like what exactly that what that looks like. And so that's I just started that that job now about a month ago. And one of the things I'm going to be focusing on is doing more Inuit engagement and creating more Inuit workshops, Inuit-specific workshops, because we really tried to stay away from like the pan-Indigenous view that happens. So obviously, not all policy applies to Inuit the same way that it would apply to First Nations communities. And so that's something I'm going to start taking the lead on, as the months go by is really developing that policy school for Inuit youth. And yeah, so that's what I'm doing right now. It's still pretty early, just because you know, I just got back, new role, new position, really trying to transition into that. But I'm hoping that some really amazing things come out of it. And now that things are easing up a little bit with COVID, we're hoping to be able to do more in-person activities, because nothing compares to you know, being in person and seeing each other. Actually, one of the amazing things I got to do, I think it was like a month or two before the pandemic hit, was CRE put on a national gathering in Montreal, and I coordinated having an Inuit room with country food and I shipped in like, three whole caribous. Like, I think it was like 20 pounds of like muktuk and also I brought in char. And so I got to share that I think at the gathering we had close to like 500-600 people. So I got to share that with with a lot of people and share some, I guess some teachings around that and some stories. And that was an amazing experience. And I think that before the pandemic hit, I went out with a bang before we all got shut down.

Sheldomar 39:19

(Laughs) Of course, there's no other way to do it. I, that's amazing. That's, um, yeah, that's awesome. It's always an incredible feeling to be able to share food with people. And back to what we've been talking about this whole time. Like there's so much power in that. And it's yeah, it's incredible. Also, yeah, that's really dope work that you're doing at CRE, I'm happy to hear that. And I hope that that programming and the policy pieces that you're working on develop and become what you imagine them to be.

Jaelyn 39:51

Yeah, thank you.

Sheldomar 39:52

So this last few questions around food, you know, as we see in food security work, there's often very, you know, despite the very different experiences of displacement of Indigenous folks and Black folks, we often find ourselves today in similar circumstances, experiencing the highest rates of poverty and food insecurity across so-called Canada. So I guess my question here to you, and thinking about the youth engagement that you've done in your past and currently and presently, perhaps, like, what else do you think we could do together? And what could it look like? So in your experience and beyond, what innovative models are you seeing folks take to come together around the things that we do share, or ideas that you might have that are maybe so out there, but you don't mind sharing them with me and the rest of the listeners here?

Jaelyn 40:48

I think that one of my dreams actually is to, I'm really thinking abstractly here. But it's something that I've always I've always thought of, I would love to create, like a program for Black and Indigenous youth, like a land-based program, where we could like bring Black and Indigenous youth, for instance, to I don't know, Nunavut or Nunavik and do some hunting together or bring Black and Indigenous youth to whatever Black diaspora homelands that looks like and kind of get some teaching through that. I think that would be so amazing. Super expensive. And (laughs) but...

Sheldomar 41:30

The money's there. The money is there.

Jaelyn 41:30

I've definitely, I've definitely thought about that before. Because I think there's only so much that workshops and online learning can do I think that the best way for us to learn is to be together. And to experience things together, I think that's when you really start to see humans for who they are. And you really start you connect with people and you spend actual time. I don't think that the online learning piece can really do that. And I think that the the workshop piece is valuable in terms of education, but I don't think it has a lot of longevity. And I think that spending time with people, you never forget, you never forget that, right? Like my grandmother always says to me, my Guyanese one, that people don't forget how you made them feel. And so I always think that that would be that would be so amazing. I would love to do that. But again, like just in terms of resources and access and the pandemic, it's really, I think made things hard. Especially for our communities who are so are so used to being together. Yeah, so that's something that I dream of, I'm not sure if it'll ever happen. But I'm definitely you know, trying to take the steps to get there. Like you said earlier, like, I have my own little consultation business where I do some of these workshops. I'm creating some right now for Black and Indigenous solidarity and creating space for these conversations. So I'm hoping that eventually, one day, I can get to a point where I can create some of these, you know, amazing programs and, and give youth access to get back on on their lands and, and to learn with one another.

Sheldomar 43:11

Yeah, no, that's what dreaming's all about, right, is like imagining these things that we don't think

are possible, but somehow, sometime, they could be. And, you know, not to get all deep and spiritual on the spot here. But I am a good believer in like, manifesting things and speaking them out. And I also feel like there is more than enough resources around this world to make these things happen. It's just a matter of change. And, you know, having the right people in the right places and power and all these fun things that we didn't get to talk on. But yeah, dreaming is real. And I appreciate you sharing your dream with us here. And you know, the world is our classroom.

Jaelyn 43:54

Exactly.

Sheldomar 43:55

And like I'm, yeah, I don't think there's it's so there's nothing as valuable as that. And yeah, I'm also so over Zoom. I think Zoom fatigue is real, people are tired of online stuff. So yeah, nothing beats the real deal.

Jaelyn 44:09

Exactly. And I don't think it always has to be so abstract. Like one thing that I think that when we think about change, sometimes we're like, oh, I have these big ideas. But it could really be so simple. Just for instance, like my anânsiak hasn't met my son yet. And so one of the things that I'm hoping to do is to meet my anânsiak, when I go back to our home community and where my atâtsiak grew up, and we want to spread his ashes there and I would love to bring my son back to where I where I came from. I feel like it's you know, like that, gathering in that in that coming together as communities, it doesn't just need to happen on an external level. I feel like within our communities and within our families that can happen as well. And so that's something that I'm like saving up for right now. I'm hoping to be able to go in the spring and I think that that's like huge, it's really bringing like, that's like three generations, right? Three generations back to back to where we came from. I also do really small things too, like, in my, in my son's room, I have this little place where I've taken pictures of my anânsiak, my great, great anânsiak, great anânsiak and I put them up so that he can, he can see where he comes from, and he can see who he belongs to. So just I think little things like that, you know, we don't always have to do the external work with, you know, engaging stakeholders and all that extra stuff. Sometimes we can really just make the change within our own families and reconnect, you know, within our own families. My like my anânsiak, she went to residential school. And so I think that meeting my son and being able to spend time with him is going to be like so healing it. It also, I feel like in a way too like bridges, gaps between Indigenous and Black communities like we're one family like it doesn't get more, I don't think it gets it gets any better than that.

Sheldomar 45:58

Preach. Preach to that. Yeah, I think that is such an important takeaway. And they had something to really sit with is that change doesn't have to be this macro thing as you say. It doesn't need to be this dreadful systems approach as it can be like that. And it's important to do that work, but also the micro things matter too and like those little changes in your life. So wow, thank you so much, Jaelyn for this conversation. I feel like I've learned so much, including that

there's a an Inuit word for Black and Portuguese person that is so funny being Black and Portuguese myself. So I gotta take that into my my daily life and just explore that a little bit more. But I'm also really hopeful about what we can accomplish together. And thank you so much for this conversation.

Jaelyn 46:56

Thank you.

Sheldomar 46:59

That is it for this episode. You can find and reach Jaelyn on Instagram. Jaelyn do want to say your Instagram.

Jaelyn 47:07

Yep, my Instagram is @jaelynekayah, with just one 'n'. So that's J-A-E-L-Y-N-E-K-A-Y-A-H.

Sheldomar 47:15

Excellent. And you can also find her at the Canadian Roots Exchange at canadianroots.ca. Dignity and Joy is a podcast from FoodShare Toronto, we are a food justice organization, advocating for the right to food and working to challenge the systemic barriers that keep people from accessing the food that they need to thrive. You can learn more about FoodShare and the work that we do at foodshare.net. And if you have feedback on the pod, we'd love to hear from you. You can send us an email at info@foodshare.net or on our social media. We're @FoodShareTO on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and on Instagram. Dignity and Joy is produced in collaboration with Lead Podcasting with sound engineering and editing by Michael Allen. The production team at FoodShare is Renee D'Souza, Moe Pramanick and Andrea Thompson. Special thanks to Amanda Cupido, Ashley Marshall, Shar-Dey Phipps-Walker, Shenice Steel. Thank you so much for listening.