

O'SRO (What They've Been Taught)

Brit Hensel and Keli Gonzales (Cherokee Nation)

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TRANSCRIPT

Thomas Belt

When I was young, I would hear it occasionally the elders of our tribe saying, "Gesdi vskivdvneho udohiyu ayvwiya yigi," which translates to, "Real human beings don't do that." They were talking about one's responsibility and how you fit into that, because essentially, there are going to be consequences for everything.

When I was about 11 years old, I was sent by my mom actually to get a certain kind of a plant. "And get this plant, you'll see it, it looks like this and grows here, and grows here." She said, "Dig that up from the root, we have to fix some medicine for your cousin." So I went and got it, did as I was told. And when I came back and gave it to her, I was sitting around, I felt pretty proud of myself, and my father came and he said to me, "Did you leave something there? It may be tobacco, it may be anything, but left something there? Did you pray even?"

He said, "They used to say a long time ago that anytime that you go for help, make sure that person or that thing understands that you are grateful for it. That way, they will always help you, but you have to acknowledge that this is not something here just for your benefit, that it's part of something else."

Elwood Gloyne

After this, will we go?

John Henry Gloyne

Mmhmm.

Elwood Gloyne

Thanks.

Waloshi Gloyne

Dig!

Thomas Belt

We didn't create that cane. We didn't create that buckbrush or honeysuckle or whatever, we didn't create that. It was already made.

John Henry Gloyne

What do you think's under there?

Elwood Gloyne

Nothing.

Waloshi Gloyne

There's gonna be a worm.

John Henry Gloyne

A worm?

Elwood Gloyne

And a snake worm. Look he's digging!

Thomas Belt

We have no word for art in our language. We have no word for it. So, 'nvneha', you are making it into, or making it into a thing. Not making a thing but making it into that. It's just little things like that in the language that make you understand that the way that we look at the world is different.

John Henry Gloyne

Hey! Quit eating my eyes! Here you hold it, thank you.

Thomas Belt

Or in that word then, it also carries with it something else doesn't it? It also carries with it and establishes that you are not the creator of that. You can't just make things. It was always here. It puts you in your place.

This world doesn't belong to us. Everything was here before we were. Even in our stories, we say that. An elder here told me, "We know that we were the last ones here because we don't even have names. All the names had run out." And if we were to give ownership to anything, it would be to those things that have lived here before us.

How we came to understandings about how we live in this environment is tied to the ground, isn't it? And our place with it. We're here as guests, and we're here to be as careful and as responsible as we can be. To be alive, to be able to live here, to be able to walk in these mountains, to be able to live by these streams, to be able to use these things is a gift. Every ceremony that happens is to remind people to be thankful for what we have. We have to be reminded every cycle of the moon of who we are and what our purpose here is, and to remember to give thanks that we get a chance to be here. And I believe the whole foundation of us as Cherokee people comes from that understanding of that is how you live.

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My deepest gratitude goes to Thomas Belt, for your guidance, generosity, and wisdom. This film would not have been possible without you.

Thank you for loving our language and our people. Through your stories I am reminded who and where I come from.

Gvyalielitsisi.

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