X̲’unei:

This episode contains detailed descriptions of a boarding school experience, including abusive treatment and sexual abuse of a minor by a healthcare professional. Personal trauma of this nature regularly occurred during the boarding school or residential school era, which began in 1869 and ran until the 1960s. This era included forced separation of children from their families, prohibitions of indigenous languages and cultures, and a variety of horrendous tortures, abuses, neglects, and the deaths of thousands upon thousands of children on the Ton Unbroken. We give love to those who survived and we honor those who did not. And we encourage widespread healing from this genocidal era. If you would like to learn more, engage in the materials from the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition. If you do not know about this era, then please listen to this episode. Educate yourself further, and then ask how you can help. If you are a survivor or the diss descendant of a survivor. Practice self-care and reach out when you need help and help others when they reach out. Tell your story and join programs like The Healing Voices movement, we go forward with love and the strength of our ancestors. We brush off the attempts to destroy us and re rise up with the voices of many languages in related movements of reclamation.

X̲’unei:

You are the medicine. Welcome to the Tongue Unbroken. We are here in Anchorage, Alaska in a little conference room that this hotel was so wonderful to let us use. And I am here with the esteemed, brilliant and wonderful Dr. Walkie. Charles, it's so exciting to be able to talk to you here today and to just share some time and space. Could you introduce yourself and talk about what you do?

Walkie:

Institute Boarding, university of Alaska Fairbanks, university of Alaska, Fairbanks, Alaska Native Language Center. Rami, well, first of all, I just wanna say thank you, JNE, for inviting me to speak with you about who I am and what my contributions have become. I am <inaudible> named after the person who assisted Father Lenu in creating this writing system for the Yik people and the Yik culture. When somebody dies and a baby is born, the baby is provided. The spirit of the person who had just died was a person who owe Yik, who assisted Father Len, a French Jesuit priest in writing. Andrey the first writing system of the Yik Catholic Yic people of the Yukon Delta. And the old folks who know this know that. They say, oh, you're still continuing your work. And then age 12, and I'll talk about this some more, as I said, um, <inaudible> earlier at age 12, I was taken away to boarding school. But I'll talk about that in just a little bit. I am a professor at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. I'm the director of the Alaska Native Language Center. I've lived in Fairbanks for the last 43 years and I'm really excited. Oh, every year is a really exciting year because my program, the UP Program graduates people with degrees, a bachelor's degree in Upic. And I have four graduating this year.

X̲’unei:

Ka. And for those who might not know, Yik is a language on Western Alaska. And this is my father's people. So on my father's side, I am Yik and Sammi. My APA was Tim Twitchell and his father was a <inaudible> who came and ran a store and collected a lot of masks and did a lot of pretty amazing things. His name is Adam Hollis Twitchell. And on my mother's side I'm, and I am Haida. And also on my father's side, I'm Sami. So Walk. And I have a lot of connections through the work that we do, which is in language reclamation, movement building, and teaching. And so I wanna start with really the positive stuff and just really think about the work that you've done. There's a lot of times in my day-to-Day life where I've had conversations with you and then I have taken things back and become a better teacher

because I talk to you about how to teach people indigenous languages. So when you have someone, let's say day one, class one, and they say, Dr. Walkie, I wanna learn <inaudible>, how do you get them started?

Walkie:

Well, first of all, I'd say <inaudible>. And I will honor you by using your name when I call attendance, because that is your given name, I will learn how to spell it. I will learn how to say it because in my classroom your name, I honor and they know me as <inaudible> and everybody else who comes in with their IC names. And if they had been misspelled in previous years by other their teachers, we write them properly in the class. There are people who come in who are non ic and they want a IC name. I say, write it in your journal and give it to me. And I will call my family in two days. I will provide them their names. Well de depending on we know what it takes or how long it takes for me to connect with my family. And there's a story that I'd like to share because it's really, really powerful.

Walkie:

There was a Caucasian girl who was in my class who has since then received a PhD and is director or curator of the museum in Juneau <laugh>. So when she was going to school, getting her PhD, she wanted to take Upic because that was going to connect her with her study or her PhD. And so I asked her, what year and what month were you born? 'cause it doesn't matter what day, but she wrote, I was born, I was born July 11th, 1973. That was the day that my brother's body was found floating in the river. And immediately I gave her my brother's name. Wow. Today she is my brother and she has my brother's Yik name. Mm. And so that's how powerful naming is in my, in my culture, I don't look at her as Dr. Curator, she's my brother, <inaudible>. And you pick, people do not do gender.

Walkie:

So you have like ku, the person I'm named after was a woman. But in you pick even the Yik words, Yik sentences like could mean she was eating or he was eating or it was eating. And that's what's so beautiful about Yik is that, you know, set everything aside and just be I. And so once I learn the student's Yupik names, that's, those are the names I call them by every day. And it's such a celebration every day to allow my students to hear their name. And I'd say <inaudible>. And he'll say <inaudible> because he'll have to respond. Yeah, he's clinked. But then if he's gonna respond, he's gonna respond in in Yik Juan. And then the other thing that I say is, welcome to Tun 1 0 1, an emotionally charged class. Some of us come to this room knowing the language already some of us are Yupik, but we've not provided the opportunity to learn our language because of the history of our parents or our grandparents.

Walkie:

And there's those of you who are confused because, or scared because you've never heard Yik before. So there's lots of emotions that flow through here. And if we could see them in real life, I wonder how many colors there would be just floating in this room of oddly emotions that are happening. So I honor those emotions and know the fact that this room, this space here is the safest place for you to learn your heritage language that you weren't provided. Or if you are provided the language, this is the place where you're going to strengthen your ability to use the language in ways it's proper. Because I honor the language I was provided, the skills to learn so that I could share with you the most proper way of learning and delivering the language to those who need it. And so it's gonna be a lot of work, but know the fact that even if you make a mistake in this room, I'm going to say <inaudible>.

Walkie:

And as is, I think our Jewish brothers and sisters would say, mazel. So you're going to hear <inaudible>. When you misspell a word, you're going to hear asah. When you mispronounce a word, because we're going to, we're gonna fix it together. We're going to, these are this, this room. And these times are opportunities to learn together. Because you're not here alone. You come with an empty slate. And that slate sometimes gets messy because we don't know. And so know the fact that whether you know the language or you not know, for those who know the language, for those of you who know the language, please recognize that these people who don't know are the ones who are struggling, but had the passion to learn something that which they wouldn't otherwise. And so welcome to Tun 1 0 1, and let's learn about how do you use baby words. And this is semester one, and it's only 15 weeks, but we have lots to learn and we'll take the time to do this. I'm not gonna go any faster than I breathe. And uh, you're going to hear me say, we'll get there when we get there. You didn't get it today. We'll get there when we get there. You will feel it when you get there. I don't care how long it takes, but you'll get there when you get there.

X̲'unei:

I can really relate to that. I think a classroom is an incredibly sacred space. It's a safe space. It's a place to, there's a lot of people who sometimes have trauma affiliated with coming to the language. It could be coming back to it, it could be coming for the first time. And you don't know that student. You might not know their backstory and what's happening and all the things going through their mind. I love what you were sharing about names and connections because the language connects us and it keeps us moving. And it helps to expand our mind into this universe where we know our ancestors and our ancestors were waiting for us to come to them. And I think about this, I had a student who said, you know, this is my third semester. And I, I really thought about this in my second semester.

X̲'unei:

'cause we took our winter break and we came back and we come in and everybody's hugging each other and they're saying hi. And no disrespect to chemistry, but that wasn't happening in my chemistry class. There was an identity that's formed in this place where you're talking about an indigenous language that just keeps going. And yin is one of the strongest languages in Alaska. Our ancestors on that side, were really able to endure so much and hold on. And one of the things I always think about is when a student really becomes, they get really close to becoming a speaker. And I think there's a little bit of fear and hesitation sometimes to really let go of English and just go and stop translating and just go for it. And so I really like how you're encouraging folks to just be comfortable, to be okay and to let them know that we have time. And it's okay if it takes a while to grasp a concept, to remember a word, to remember a name, to remember a story. Because these pieces come in such a, an interesting way. And so as students are getting really close to, just full on becoming speakers, they kind of hesitate sometimes when they're just getting ready to just start really talking. 'cause maybe they doubt themselves. Like I, I've seen a lot of students is that I'm not gonna say it right. And then they do.

Walkie:

Here's I think where I celebrate what I do. Not only do I attempt to make a safe environment for my students to learn, but there's so much repetition, repetition, repetition, repetition. And I'll have them say it really, really, really quietly. And I'd have them say it really loudly. I'd have them repeat I'd had, and how would your grandmother say it? And then they would do the grandmother voice, or how about your <inaudible>? When he's mad, how would he say it? Um, kinds of things. Or what do shy little girl

say? And so use any voice. And we practice and we practice because it's not book. Yeah, it's out of a book that we're learning <inaudible>. But I wanna make it ours and use any kind of, and how would you say it when you're excited <inaudible>. And so use whatever your soul wants to expel, because again, this is our language.

Walkie:

It's not like computer science. Computer science is a systems language. This is our language. And we hold onto those unconsciously agreed upon set of sociolinguistic and cultural rules that nobody's ever gonna take away from us because they've always been here. It's about time that we have this opportunity to bring all that out. And so whatever it takes and to let go or to fly out of that nest. Yes. You know, when you're ready. And we, I keep saying that every day. We'll get there when we get there and look at that, look at that. And so we have maybe a non saying that for the first time and say, oh wow. Let's stop, drop what you're doing. And I would like you guys to just start clapping because I just heard a from so and so. And speaking of which, I had this kid, six foot three I think, or six foot, six blonde hair, blue eyes.

Walkie:

And I saw him at a one year celebration of life at one of my niece's daughter's celebration, had died in a car crash. And so this kid was there who happened to be friends with my niece. And this was first year ype, first semester. And so his name is <inaudible>. And he had come before I did. And he was out there sitting against the wall with a, with a plate of food. And so I saw him against the wall with a plate of food. I said, oh no, I didn't say anything. I just said, <inaudible>. And he, he waved and said hi to me. And then a few moments later I heard him going louder. I mean like really loud. And when my students do something or produce a sound, I immediately say, <inaudible>, way to go. Way to go. <inaudible>, you're practicing. You pick. He goes, no, there's a bone stuck in my throat. And that's funny because with that sound, I say, look, what? How do you take the bone out outta your throat? Yes. And he didn't even think that. It just happened naturally. And I mistook it for practicing. Yup.

X̲'unei:

Give us cheese. Uh, and one of the conversations that I have on here with different language teachers is this balancing act that we sometimes do between speaking and listening and being in the language and just not overthinking how it works. And then this other moment where we're sort of talking about the structure of the language and how to change this thing and that thing. Because our verbs can get really long. And last night I was saying in class, don't think about it like your English brain would want you to. You have to just look at the patterns in this language and say, it's different. It's different. It's gonna be okay. Because sometimes I think their English brain expects it to be a certain way, and when it isn't, they get a little frustrated or a little disoriented. So how do you navigate that back and forth between just speaking and listening and then internalizing how the language really works?

Walkie:

It's a very tough topic, but as language teachers, we know this, but how do I tackle this? There's silently, I know every student is saying, yeah, but yeah. But in English, the thing is, okay, let's breathe in, breathe out, breathe in, breathe out. Just realize the fact that we're in the <inaudible> environment, and this is going to be as your big as possible. We know what soon as we leave this space, you know, it's, it's all English. The whole university is English here. Let's try to find ways to breathe in what we assume Yupik is. And that Yupik is something that's, it becomes when you breathe in, breathe out. This is a different

kind of breathing because this is home. This is nothing like anything else because we're here because we want to learn what wants to come out from your soul. Whatever we learned becomes a but. And so if we could practice our soul to remove ourselves from that, but because as students in other classes when we don't know, we like to say, yeah, but so let's not become yeah, butters in this classroom. But every time you think you're going to say, but stop, drop what you're doing and listen with your heart.

X̲'unei:

Yeah. And we're gonna stop for a quick minute here to take a little break. We're here with walkie Charles, the incredible director of the Alaska Native Language Center, a council member on the Alaska Native Language Preservation and Advisory Council, a holder of a doctorate degree, a producer of books on teaching Yupik and understanding the Yupik language, an incredible human being. And just a wonderful kind person <inaudible> for listening. And we'll be right back. Geez,

Speaker 4:

One or two or three times you tried and did not rise. You run around without your head. You struggle yesterday. You struggle still today, now. But you'll find a bri away. My brother sisters, don't you know about the way to bring it back for those who come believe in yourself. Now in

X̲'unei:

We are back. One of the things that we talk about now, and then it's a really dark era in the history of the United States, which extends into Alaska, and which those of us who teach indigenous languages, we often want folks to know this is not ancient history. This is a history that started at one point and extended to a certain other point. We have ancestors who have gone on, who have experienced what we call the boarding school era. And in Canada it's called the residential school era. And we have people who are alive today who are survivors of that era. It cannot be overstated how awful it was, although some people didn't have as terrible of, of an experience as others. When some people talk about the boarding school era being some form of enlightenment or bringing people to some sort of state of improvement, those are false pieces of information that omi the tremendous amount of suffering that people went through when they were removed from their homes.

X̲'unei:

So one of the things that I have talked to you about KU is your experiences that you went through in our homelands. So I am chenge, I teach chenge. I'm also, you pick and you went to a school called the Wrangle Institute. Wrangle is in Sge country. It's a place, uh, is the name of that area. But when people in my culture, Inge culture, when people suffer on your lands, you really, you owe them something. And so one of the things I was thinking about this week is how I consider you Na Yeti, NAI would be a child of the Linge peoples, a child of the clans. Because if you were a guest in our lands, there would never have been mistreatment of you. I know firsthand from some of the things you've shared, the ways that you have suffered on our territory. And for that, I say, please forgive us that this happened.

X̲'unei:

We don't want you to look upon thing at peoples and think about this negativity. We don't want you to come into our homeland and think about pain. We want you to think about love, the ways that we love you and hold you up. I look at you, I consider you a hun, an older brother. And so I'm thankful that you would share portions of your story here, whatever you feel comfortable with about what you experienced. And I just want you to know you are a shining example of strength and fortitude and

courage to emerge from these experiences and become a speaker and a teacher and a leader of language reclamation movements.

Walkie:

Ana, for your introduction, I'm honored. I'm, I'm humbled by your introduction and me having to share my experience, my wrangle experience. Your words have your kind words. Your loving words have led me to want to share this, knowing the fact that I'm in a safe space. And I appreciate the fact that you consider me your brother. And that I appreciate. Yes, I was 12 years old when I was taken away to boarding school. My mother never learned English. She never went to school. And it wasn't until I was an adult in my thirties, maybe when she said, when you left for a wr many years ago, when I hear a drone of an airplane coming towards our village, that was, that would come once a week. I would hope that you were in that plane coming back to return home. But you never did. I don't know where wrangle is, and I didn't know if you were ever gonna come home.

Walkie:

I was stripped down bare. And my clothes, what little clothes I had then were marked with a number 12, my toothbrush, my watch, anything that they could use with a magic marker, they used to put number 12. And my watch, I remember this, this metal thing that created a buzzing sound and they put a 12 on it. And I, I later learned it was an engraver. And so from there on, my name was 12. And the other name that I learned was, Hey, to this day, when I hear people, when I hear people addressing me with that word, I get scared. 'cause that's the only, that's the only name that they would call when they wanted to correct us. And it seemed like everything that we did needed correcting. And I remember that first Saturday, we were provided white shirts to wear for church the following day.

Walkie:

And we were to iron our shirts down in the basement. I've never touched an iron before. And I tried. I I didn't know you had to plug it in. And I pushed this thing onto my shirt. And then when I thought I was, I pushed the whole shirt all the way around. I brought it back up and it wasn't good enough. So I cried my way down to the basement, three flights down and did it again. And after I, I pushed that thing all over the shirt, I tried back up again and I learned the word wrinkled, still wrinkled. So went down the third time I saw a student had been there before and he had to plug it in. And he showed me how to put it in this number here and do it slowly, I'll show you. And on the third time, I didn't have to go back to the basement.

Walkie:

And as an adult, when I bought my house and I got a washer and dryer and I put my clothes in the dryer and they came out wrinkled. This was, I was an adult. I owned a house, my very first washer and dryer, and my clothes came out wrinkled. I cried. I mean, it's funny how these things, these memories pop up. But I had to learn to forgive my dryer 'cause it was my dryer's fault. I had to learn how to use the dryer. And there was times when, or there was, yeah, several times. And I didn't know. We had a physician who was, I think from Sitka, Mount Edgecomb Hospital who would come periodically to do physical exams. And this is gonna be graphic, but I wanna share it with you because my heart isn't in a safe place to share with you.

Walkie:

And so he'd lay me in examining naked, examining table and start fond fondling my penis. And until I was erect. And then I thought that was part of the examination. And then there would be, I think two other times that he came. And the same thing happened. And then the third time when that happened, I was getting scared because something about what he was doing wasn't right. I, I don't know, it didn't feel right because his demeanor changed. Like I sensed some kind of weird excitement. I didn't know I hadn't, I didn't have the term for it. And that's when he said, oh, you don't want to play. And that's when I knew something was wrong. But at the, at the same time, I couldn't say anything. So I never told anybody.

X̲'unei:

And I think people need to keep in mind the isolation of a child when you remove them from their home and we're talking thousands of miles, we're talking about a completely different landscape. If you go from parts of Western Alaska, the landscape is so different. The area is so different to take a child out and you have no parents, no relatives, no guardians, you can turn to for trust and respect and to just say, is this okay? Is that okay? And then to be dehumanized by those who are supposed to be your teachers and caring for you, who refer to you by a, a number or just hey. And then to have this person who's supposed to be a caretaker for people and help people with health, I just wanna make sure that we're keeping in mind just how disorienting and destructive this environment was. And that this didn't happen at every boarding school, but the chances of it happening were high. And the odds of people setting up situations for people to do direct harm for children was not coincidental.

Walkie:

And there were times when I learned that speaking my heart language was, I, I didn't have the term for it, but we were shunned. And it was like, and that's when I would hear, hey, to where I heard kids my age from the IC region, who would walk away from the dormitories out toward the water and speak the language. I could understand them, but it seemed like it was too dirty for me to reproduce that language that I knew because it felt dirty to where I came to a point where I would <inaudible>, I would vomit when I heard kids speak my language. And then I would hear kids say, and I ignored what they said. They said, it seems that he could speak the language, but why doesn't he? I was too scared. And I guess in those kinds of situations, we learned to fake our way through because I wanted to be liked. And maybe if I pretended not to and to speak my language, maybe I will be liked more. And so I really worked hard to learn English to where we learn things like nationalism. Nationalism is a frame of mind in which an individual fields that is first loyalty is out to his nation. And nothing about my language, nothing about my culture, but I had to learn the language of the academy. I still don't know what that means today.

X̲'unei:

I admire you so much for not only surviving and carrying these things, but I think by sharing your story, it allows others to connect to their own suffering. And, and maybe it wasn't them, maybe it was an auntie, maybe it was an uncle, maybe it was a parent, maybe it was a grandparent. But you might wonder why did they suffer. My father, the last time he came to visit me, I drove him to the ferry terminal so he could go and visit my brother. And he said to me, it was early, early in the morning, we're taking this drive. And it's a little awkward because I know he's leaving. We had some pretty rough times growing up with him and with alcohol and with violence. And he said to me, you know, I never really said I loved you when you were young, but I always did.

X̲'unei:

I just didn't know that I was supposed to say it because when I was growing up, they didn't say it to me. When we were in Kotna, I was so happy. I was so happy there. But when my mom got sick and we had to move to Anchorage, they couldn't afford to keep all of us kids. So the older kids went into a boarding school. And in this school they horribly abused my sister and my brother. And I tried to stop them in a Catholic school, the nuns and the priests. And they beat me every time I tried to stand up to them. And I stood up to them every day and I got beaten every day. And I was never the same since. And he died weeks after that. That's the last conversation I ever had with him. So when we have these conversations, we're connecting to a pain that often indigenous peoples have to, we feel like we're alone with these, which you're never alone.

X̲’unei:

You reach out and you connect to others who are doing the work, who are recovering, who are helping others. And in these conversations we're having, we're really thinking about how did we emerge from this? And how are we continuing to emerge from this so that others don't have to carry that pain? Because my father, even though his life involved carrying so much pain and suffering, I think he helped break a cycle by telling me what happened. It took his whole life to tell me what happened. And it took his whole Coe, I think maybe connecting with his grandkids and seeing and becoming an APA himself to see that he had a chance to share this and to say, I'll take it with me when I go. I wanna thank you for sharing and thinking about how you emerged from that. And so what was it like when you came home?

Walkie:

Ana <inaudible>, I don't take it lightly. What you, what you share with me. Because the emotions are exactly the same with your father's experience. You know, we forget how to love. We are ashamed to love because we weren't provided that. Fortunately I had that at my own home with my parents when I went back. I'm the youngest of the boys. I never went back to school. My mom would never see me leave again. And so I was in wrangle for my eighth grade year, a young eighth grade year. 'cause I was kind of swept into that age group because my dad was a cook in the school. And the principal said, what's your little boy doing here? Tagging along. He should be in school. And so that's how I got in. Everybody was at 7, 8, 9 years old. I was five when I went home. My mom said, you'll never leave again.

Walkie:

And she said, I am, I am. You'll never leave home again. And so I went and stayed the year and I did correspondence studies, the hardest thing I've ever done. And I didn't like it because I had no schedule. I was the youngest boy and I could split wood and I could hunt rabbits, I could go haul some ice. I did what young boys would do. That was my job. And so in a sense, um, my schooling, I mean the being home kind of spared me from having to sit down and do all that stuff. But the thing is, what if I want to go back to school? And it seemed that my brother, my older brother was doing okay in Mound Edgecomb. And so he helped me to apply to go to Mount Edgecomb. And I think by then I felt okay enough to try leaving home again after being there a whole year, whole school year.

Walkie:

And so I went to Mount Edgecomb and I didn't know this, but I thought because they were gonna put me in as a freshman, I was a sophomore. So I went to three years of high school and it was a different kind of experience. It's like I, my name wasn't, hey, I had a number, but it was a softer number because they didn't call me by that number. And people could speak their language. And I got into honor roll. And when I got my driver's license, I also got my government driver's license because I drove the school

bus for the honor dorms. I was a student body president. I was a student store manager for. And so my boss would call me in my last hour, last class, when there's a basketball game walking, you need to come to the store and pick up the truck from GSA because they're waiting for you.

Walkie:

The key, it was like freedom I've never had in a school where people supported and respected me and provided me a job. And so, yes, it was far away from home, it was all in English. But somehow I was able to reframe that ugly, nasty experience that I had in wrangle saying that knowing the fact that I will never go back there again and come to the space where I felt recognized for who I am as a human being. Because I really strongly believe, and you do too, because you teach. If you acknowledge the brilliance in your students, they'll do whatever it takes to show you that they are brilliant. And I had teachers in Mon Edgecomb, including Mr. Truitt, Gil Throught, who saw in me something, but that I couldn't, yes, I was still licking wounds. I was still the youngest in, in my age group with my classmates. But I felt safe and I wanted to learn. There was a family in Sitka who took me under their wings and I spent weekends, Christmases Thanksgivings with them. And I just, I just learned last week that Georgia scans the woman who took me under her wings had just recently died. Died. And she was from the scan DVI family from Sitka. And so yeah, I don't know what that family saw in me, but I had a home.

X̲’unei:

Wow. When we need it most. I think sometimes people show up to help, some people see it and some people are just meant to be in that pathway that you were walking along. We are gonna take our second break here. We've talked about some serious difficult things. So please practice self-care. Please know there are support networks that are available. Be a supportive person to someone you know who might be suffering. Be a shining light, who comes out of the direct oppression of the boarding school era. Be a speaker, a teacher, a learner, be a guidepost for those. Be a walking stick for those who might be out there just looking for help, looking for a moment, looking to recenter themselves, believe in yourself and be part of movements that are reconnecting people to the land, to the languages, to health, to ancestors, and to future generations. We'll be right back folks.

X̲’unei:

And we're back. The name of this podcast is The Tongue Unbroken. The reason for that is because despite some incredible inhumane and terrible efforts to completely eliminate indigenous languages and indigenous peoples, we're right here. We're talking, we're teaching, we're learning, and we're trying to live a little bit healthier with love of each other, love of ourselves, which means sometimes looking at some parts that might need a little bit of adjustment and you might sort of say, oh, I've been carrying around this trauma for a long time. And you might not need to. An overcoming historical and individual trauma is not an easy route, but it's something that can be done. And I think is a wonderful example of how that could happen. 'cause going from that experience to having a PhD to being the first Alaska native who runs the Alaska Native Language Center to be a teacher of teachers of Yun, you probably have folks out there who are teaching now who you have taught them. And so as we talk about the emergence coming out of a place of pain and suffering, how do we encourage others to do the same? Well,

Walkie:

Thank you <inaudible> for this conversation. Uh, well first of all, I just wanna thank you for allowing me to continue my language and I applaud you for finding a space to continue sharing your language. Oh

yeah. And so how do we do that? Well, when it snows outside, and there's a lot of it in Alaska, even in Juneau lately, before you go inside to the warmth in the lu environment of your home, you don't want that snow to melt. And so what you do is you brush it off and you brush it off. Make sure you brush everything off everything. Take your mic, take all the might. You have to brush that off to enter that space of love and warmth. That is your home, that is your family and that's what you do. Sometimes we have to, those of us who've gone through experiences that we wish not upon anybody else, child abuse, sexual abuse as minors boarding, school trauma and all this, the thing is more resilient people. I am a resilient person. And what made me resilient is the fact that my father would say, whenever someone does anything to you never retaliate. And what you do is you just brush off like snow, all that because it's on the surface. Don't let it melt into your soul. Brush it off. And use your resilience to continue doing what you do best because you have a lot to share.

X̲’unei:

<inaudible>, my mother's father, his father used to tell him, however angry you get, that should tell you how long you should wait until you do something. 'cause he said, or else, you're not going to be acting from your own consciousness, your own mind, your own spirit. But you'll be reacting to what someone else does. And this is how sometimes things can go where someone tries to pull you down into this big battle or to pull you down into this thing that they want to be kind of mired into. I really love this idea of being your own self and being non-reactive. And it doesn't mean you just let anybody do anything, but it means you control that ego. Part of you that I think is, is not really, if we go into our languages and we go into our ways of living, we see a lot of kindness and respect and love and listening and patience and time. And so even though there's been this ugliness that's either from something long ago or something right now, that doesn't mean that has to be the gasoline that burns your fire.

Walkie:

So one of the things that, um, again, brushing that stuff because it can come off. Yeah.

X̲’unei:

Well

Walkie:

Yeah. And so my wrangle institute experience, I can brush it off even though, you know, there's times when I'll hear music or I'll smell food or maybe a starch from something that would just freshly ironed would remind me of that space where that space where I felt uncomfortable, scared or beaten my, you know, my soul. Not physically, fortunately what they did, the phy physician did. But I didn't know that. But the thing is, my father would say that feeling that you have, don't hold onto it. Acknowledge it. Yes. But don't hold onto it because it's going. If you don't let go, it's gonna become you.

X̲’unei:

Yeah. Well and if you don't like, if you move past it, right? And that means it's not like you're ignoring that this thing happened, but you are dealing with it and releasing it and saying, that's not mine and it's not my obligation to carry around all this harm. And I think that's how you avoid harming others. And then your energy then sort of focuses on doing things and creating things and being a shift. 'cause a lot of our work on a day-to-day basis is shifting the way that things are right now so that our languages exist more. Restoring indigenous place names, teaching people the language, making knowledge of indigenous languages, an expectation in education to the point that maybe it's a requirement. Talking to

people, learning, continuing to think in our language, raising children in our language who are then not as proximal to some of that colonial trauma and pain.

X̲’unei:

They can just speak a word without thinking of someone trying to stop them. They can just engage with each other and play and have fun in the language without worrying about being in trouble for doing so. So as we go forward and we sort of create this era of growth and opportunity for language learning and language use, it's really exciting to see because it takes energy and focus to say, okay, we need some teaching materials for our language. I can write that. Okay, we need some new techniques to get people talking to each other. I can help facilitate that. And so to move to this place of being a productive, positive person who's constantly in these realms of language use, then I think people look at you and we were talking about this a little while ago. When you get together with people who are doing a similar thing in a similar way, that might be a completely different language, but you get energy from each other to keep going.

Walkie:

And, um, thank you. And golly, this is a really, really nice conversation. Not nice, it's a powerful conversation. But you know, it seems, and I've learned this, that when you're in a safe space, you let go of your vulnerabilities and let the real EU come out. And I'm honored to be able to do this with <inaudible> for all that you do. And for especially this because I think people do need to hear all this. Yeah. How do we reframe trauma? My dad would say, if you're gonna be upset, be upset for five minutes. Just give yourself five minutes. Because anger is not you, or hunger is not you, especially with feelings. If you feel negative feelings, time yourself five minutes because your soul is too busy to be in that space because people don't wanna recognize you as the angry one. No, it was just angry for five minutes and he's right now doing beautiful work and then reframing my position or my, how did I pull out of that?

Walkie:

Because my father said, let go of what happened and hold on to the best of tho that experience and know the fact that you're always going to be Yupik and you never let go of that. Never let go. Always acknowledge where you came from. That experience is not where you came from. You are yupik. That's what you focus on, that which you experienced let go because you have more to give. And so 44 years ago, I entered the University of Alaska Fairbanks, and I saw on the schedule ESK 1 0 1 elementary Upic. I thought, what? No, I was told not to speak my language a few years ago and there's a class where I could take and I could credit for it. This is crazy. And so I sat in and it was a Caucasian teaching my language. And the more he spoke and he talked about the liberalized front feeler voice is fricative and won a single frick of is beside a stop.

Walkie:

Cons, it automatically becomes voiceless. And there's all these nasals and fricatives and stop consonant and ative modalities and terminology and ab all this stuff is like, dude, slow down because I wanna know what you're saying because I wanna take over, I wanna know what you're saying. I wanna say what you're saying because this was a language that was almost taken away from me. And you're, I'm, I'm able to celebrate it now. You better make some room for me, buddy, because I wanna take over. I've been teaching you for the last 25 years at the University of Alaska Fairbanks and graduating students with UIC degrees. The language that could, could have been taken away and lost from me. My father

made sure that I reframed in ways by which I could find a passion and make it mine to that so that I could share. One of the shaming things that I make created of myself is that angu means man, but angu also means provider.

Walkie:

My dad, in his dying days, I said, dad, I'm really embarrassed for, um, even recognizing myself as angu means provider. 'cause I'm not providing, I'm not home, you know, I'm not hunting, I'm not gathering, I'm not fishing. And then he said, you are providing our language. And then I said, but dad, I need to be home taking care of you because inevitable is going to happen. You know, we're gonna lose you. And the people in the community are gonna say, you know, negative things about me being away from home. And my father said, so long as people have tongues, it is through that, that they will continue to speak. And he ra raised his frail finger and says, but I've okayed you to go to school because I didn't have that opportunity. How do we share reframing of having to leave home to these young kids from the rural Alaska who struggled to find identity or being away from home and all this stuff and saying, it's okay, it's temporary. My father would say, Iman, you know, is always gonna be here. My community and so and so is still going to be doing such and such. That's not gonna change. But you have, you have a vision. Follow your vision because it's going to become something if you put your effort to it. Into it.

X̲’unei:

Yeah. I'm so grateful for the work that you've done, for the healing that you've done, for the things that you've shared, for the ways you've talked about. Reframing, recovering, rebuilding the future is really bright for indigenous peoples. Indigenous languages contain so much medicine and beauty. When you engage in these languages, whether you are a new learner, you're a teacher, whether you're indigenous, whether you're a visitor on indigenous lands and a guest and someone who's living there with us, you have an opportunity to create positive change. To watch a child who can grow up and say a word without fear of being punished for saying that word, who can take the language on for another generation so we can build a stronger platform for things where so much is possible, so much is within reach, so much is achievable. And we can listen directly to the words of our ancestors and remember them so much. Wisdom of the Yik Way has been taught to you directly from your parents through <inaudible> and through yo, it gets taught to others. We're so grateful that you folks would tune in to listen to us. The Tongue Unbroken is a production of the iHeart Media Network. And the next Step initiative though, if you're out there, think about doing good things, standing up for good people and good causes. And if you're not, just please stay out of the way and watch the indigenous movements continue to rise.