

Tyler Bruce

August 24, 2020 Interviewer Jared Matsunaga-Turnbull; Camera Don Bouzek

Location: a park in former Papaschase territory.

Q: What is your union?

TB: I was working for a union, for Local 720, the Alberta North Ironworkers Union.

Q: Where were you born?

TB: I was born in a beautiful place known as Amiskwasciwaskahegan, Edmonton.

Q: Where is your family from?

TB: My mom is from Saddle Lake, Onihcikiskowapowin, and my dad is from Moskowgan in Saskatchewan.

Q: Tell me a bit about your family.

TB: I am Nehiyaw and Ojibwe, or Anishinaabe. I'm the first person in my dad's side and my mom's side to not be in a residential school. We've been hit pretty hard with that. I still ended up in group homes, in Child and Family Services, so that's sort of like another application or a natural progression of residential schools. I'd say we're working class, for the most part, due to residential schools and the sort of poverty culture that the school promoted in the children, like really not preparing my dad's side to be well fitted to be working in Canadian society. He ended up being like on drugs, selling drugs, and involved in gangs and stuff. If the listeners or viewers aren't familiar, the Saskatchewan environment in the '50s and '60s was extremely violent towards indigenous people, and he had to grow up fighting off a lot of people and facing a lot of discrimination within Regina and Saskatoon. He ended up in drugs, not that I'm defending his choice, but there weren't very many options. It's pretty wild to think that I've been able to come from that sort of background and family history, and still be able to get up and be able to enter

the workforce in the trades and whatnot, and then be able to use that as an opportunity as a stepping stone towards going back to university and taking a degree program.

Q: Are you in university now?

TB: Yes.

Q: What are you taking?

TB: I'm studying indigenous social work for now, and thinking in the future I'd like to be a mental health counselor to try to help work on some of those effects of residential schools and colonization. It would be really important for me to use this history and experience that I have being on the front lines of these institutions that have really not served native people and have really caused a lot of harm. I'd like to be able to use that experience to help, basically.

Q: Can you talk about the systems you grew up in?

TB: To me it's sort of wild, in how within, like there's a lot of similarities and forms of masculinity. I'd say to me that's like a major thing within health and safety in the workplace and these systems that I grew up in, is the sort of like masculinities that are promoted. Even in group homes there's like you're expected to be rough and tough and like, oh ya I'm gonna fight you; you wanna cross me? No talking. If you wanna even try to act like you're stepping on me a little bit, there's gonna be fights, there's gonna be this competition of who can be more dominant. Even that ties to like the industrial schools, the residential schools that the priests and Canada were trying to like stratify native kids to be native adults in the workforce kind of doing menial labour and work that isn't really associated with systemic power – like lawyers, doctors, politicians, business owners. Those schools really weren't designed for that, they were intentionally designed to stratify us as a working class basically. To me, it's interesting too because that sort of masculinity that is prevalent within a lot of indigenous communities, that's like residual residential schooling and really overlaps with a lot of masculinities present in the workplace. To me, it's like I've always seen that as, well not always, but I'm starting to see more

of like how like racism is not very helpful to workers. People who are racist to native people on the jobsite, it forces more division within workers and allows more scapegoating to have more workers being exploited. I find that happens a lot in a lot of different jobs. With the union it wasn't really that bad, it was pretty good. I got fair pay and people standing up for me making sure future ironworkers would have those benefits, death benefits, health benefits. Those things are really important in any workplace, but often that's not the case. When you work outside the union it all of a sudden becomes a lot much more almost like a hostile place, as I find it anyway.

Q: How did you get involved in the trades? What was your first job?

TB: My first job was at Yogen Fruz at West Edmonton Mall. I made some really nice tall yogurts that I could never finish, but at least I had it. I worked in produce at Super Store while I was upgrading high school. But then from 18 to 24 or 25 (I'm 26 now), so for the past six years or so I was in carpentry building foundations for houses, from pouring the concrete in to doing a little bit of rebar, working on larger commercial sites, setting up the parkade form work. I was doing some carpentry work for a while, residential carpentry installing doors and windows and doing some insulating. Lots of temp work, working as a swamper, working in different warehouses and that kind of stuff.

Q: What does a swamper do?

TB: Swamping, basically you are a truck driver's helper. There's all sorts of trucks out there. You can be a swamper for hydro vac; they do some occasionally disgusting work, working in outhouses and all that stuff. What they really specialize in is locating lines. If you're about to do some work here say at this park and you have to dig down to set a foundation for an art piece or something, you don't know if there are gas lines or power lines. So you can reference a map, a city blueprint, and then estimate where that would be, then you bring in a hydro vac truck and it uses extremely high pressure water. That water can take off a limb or a finger. It cuts through dirt, then it's vacuumed and then you can find your line and work around it.

Q: Was that one of your first jobs in the trades?

TB: Yes, it was through the temp agency. I found that it was very challenging to get my foot into the door with some carpentry work.

Q: How did the temp agency work?

TB: It did not work, it's terrible. That's one thing I've always wanted to do, is make a temp workers union. You wake up, you go there at like 4 in the morning or something. You're not guaranteed a job. If you do get a job, it's like \$10 or \$11 an hour, and they'll tax the heck out of you. You have to pay for rides to get to work. The company doesn't pay for that ride, even though they're making \$8 or \$9 per hour off the labour you're doing. It wasn't really the greatest.

Q: Did you feel like you had any power in that kind of job?

TB: Nope, it was at the mercy of the dispatcher and the supervisor of the site.

Q: As a temp worker, what was your experience with health and safety?

TB: At one jobsite we were not notified that there was asbestos there. We had to find out through plumbers; we were just talking with them. They were like, why aren't you guys wearing masks? Well it's just drywall dust, that's it. No, that's asbestos right there. Then we went and talked to the guy and he's like, oh you should be fine. It's really not the greatest, they didn't really care.

Q: What was the process of you getting into the trades?

TB: I didn't have my high school. I wasn't making the best choices growing up in my teenage years. I can definitely attribute that to being in group homes and foster homes. My friends around me were not, they were just like me, coming from broken homes, and really having a lot

of autonomy taken away by social workers. Just being uprooted all the time on top of trauma, not to go really in depth, but that sort of thing really didn't... And again, it's like another pushing of stratification of native people into being helpless almost, not equipping. The government can't raise children, and that's what it's been trying to do. It didn't set any of us up, which kind of sucks. There are some people I know in group homes who aren't here with us today, and some people aren't really all there because of addictions. So I grew up in that environment. When I was 18 I just decided that I needed to do something different. Partying all the time and drinking was fun, but it was really apparent to just look around and see where that was taking me. So I decided to start working. My step dad, I don't know if he was trying to impress my mom or he genuinely cared, but he took me under his wing and really taught me a lot. I didn't really have much experience in the trades. He was like, I'll get you a job. He taught me a lot.

Q: What was your first job in the trades?

TB: That was being a cribber, doing residential foundation work, 2'x9' frames, panels. I forget what they're called, it's been a while. But we were placing those all day.

Q: Then from there, you went through carpentry?

TB: Ya, after doing that work for a while, I realized that I wanted to go back to school and work on upgrading and completing high school. So I took a break from cribbing to do that. That sort of work wasn't giving me a red seal. After doing some research and seeing people and realizing that a red seal would be the best thing for me, and knowing that through cribbing, while it is carpentry for sure, it's not an area of work that requires a red seal. It was challenging for me to find somebody with a red seal to work towards those hours. So I decided that I should get my foot in the door, and went through a program called Trade Winds to Success. I went through there, flunked; right at the end I stopped going, had some personal stuff there. But I still kept trying to do that work, and ended up getting a job doing residential carpentry for a while. That was pretty good, those guys were pretty alright, kind of fucking assholes. But ya, that was good stuff; learned a lot, did a lot of work. I went through the temp agency, I had a good reputation with them. They would send me out to week-long jobs. One job I went to, I was just there, was

just supposed to watch a back alley while heavy equipment went in while they were demolishing a house. So I had lots of time to talk with the guys, so I just chilled and talked with them. I tried to learn as much as I could, and told them my dreams and ambitions. I learned that they were red seal carpenters. I talked to them and they're like, ya, we'll hire you. That was pretty good. I was able to get some of my friends some part time employment when they needed extra labour, so that was kind of cool. But then personal issues came up at the end of that, and poor decisions.

Q: Where did you go after that?

TB: After carpentry. . . big stretch here. So after carpentry, I was sort of drifting around, didn't really know what I was doing. I really did not do a lot of growth throughout my teenage years and my young adult years, so I was really trying to focus on that. That's when I started writing – picking up a pen and paper and just writing whatever, lots of poems. Then I was still doing odd jobs here and there, a few temp jobs. I really feel like for a lot of those jobs I should've got paid more. While I was going through that growth and self reflection and healing, **it became apparent to me that I needed to get into a trade that would be safer, where there was more people who cared about workers, and people who were professional at work.** 'Cause there were some people who like to cut corners. To me, that attitude of just trying to cut corners and trying to be lazy at work and stuff, to me that wasn't who I am, that's not how I work all the time. I knew that I needed to get into something that was better for me, that would pay me better, and something that would lead to having a certification in my pocket that nobody can refute and that will guarantee me work. I realized that I needed to get into a union. I've had a few friends through Trade Winds. I had a structural ironworker friend who worked through Local 720, and after hearing him talk about it and hearing people's experiences with other trade unions in the city, knowing my own self and knowing more of the work that an ironworker does, I realized that's more what I wanted to do. I decided to use Trade Winds again to get my foot in my door with the union, and went through the program, graduated, did the two week training program at the hall. I just went right into the workforce there, and that was really good. That was a pretty big moment in my life, because it was like I was stepping out of, what do they call it, something more professional, something that I feel it's the kind of work I want to be doing,

the sort of projects that I want to be associated with. Those are the kind of work boots I want to fill in; I want to be like those people. So I was able to do that, and that was pretty good.

Q: You looked for a unionized worksite?

TB: Ya, I realized that they're the best.

Q: Tell us about Trade Winds to Success.

TB: Trade Winds to Success is a program designed for indigenous people – First Nation, Metis and Inuit people – who want to get into the trades. They have the pipefitters union, electricians union, carpenters union, ironworkers union, the pipeline insulating union, and probably a couple more that I'm having difficulties remembering. What they would do is they'd take people, there's a minimum requirement for certain trades where you have to have like a Grade 10 Math, Science, and English levels to get into them to become indentured in that red seal trade. What they would do is they would upgrade your Math and Science skills to that level, so then you can do a test at the Alberta Trades Board or something downtown; I can't recall the name. But you go there, you do a test, and if you can pass that then you get certified with the level that you need for the prerequisite of that trade to become indentured. So they do that, pretty good work. Lots of people take it and use it to get forward in life.

Q: What were the differences between your experiences in the unionized and nonunionized settings?

TB: With the union there was a lot more health and safety. There were people whose jobs were health and safety, and they took it seriously. The workers hold each other accountable. There was a lot of times people would be making sure that I would be working safely and properly. People would watch me work, and then if they noticed something was unsafe, they'd come up and show me how to adjust so it would be more safe. That was a major difference in working within a unionized jobsite, and the pay was worth it. You work hard, you get stuff done, and you

get paid pretty well. It's consistent. It doesn't feel like it's sketchy, like is this guy going to cut my hours or not pay me? There's definitely that sort of anxiety when working in smaller jobsites.

Q: How do you explain that difference?

TB: I'd say history would have a major part to play in that. Within unions, they're the result of decades and centuries of organizing and making sure, and openly standing up for one another. I believe that way of being stays within unions, and people who go through there see that and then they're in part inspired, and that spirit lives on through people who get introduced to that. That's a major thing. Within the halls, I think a lot more people sort of like, people who are in there have been in the trade for a very long time and understand the ins and outs and see how to be there for one another. I think that's a major thing too, is people are there for one another a lot more.

Q: What were the major differences you experienced with health and safety?

TB: It was better working in unions versus not. It was better, but there were times where it wasn't better at all. There's still lots of, like me being native was a major thing.

Q: What do you mean by that?

TB: Chief. Lots of people would be like, oh ya, my wife is native. Oh ya, I had a native girlfriend. Oh I grew up around a reserve. All of a sudden it's just like that's the first thing people say, it's like that's the only thing people see about me. It's not really so much my interests. Sometimes it would be consistent throughout the existing day to day life. That's definitely the first thing people see.

Q: What does that do to you?

TB: It creates, especially being like the only native person or really like the only non-white person, I'm obviously dark but some white guys get pretty dark. But non-white people on the

site, when the people are so aggressive constantly, that's like, I don't know if that's a by-product of all the testosterone and the fatigue from the work. A lot of the work is incredibly straining, and it's really hard to be happy when all your energy is trying to wrestle with thousands of pounds, trying to jam something in. It's like drugs and alcohol too, there's lots of partying with workers. But that's more on a tangent there. So being native on the jobsite, it's weird, because that's the first thing people see. But at times there's a pride, especially when I was doing ironwork. I was really fit. When I was all warmed up, I was killing it. I was packing hundreds of pounds, I was doing all this hard work. I was bouncing up on things, like sawing things and throwing around all this stuff, like hopping over things easily, flying around the jobsite. I'm just like, nobody else there is doing it, I'm the only one who cares about being like that. But I'm like, alright, you guys had better step up your game, I'm gonna make you look bad. But at times it's hostile, because that racism or my being indigenous being the focus, sometimes it's hard to know if that's going to open me up to hostility. Hearing racist things, hearing about all these agro white dudes, swearing, mumbling and cracking all these racist jokes trying to be popular, really I think that's what a lot of these guys try to do, is try to be the cool guy by making racist jokes and whatever. I've never really understood that trying to really bring people down, or punching down. It's sort of scary sometimes when there's all that aggression and you're on the jobsite and there's white faces everywhere and people are looking at you at times. It's weird, some people will just stand at a distance and they're staring at you, whispering to each other, gossiping. You're there and you're just trying to work, and you hear people trying to test you on the jobsite. Then it's like, when is someone going to go overboard, and I'm going to have to physically defend myself? Am I going to have to? There's that threat. People want to talk about breaking people's legs, people talking about these white supremacist groups that they know. People talking openly about white people who organize to be violent towards Jewish people, towards black people, towards native people, knowing that these people are on the jobsites. Those people need to make a living too. It's easy to show that racist side of yourself within the jobsite, because there's so many people who agree to some degree. Understanding that and having to focus on work, focus on how I still want to move forward, while still having to defend myself and almost having to take care of myself through all that on these cloudy emission, overrun, loud, unnatural concrete dirty, heavy machinery kind of backgrounds. Being there, being like, okay if something happens, I've seen these guys lie how many times, and I know that

they're going to lie for each other if need be. So it's like, okay I gotta be able to stand up for myself and know that they can try to hurt me and they'll cover for each other. Knowing that that sort of environment exists and knowing that me being native puts a big target on me, it's something that I've had to experience my entire life. I know that it's part of that masculinity I was talking about earlier. It's something that I don't like and I don't appreciate, and I know that it has wrecked people before. It pushes people away from the trades. When dealing with racism, it pushes away people like my dad. People can be openly racist. I've heard stories from some older native workers about what they've experienced on jobsites. I'm not happy with how things are today, but people have changed a little bit and they're not fighting as much. It's still not alright to be on the jobsite and be concerned about being attacked.

Q: Do other people have to deal with this?

TB: Probably to a point. I know with some black workers, often I feel solidarity with them when we're surrounded by a lot of this violent sort of white construction blue collar, really heavily masculine social environment. It's like I know how this racism works and I know that that sort of extreme identity is violent towards native people, is violent towards black people, is violent towards women, is violent towards queer people, is violent towards foreigners. That sort of mentality, I know it's common but it's like I know that at least there, that person, when we talk sometimes, we speak the same language. It's like, ya don't get those white guys get to you. They see that and they see that these other workers test me because I'm native. I see that these other workers test them because they're black. You see that all the time. That's nice, that's refreshing, that's been really nice. But again, why does it have to be that way?

Q: Are there any other health and safety issues that you've experience at work?

TB: There's the racism, poor work conditions; we talked about that. Unsafe jobsites. I think just attitudes sometimes are the biggest workplace hazard. A lot of times there's this expectation to be super tough all the time, and that sort of toughness leads to. . . There's times when I felt like I had to prove myself, so I'd go and do a ton of stupid things. There's really unhealthy expectations that's put on people in the workplace to produce at max capacity. At times it's like

your job can be on the line if you're not producing that. It's like you almost have to push yourself to your limits and put yourself in unsafe situations so you can meet these expectations of your employer. A part of work is to get things done, to complete a project or whatever. But sometimes that pressure can make people make dumb decisions. Maybe like, oh I can put my foot here and I'll be able to lift up more stuff there. I can take one less trip, so now my job looks better. Now maybe I can talk about a raise or something. Just one foot, there's a little bit of oil there you can't see, you slip and then get hurt or whatever.

Q: Have you ever experienced a positive health and safety situation where you felt that you were able to participate in it?

TB: Every day there wasn't people getting hurt, and the job got done and everyone was able to go home okay, it's pretty good, it's a nice day. That happened often.

Q: Were you ever able to raise an issue?

TB: Ya. It wasn't major, it would be more like pointing out, oh maybe we should put another block there or we should do this. We should tie this to that, and that's going to make the ladder more secure. Small things like that.

Q: Do you have hope?

TB: Do I have hope? Yes, I have hope for change, more broadly outside of work. I do have hope in a different type of work, I guess. That's why I'm switching careers, that's why I'm switching workforces. I know that I need to be in environments where I'm not constantly threatened. I need to be in a safer place so I can make sure that I'm able to live up to these responsibilities that I have in the community outside of work. To make sure that I have time to give to my family, to give to my friends, to give to myself. So ya, there's hope.

Q: Can you talk about the symbols you're wearing? I'm also interested in your writing.

TB: These are tattoos. We'll start with the writing and then ease into that. I started writing a few years ago. Five or six years ago is when I really committed myself to it, when I started buying books and looking at other writers and really trying to see what I can create. It's been pretty wild, because it's led me to really understand what's going on in my own mind. To be able to put that on paper, put these things down, and then think about it and wonder, why is this an issue, why is trauma such a recurring thing, why is addiction such a recurring thing in my life? Then to be able to submerge myself into all sorts of writings and academia and other writings on these things, and begin to really broaden my understanding of these things and gain insight into myself. Then to be able to take all of that and then condense it into words for other people to look at, and to think about that your own self – to me, that's the ultimate form of reciprocation. I've been given so much by these other writers, and I need to be able to give back to other readers and writers too.

Q: What kind of writing do you do?

TB: I'm mostly a poet. I'm trying to broaden into more like rap kind of stuff. I do appreciate the medium. There's a lot of rappers out there who really have been able to shine a light onto lots of messed up social issues, and have been able to make an impact on people, and really change culture. American culture has changed fundamentally due to rap, and that's a really important step. I think eventually that's something more I'd like to try my pen and voice with too.

Q: Do you do spoken word, too?

TB: Ya.

Q: Do you have anything, off the top of your head?

TB: I'm thinking of that one I wrote. I just wrote this; I haven't actually read it aloud yet. A decolonial menace, demonstrating what can be done. Dodging native statistics while standing open mouthed. Running water defense while navigating trauma that kills. Okay. So I call this A Kinship Pandemic. It's like a group of close friends that I've made in the last eight or nine

months, we've been all over the place and have really been able to really change each other's lives just by existing and supporting. My crew, the kinship pandemic, ? of blood, a decolonial menace demonstrating what can be done. Dodging native statistics while standing open-mouthed takes land and water defense while navigating trauma that kills. A consistent presence keep us out of addiction's reach. All children of residential school kids, urban indigenous youth looked down on, struggling alone. Decisions made from loneliness and grief begin to cease. As our times spent together increase, as hours and months pass, this kilometer is ticked past. Crises arise and so do we, a band of nomads travelling kicking ass, opening each other's eyes to what individually we cannot see. Setting up teepees in far off lands away from our prairies, ready to wreck racist redneck necks, a Roman war party. Hears faces break open into lovely smiles for our friends and family, a convocation of young natives committed to harmony in a violent world. Creatively journeying of maneuvers towards a healthier community Nehiyawak with the native story. Tired, brain fuzzy, craving caffeine's buzzing. Laughing, teasing away residential school's grip. Making kin with strangers everywhere we go, protecting the home of thunderbirds. My crew, the kinship pandemic, Nehiyawak of blood. For those who don't know, Nehiyawak is like how we say noncolonial Cree. That's what we call ourselves. Cree is what the French call us. Then Ogamawtik, that's sundance tree in the centre pole. It's really important, it gives a lot to community in people's prayers. It holds a lot of that and holds that connection to all the other sun dancers from behind us and all the sun dances ahead of us that are there. That poem, that spoken word piece, it's important to remember these things and honour different points in life, the good things in life, to be able to revive those kinship systems that we once had. Back in the day, Canada was scared of us. They didn't dare set foot on the prairies. They had to structurally, systemically cut off our food systems, kill the buffalo, and force us to be dependent on rations, and force us into agricultural life. But it took hundreds of years to get to that point, because our kinship was so strong. It was so strong, they had to attack our children. They had to attack our parents, our grandparents, our great grandparents, when they were just little children. It breaks my heart to see these old people, knowing that when these things happened, they're old now but they were just little nieces and nephews when the RCMP came in and took them, when the church took them. That's been effective. You can see it today in how divided native community is and how far and almost foreign kinship is. To us young natives, that's new. In the history of us native people, it's new to not have kinship. To be able to bring

that back and to be able to do that and share it, I see it in my life and I see it in these people who are near me, to create that kinship and how much life that gives. It's spreading. There's people I know from Vancouver, Victoria Island, to Ottawa and probably all the way up to the East Coast in Micmac territory. I met some people who are now down in Mexico, and to be able to have those connections with people who I know that are genuinely there. To have that all over and to know that that was something that was taken, and to be able to share that and give that, it's nice. It's just spreading, and it's good. It's a pandemic. These tattoos, this is a ?. It's a reminder of my own commitment as a sun dancer and it's a reminder of those days that I've spent in the arbor. It's a symbol of that connection and it's also a symbol of me reclaiming myself, that identity who I am. It's an assertion of me being how I see natives to be, now I see myself. I feel like with this tattoo I'm taking back my face, I'm taking back my skin, I'm taking back my identity. These shopkeepers following you in stores, police officers who discriminate, these people who try to project how they think natives are onto me, they can't. What the hell is that? It just completely jars that and brings me in as my own person. Who are you going to say I'm going to look like? I'm me, I'm not the native you had in mind. That is important. Whatever social taboos people want to have, okay have that for yourself, you're missing out. It's nice. It's a symbol of my commitment to land and water. What does it mean to stand up for land and water? What does that mean to make sure that this dirt that has been fought for to create this farmland here in Canada, this land that nourishes these medicines, that nourishes these trees and give us this air, making sure that I'm tied to that. Ogamatik is in the ground and it that's the prayers of the ogawemaski coming through the ogamatik to everybody, and knowing that that needs to be preserved, that needs to be kept alive. It's hard to, like even behind us we have the North Saskatchewan River; you can't drink that water, you're gonna get sick. A long time ago, that wasn't the case. I think it's easy to imagine how the water has been poisoned as more farms and resource extraction happens and the world focuses on trying to keep that profit margin up. It seems like for some of these people it's worth it to poison water and put it through these industrial systems and then put it back along with methyl mercury from dams and stuff, and all that water going across from like the mountains all the way up into Hudson Bay. That's okay to some people, because you're going to make that money, and all those workers need employment. To me, it's a commitment to figuring out these issues and knowing that these are things that have real life changing impacts, and that that needs to be taken

seriously. That commitment is the reason why I'm here, the reason I have life, the reason other people I care about have life. The reason why everybody has life is taken seriously, and stand up for that.

Q: Can you talk about ? as a cultural safety issue?

TB: Within the time and space as an indigenous person being here today with a cell phone in my hand and Skip the Dishes on mine, not too long ago we'd be thinking about buffalo and living that life on the land. Understanding there's been some pretty big changes from then to now, and understanding more of the hardships in my life and how a lot of the hardships that I've experienced in terms of racism and intergenerational trauma and stuff, it stems from Canadian legislation. It's often based around land acquisition, how they say it, land entitlement. It's all crown land, right? I say that sarcastically, in case some people may not understand that. It's wild for me to think understanding some of this connection to land and water, and as a cultural connection, how over time through the Indian Act, through treaties, through the pass system, which was basically. . . After treaties were signed, the Indian Act and native people, we used to travel wherever we wanted. We'd want to go for a trip to the mountains, get a bunch of friends and we'll go check out the mountains, go visit some people we know over there, go out on the other way towards our relations out east, travelling around, going down south, go fight some Blackfoots. Whatever we wanted to do, we were able to do that. Through policy and the encroachment of settlers often settling in the best places, like Montreal, Ottawa, Winnipeg, Edmonton, Vancouver. All these places were like hubs of transport, commerce, which is exactly why these places were decided, and land was slowly take back, taken away from us. It became all of a sudden policy to have natives stuck on reserves. Once we were on reserves, they can then claim that, oh they're not even using this land and we've got a treaty so really this is our land. They're not occupying it but we'll just make sure they can't occupy any of that land, by having the pass system. Within that system we weren't allowed to leave the confines of the reservation, and that was enforceable by jail. If we were caught off reserve without a pass from the Indian agent, jail, you're gonna go get locked up. Unfair, ya. That destruction of the buffalo, the fragmentation of our lands by farms, by towns, by railways – that completely changes our food systems, our economic systems. We weren't able to travel as easily, we weren't able to

provide for ourselves as easily. We all of a sudden had the RCMP coming after us for going on farmland or leaving our reserve; they'd come after us. How were we supposed to provide for our families when we can't do that? When treaties were signed, there was no food and so much hostility. Food systems were destroyed and people had to eat. Treaties were made under duress. It was illegal to be native, it was illegal to be native and provide for yourself. It was illegal to hunt, it was illegal to leave the reserve. Now after generations of that and eventually due to indigenous advocacy and rebellion against these policies, they were then limited. All of a sudden Canadians started to have a conscience somewhat. All of a sudden those policies seemed barbaric and uncivilized. Wow, how ironic. Now it's messed up because over time with those residential schools and the Indian pass system with the Indian agents, with the destruction of all these territories where you would live, with the waters being poisoned. . . In places like in Fort Chip people are advised not to eat more than three fish a year, otherwise you run the risk of getting heavy metal poisoning. People up north, workers up there too in the tar sands, are getting increases in cancer rates. People how've worked there have higher rates of cancer because of that, and so do the native people, from that introduction of all those hard chemicals and stuff into the land and water. It's kind of messed up because now there's not a lot of choices to work up in those communities, because of those generations, those decades, those centuries of basically attacks on our economies. Now people are almost forced to work in these oil and gas and resource extraction economies because of that. It's like you have to do that. It's almost like you're forced to work inside that and further destroy your communities and further open up the land and water to being sold, to being modified and not respected. It's kind of wild. Sometimes it almost doesn't feel like there is a choice, especially when there's conflicts over land. These companies are quick to like, okay we've dealt with this problem before, we just gotta create a bunch of job opportunities for them. Okay just download that one document from 20 years ago and change Indian to Aboriginal; oh no wait, it's Indigenous now. We'll hire indigenous people, okay. Bam, a program, and these jobs are pretty bottom tier positions within these companies and often then those workers become politicized. They're like, okay look, we have natives working for us. How can we be racist, how can we be putting the community at risk? Look, we have these natives that we give money to. Often these are people in far off communities who don't have access to that kind of money. That money then turns into politics. Sometimes it's like there's not really many choices. It's hard because you want to provide for

your family, you want to give them the best opportunity. You want to make sure they can have school, clothes, and make sure they're eating well. Sometimes that's only through working in these industries. Sometimes there's not much choice. If you don't really know your options, it's hard to make an informed decision, especially when you have the pressure of poverty, the pressure of other people pushing you into that employment. It's hard.

Q: Do you have any messages about health and safety for young people in the workforce?

TB: Take pictures of your worksheets, your hours; make sure to keep track of that. Write down what you do every day. Don't put up with people's bullshit. If people start trying to step on you, tell them in one way or another to stop. Don't feed into people's bullshit when they want to try and go on power trips, get under your skin, don't let them. You don't need to waste your time with people like that. That's about it.

Q: Could you talk about the history of the sun dance?

TB: I'm trying to imagine how that will look, sometimes it'll be cut into clips. I'm thinking about how my body language was at the point of the conversation. Continuity. Ya, so as a sun dancer, being a sun dancer is so important to me, it's so like I didn't know that I needed that. I didn't know that it almost seems like that's who I was my whole life. But I didn't have people around me who grew up in that culture, so it was hard to see that and be introduced to that. As an adult now, being able to participate in these ceremonies and understand the history of that, how it was outlawed and illegal, these ceremonies were illegal. You could go to jail just to be a sun dancer, you'd go to jail for going to a sweat lodge, you could go to jail for having a powwow. You could go to jail for speaking your language, you could go to jail for organizing in more than groups of three natives. You can still see remnants of that attitude today. Sometimes within Catholic and Christian communities, it's seen as witchcraft, witchcraft to see how a tree is a symbol of life. That's witchcraft. Okay. Just like drinking the blood of your saviour's is life. Okay, okay. Remnants of that attitude still exist today. I go out with two or three of my native friends, even if it's just my male friends especially, people get scared. We're walking around, we're having a good time, we're laughing. People get scared. Police stop, they slow down, they look at

us. That's because we're seen as hostile. We're those scary natives in the forest. We're those ones that could walk in this frozen wilderness with a smile on our face while they're freezing in little farm homesteads. Get more cow patties, Betsy, we need more cow poop to burn. We're just chilling in our buffalo robes, tapping trees, making some syrup, just chilling. Ya, remember that eagle we seen? Oh, sacred. It's scary, this thing's always killing Europeans and it's so tough for them, but we're existing. We weren't people to be messed around with at one point. That criminalization of us still happens today. It's happened against our ceremonies, it's happened against our skin, our tattoos. At one point we had tattoos. It's against us standing up for our land, it's against us being indigenous. So often it's still criminalized, maybe not necessarily jail or being charged, but being isolated on the jobsite, being pushed into a corner, being only able to be seen doing a few tasks, being seen as a menial worker and not being seen as somebody who could be running things. That's a form of jail, and that's a form of jail that is upheld often by these companies, and even unions at times. You can see these big companies that are international, that's a form of jail. That's a creation of a system of power that is being seen as something that can only stay in a certain place, and that is still present today. That sort of stuff too, that having this ogamate ? here, I guess it's a symbol of reclaiming all of that, being able to live this life that my parents weren't able to live, that my grandparents weren't able to live, that my great grandparents weren't able to live, my great great grandparents, who weren't able to live this life because it was outlawed, because of Indian agents, because of legislation, because of RCMP. Because of all this stuff it was illegal to be native, and in some ways it still is today. Ya okay, I'm ready to face all that.

Q: You're a poet, which is not the stereotypical construction site worker.

TB: Writing poetry, it's interesting existing within ideas like hyper masculine blue collar cultures and existing within these really artsy feminine or even trans and queer communities. But it is a focus on caring about one another existing in these worlds and operating within all this stuff. That's wild, now that I'm thinking about it. Existing in both those worlds, it's kind of funny. It's like being an outsider in both worlds because of the nature of myself, but being able to adapt. Within the jobsite nobody knew I was a poet, nobody knew I wrote. I just talked about things. It's seen as, that's for pussies. There's an F word that has more than four letters that's

derogatory, that kind of stuff. It's almost like a form of classism – artsy people versus working class people, and it's almost like there's a clash there. Existing in those worlds, I think at times they definitely informed one another. To be able to carve my space into these worlds, being a writer and being involved in the arts and having a bunch of friends in those communities, helped introduce me to these different ways of thinking. Being able to be in a social environment and kind of think more deeply about things that are said, and understanding more of that kind of stuff and being able to articulate that kind of stuff. Emotional intelligence, I definitely don't find on construction sites. You can only feel angry or happy. If you fit outside of that, you are like something's wrong with that guy, don't go near him, he's not all there. So being able to learn more about that kind of stuff too, it's important. It was important for me in the arts world to be able to see more than what is physically there – be able to see more than a tree, be able to see more than some lines – being able to see the meaning behind it. It's kind of almost like seeing what's not really present, that helped me see what I needed to be doing for work, what sort of environment I needed to put myself into. Then to sort of get up and do it, get up and work hard and push yourself, push through that tiredness, push through all that stuff that construction demands and promotes within the jobsite. That stuff helped me get out there to go to these different events, to go out and talk to people, to put myself up on stages at times and be able to really push myself into those places. A big part of that has to do with being in construction. A lot of times it's really helped me grow as a person and become who I am today. Bizarre to be going from work for ten hours, like swearing, and sit in the and ? and you're like, what the hell is wrong with these people, and then going to arts communities where it's like all of a sudden everything's air conditioned, nice drinks, some fancy sodas. Then I go to work the next day and I'm drinking Perrier or something and they're like, you drink Perrier? They're all looking at me and I'm just like, diabetes man, or something. Ya, wild times.

Q: Anything else you'd like to talk about?

TB: Ya. I guess on the topic of resource extraction and being native, when it comes to health and safety, often workers in construction and resource extraction have been major, like it's been part of the genocide of native people. Going back to when Vancouver was being created and up in Washington and Oregon with the gold rushes, natives were slaughtered, shot, killed, raped,

turned into slaves. Even in the '70s there was a dam somewhere up in Northern Ontario I believe. They just set up a dam and flooded it, and they did not tell the native people who lived on that flood plane. Everything was lost in that community. I think it was Fox Lake, the Fox Lake Dam Community, or something. If you were to google that I'm sure reports would pop up about the rampant sexual violence against native women within the jobsite there and in the community. And the missing women, the workers who have killed women and dumped them in the woods, and have gotten women drunk and taken advantage of them with multiple guys, like the crew. When you talk about health and safety at the jobsite, what does that look like outside of the jobsite? What does that look like in these communities? Those people were bringing death and pain, and making communities unsafe that's not even their communities. These workers don't have any ties to those communities. I wonder how many tar sands worker people actually know much about the Dene people there. Do they know the history of the artists, do they know the histories of the people who live there. Do they know about the medicine, do they know the creation stories? Unlikely. It's seen as a money stop in a place where you can go into town with your thousands of dollars to go blow off steam after working 12 hour days. You can go in there and, oh look at all these native women. It's fucked up but it's what people have done and continue to do to this day. That's the resource extraction industry that has brought death and violence and the destruction of land and water. It's complicated when you think about the people who need the work to provide. It's hard, but that's why things have to change. How do things look differently in the future, where you don't cause harm just to make money? You don't have to exploit things to make money. Is that possible? Hopefully one day. Also it's like looking at how the violence against women can stop too. That's messed up. It's so messed up because it's often this culture of racism against natives. It's also the culture that caused a lot of these stereotypes to exist, and there's no self awareness of looking at how, oh look at that dirty fucking Indian bum on the street picking bottles, passed out there drunk in his sleep. They don't see that that's because of treaty, that's because of the reserve, that's because of the residential school. That's why you get to have these buildings, that's why you get to use these roads, that's why you get to turn on the tap and drink water. Those same reasons why you have all that is native people had to be displaced first. We had to be put out of the way. We had to stop living on our land so resources could be extracted to create the wealth that this city, this province, this country knows. Those same people will shit on the people who had to get taken out of the way,

which is mean. I had to get taken out of the way, my family had to get taken out of the way, my culture had to get taken out of the way. That has caused massive amounts of pain and suffering. It's everybody's responsibility. You wanna live here and enjoy this wealth, then you gotta be a part of the solution. Right now it's like you're part of the problem. If you're going to be ignorant to all this stuff, if you're not considering the far reaching impacts of your existence on these territories, and you're just trying to continue to not help, just kind of sit back and enjoy the results of hundreds of years of colonization, then fuck you. If you wanna be racist to me, then be racist to me. Fight a strong person for targeting these little struggling, vulnerable girls, little girls, little women, little grandmas. Men on the streets that are fucked up because of alcohol and addictions, try to be tough beating them up, try to fight some strong natives. You won't, because you're scared. Fuck you. Sorry, I'm just all worked up.

[END]