

Katie Rabbit-Young Pine

Interviewed by Trevor Stace, April, 2023

KR: Tsikinaakii: that's my Blackfoot name. My English name is Katie Rabbit-Young Pine. I am Blackfoot. I live on the Blood Reserve. I was raised in the community of Stand Off. I went to school in Fort Macleod, FP Walshe. I was very involved in the sports there and very committed to my education. I believe that my education started at home with my parents. I think my dad taught me about good work ethics. I remember one time, our home was situated just off the highway but you first have to go a quarter mile south on the gravel road to get to the highway. Then you come back north and you pass our place. One time he said he was going to town. I wanted to go with him and he said, I'm leaving in five minutes. So I took my time. I just thought, well, it's okay, I'm just going to take my time. I ran out 10 minutes later, and he was gone. So I ran to the highway and thought I could catch him there, but he just drove by. I was so upset. I was quite young; I started crying and I was upset. When he got back home, he told me; I asked him, you just left me; you saw me on the road; I wanted to go to town with you. He said, well did you hear me when I said I was going to leave in five minutes? I said, yes. He said, well you weren't there in five minutes and I had to go. I've got meetings, or something he had to do in town. He said, you remember that. When people want to meet with you at a certain time, you stick to that time, because they're busy too. It's not all about you. So that was one lesson I learned. To this day, when I call a meeting and I say it's 2 o'clock, I expect people to be there at 2 o'clock. It doesn't always happen; I give them that 15 minute grace. But very quickly people start to realize when I say 1 o'clock, 2 o'clock, or whatever the timeline is, they will respect that and they know I want to start at that time. I've had I'm going to say seven jobs in my lifetime. My very first one started when I was 16 years old; I was a waitress. I was born in '59, so I'm going to be 65 in January. My brother and his wife owned the restaurant in our community, Doyle. So I was a waitress there. At that time we had to go to the tables and take the orders, then bring them back the food. It was situated right in our administration building. I knew that my section at noon five guys came down. They all had suits, and I knew they were very important people. My sister-in-law said, take good care of them. I said, okay. So I went and took their order. One of the gentlemen sitting at the edge of the table wanted a grape juice. I remember that so well, because when I went to bring the grape juice back to the table

something happened and my tray tipped and the grape juice spilt all over his suit pants. Needless to say, he was really upset about that, and so was my sister-in-law. That summer I worked off I call it the fine for spilling the grape juice on this gentleman's suit. He was really upset and I had to buy him a new suit. So my whole summer was working to pay off that expensive suit. I probably bought him a more expensive suit than it really was. Just kidding. So after that I thought, I'm never going to be a waitress. When I was in high school, and at the time – well you guys already know I'm going to be 65 – typing class. We couldn't look at our fingers, the keys. We always had to keep our eyes on the words that we were typing. Our instructor would walk around with a long stick, and if he caught us looking at the keys he would tap our fingers. That's what he did. He really hurt me because I looked at them and from the next row he came and whacked my fingers. That was painful. So I got up and stormed out. He said, you're going to the principal's office. I said, yes, I'm going. And he said, and you come right back after that. I said, no I'm not; I'm quitting this class. He said, you need this class. I said, I don't need it; I'm not going to be a secretary for anybody. I was already being a little bit rebellious at that age and a little bit outspoken. But I realized very quickly after that, even if I'm not going to be a secretary, I needed to learn typing. After that I started working a regular job with [5:39] Group Home. I was supposed to only be an evening and weekend counsellor. It was a group home for troubled youth, and it was just off our reserve, just a couple miles off the reserve. So it wasn't far for me to commute to work. At the same time, I was also working as a social worker for the Blood Tribe social development. I hadn't received any formal education. This is why I think that a lot of our youth, some of those ones I was responsible for those evenings and weekends, because of my lack of training in the field of caring and just guiding them. . . I was still quite young myself; I was 18. I hardly knew about parenting and stuff like that to try to parent the youth in that, because they were 13 up to 16 years of age, and they had been in the juvenile delinquent setting before they came to the group home on their way out into the community. So I believe that it's people like myself who were not properly trained to do those jobs well enough to really give the proper direction for the youth in those homes that as First Nations we still have a lot of problems with that. Now you couple it with the residential school survivors. My parents were residential school survivors. I was fortunate enough not to have to attend the residential school. But some of the things that they went through! When I did my last year of university I did a course there, Women's Studies. My final project was all around the residential

school. At that time we had a lot of elders still living in our community. So I went out and interviewed all of them. I heard their stories around the residential school. Some of them were really, oh man, it was just heart-wrenching to hear. Here I am sitting in front of an elder, and he or she is telling me the horrific events in their lives that made them become bullies. One guy said, I learned really fast that I had to be a bully first so people wouldn't bother me; I had to be the meanest bully I could be, and I was never like that at home. Or they had to eat their food really fast because someone would come and grab it and then they would have to go to bed hungry. So a lot of stories like that I heard. It was very discouraging to learn that our people went through that in an educational institution. That's why my mom, who was a survivor, only went up to Grade 6. I'm the youngest of six children, and she wanted all of us to speak English and to speak it well. That was our first language. I learned Blackfoot at a later age, but I'm still not a fluent English-speaking person. I'm not fluent in Blackfoot, but that is the language that I try to focus on nowadays, trying to pass it on to my girls and my grandchildren. I always tell people that back then I had to learn to speak Blackfoot because my husband and his family all spoke Blackfoot. I just wanted to make sure that they weren't talking about me. So I learned the language. So now I can read it and I can spell it and I can speak it quite fluently. I'm proud of the progress that I've made in that regard. When I went to university I remember doing several papers. After you listen to the lecture from the professor, then you have to go and do a paper to kind of summarize what you think you have learned from there and how you're going to use it in the real world. I always incorporated my Indigenous upbringing, throwing in our culture and how we would do things; how we would discipline, for example. My background is in HR. I had a few arguments with the professors when they said, this is just a C paper. I said, no it's not a C paper. How can you grade me a C? I felt really good about my writing skills and all of that. He wasn't able to give me a real argument. I told him, you're not Blackfoot; that's all Blackfoot that I've incorporated in this paper. How can you grade me on something that I know more about than you do? I'm teaching you. So he changed his marks on my papers after that. He was always kind of consulting me and asking me things. But now it's a common thing, that people use their background, their culture, and incorporate it into their papers, into their work, into their art, everything. So I'm really happy that that's happening. I know that in my fourth year I wanted to check to see if I had completed all my requirements to achieve my degree. So I went to see the advisor and I learned that I had to go back and do a 1000 course because that would suffice for

my degree requirements. The only one that was available was NAS1000, Native American Studies. So I took that. I never did take that in the beginning because I thought I knew enough about who I was. After all, I'm Native and I'm First Nations, a Blood Tribe member. But I knew very little. I'm in my fourth year and these are students, most of them non-Native, coming out of high school going into university in their first year. They had some very interesting thoughts about First Nations. I had a following. They would not miss that class because they wanted to hear the arguments. I didn't hesitate. We would be arguing. Students would argue with me about being Native and those kinds of things. So that was very interesting for me. Today I still try to share my thoughts in the business world. I am on the Senate for the University of Lethbridge. Also I'm a board member for Tourism Lethbridge here in the city, and for Business Link. I try to get involved in those areas that I feel that I could influence, even in a small way, how we could start to create that awareness in the business world, in the tourism world, in the Senate, in the educational institutions. I think that would be really positive for everyone to be able to feel comfortable in a situation where it's already quite openly creating that Native awareness in their university or business or whatever. When I was working, well after the waitress job I became the social worker, then after being a social worker I went and the training that I got from the government at that time was just sending me to workshops to get a certificate. That was supposed to qualify me to be that qualified social worker and do an effective job. There were no programs involved to try to encourage the clientele to want to go to maybe further their education or secure employment. It was all about just making sure that they had the basics, and the basics was food, clothing and shelter. Very minimum. They didn't get the same rates as Alberta government, and this I learned afterwards; but they never came close to the same rates as the Alberta government would receive. So it wasn't effective. I don't think it was effective social work. But now they do require that all employees of the Social Development Department have a degree. So that again is very encouraging. We're starting to see the need for that education. Back then if you had Grade 10 you got a job. Then it went up to if you graduated high school you could get a job. Then it was college diplomas; then it was university degrees. Now I think you need to have a Masters or a Doctorate to secure employment. So the standards in First Nations communities are going up. They're starting to recognize the need for those professionals, and they're demanding those professionals in their job opportunities. When I was done there as a social worker I then applied for a job as a post secondary coordinator for our

Red Crow College, and I secured that. I was there for 10 years. I was really happy to see the results of a lot of our students. We were only funded to be able to sponsor 300 students, but there was like 1,200 applicants when I first started; 1,200 students wanted to go to school. They wanted to go to college or university. But unfortunately we could only sponsor 300. So, imagine all of those others we had to turn down. A lot of the community members, who maybe it was their child or their grandchild, became very upset. Those were some of the challenges that I had to face. I just wanted to say a little bit about when I watch movies and there's somebody chasing somebody and they're trying to get the key into the keyhole to open the door of their vehicle and all that, they drop it or something happens. I keep saying, oh come on, hurry up. Well it happened to me one time when I was working at Red Crow College. We had just passed the deadline date and everyone had been informed: you're going to be sponsored; you're not going to be sponsored. At that time, because I was the only one in that department, I usually had to work late. I usually worked until about 8 o'clock sometimes. This particular evening I was leaving the office and going down the stairs, and I noticed someone was parked by the trees. They turned their light on. I kind of got scared. So I took my keys out already, ready to open my door as fast and as quickly as I could possibly do. But then he got out and walked in front of his vehicle, and you could see he was a huge man. He said, are you Katie Rabbit? I wasn't married at the time. I didn't respond or anything like that. I went to my vehicle and I was trying to get the key in there and I couldn't. I was thinking, oh my god, now I know how it is in the movies; this is me. But I managed to get into my vehicle before he could get to me. Needless to say, I was still very scared. That was one incident. Another incident, my tires were slashed. Just a lot of nasty phone calls to my home because I wouldn't sponsor. And it wasn't because I wouldn't sponsor; we couldn't sponsor because we didn't have the funds. Getting students into other programs, that's where I learned too, is if you have to say no always be able to provide an alternative. Don't just say no and walk away. That's what my mom used to teach me: treat others the way you want to be treated. I even took that to the job. If someone's going to say no to me, then provide me an alternative; don't let me just get upset and be frustrated. So that's what I used to do. I did a lot of research when I was there at Red Crow College, and provided that alternative for people. They were on a limited number of months for sponsorship. For example, if it was a two year college diploma, we gave them three years. If it was a four year university degree, we gave them five years. We took into consideration the fact that most of our

students, most of the people wanting to apply to college or university were not single students like the non-Native. They were not fresh out of high school. They already had a family – a husband, a child. So we had to take into consideration the other responsibilities that they had. They wouldn't be able to devote all of their time to studying and to doing well. We wanted to be able to provide the space and the time for them to be able to do well. Giving them that extra couple of semesters, that additional year of sponsorship, was something that we did. That I guess is one example of taking into consideration who you're working for and where they're coming from. You really have to understand that to be able to do your job well. I was there for ten years and then my next job was with HR. It was during those ten years at Red Crow College that I did night school. I went to work fulltime and then I went to school full time in the evenings. At home very little. Then I achieved my degree in Management and continued to work at Red Crow College for a few years after that. Then I moved on to the Blood Tribe Department of Health in our community and worked as their HR director. I was there for five years and it was there that I was first introduced to the union, the nurses union. Because I was the HR director, they wanted me to be involved as part of the team to develop the rules and regulations for the union. What are they called? I can't remember. The Labour code, yeah, for the Blood Tribe Department of Health. I was kind of torn; I had a conflict with that. I did not want to encourage unions in our community. Then at the same time I thought, our nursing staff, our medical staff deserved the rate of pay that Alberta government was providing to their employees. But because we were on reserve, federal jurisdiction, the pay rates differ greatly. So that was my conflict, the union and then supporting the nurses. But it turned out really well, because we were still able to, again, you can't be a part of something and not say anything. I felt very strongly about these things and I was very passionate about the service to our community. That's always been the first and foremost reason that I worked where I worked and what I do today. It's never for myself. It's always been for our community. It's a community, and I used to tell the students that I work with today, I want you to do well, because in you I see the service you're going to provide to me when I get old. I want great service. So, do well. People say, well that's kind of selfish. I say, well yeah I guess you could say I'm thinking about myself. But it's not just me that they'll be servicing; it'll be others like me. So it's our whole community, and we should expect the best from everybody. When we take the time to do this with our people, we should encourage them to always work really hard. And they can. When I think back on my

mom and dad, no one really encouraged them. My mom in residential school went up to Grade 6 and then after that she was taught how to cook, sew, and clean. She did that very well. She clothed us. She would get the material and we would have a dress in an hour. And we were well fed. She was a hard worker. You see that every day. From what little that she learned, she gave back to the community in great abundance, and to our family. That kind of always encouraged me to be able to encourage others. They start to believe because you continue to say to them, you can do that, and then they start to believe that themselves. Things do happen; change does happen. It could be just a small change or a huge change. But it does happen. So, after my employment with Blood Tribe Health, I felt like that was where... Actually no, I started making change, I felt. This is me talking. I don't say this often. I'm going to say it now for the first time. I believe that's when I started to make change in our community, when I started to work at Red Crow Community College. I had mentioned that we were given enough funds to sponsor 300 students but we had 1,200 applicants. Then I had to put the statistics together. I had to put the information together and go to Indian Affairs – they were called Indian Affairs at that time – and prove to them that we needed more funds. What they were giving us was not sufficient; there were more people interested in learning and going beyond their high school education. So we were able to increase the funds. We set up the policy to add that additional one year of post-secondary funding. And we did other things; I can't remember what they are right now. Then at Health I was involved in the union. I believe that I was able to establish a good comfortable halfway point for us. It was a good compromise – the nurses got what they wanted, and the employers got what they wanted. It encourages now the nurses to work hard, because they as part of a union, they are required to also step up their capabilities, further their education all the time, just to improve their service to the community. So I think it was I'm going to say a win for the community in that regard. Then after that I moved on to Treaty 7 Management Corporation, where I became the CEO for approximately three years. That's where I got the opportunity to work with all the Treaty 7 chiefs from Piegan, the Bloods, Sitsika, TsuuTina, and all of the Morley tribes. I had to deal with everything from education to housing to health, everything for all of those First Nations communities. That was a big challenge, but I really enjoyed that as well too. We initiated the discussion with the premier to start talking about sharing the proceeds from our natural resources. I told the chiefs, if we even got just one percent and we split it up with all the Treaty First Nations, it would be a substantial amount. We

should be able to negotiate something like that. But I left before that went any further. I feel like I started to make that change. That's what I like to do, is try to create change, even if it's in the minds of people or how we do things, but especially most importantly to incorporate our Indigenous way of things, way of doing things. We've always been business people from way back when. Not very many stories out there that I've heard. There's probably quite a few, but as far as I've heard, I haven't heard very many. The woman is always in the background. But the pillow talk at the end of the day between husband and wife, it's usually from the wife that some decisions are made, and then they go back to the circle as chief and council or whatever, and share that thought. I think that women have played a major part in the change and in the development of our First Nations communities. During the time of Treaty 7 Management Corporation, my mother died. It was quite devastating. I decided to move back home. . . . Where was I? While at Treaty 7, my mother passed away. So I felt the need to come back home. I wanted to be with family. So I came back home and then I began as the HR director for the Blood Tribe administration in our community. That administration had 15 departments. So I had to work closely with all of the directors and with my immediate supervisor, who was the CEO, and make changes there. When I first started, I got a lot of calls from community members saying that we're never at work; we can never get a hold of anybody. I wanted to use technology. I'm no techie myself, but I did some research and I thought, okay here's a way to get all of the employees to the office on time. I introduced the hand punch system; you had to use your hand to clock in every day and clock out. There was some reluctance at first but everybody started to fall into place. I believe they continued to use that even after I left. During COVID I think they did something else; because of COVID they couldn't use that hand punch system anymore; so I'm not sure. I've been gone from the Blood Tribe administration now for ten years. Actually no, I left there in 2012. I left there in 2012 and then I decided I'm not ready to just stop working. So what can I do. So I thought, okay I'll put into practise all that I've been doing as an HR person. So today I call myself an independent consultant. Probably one of the best things I've ever done for myself was to take that risk, that challenge to go out on my own. There's no guarantee of a paycheque every two weeks, but you have to do what you have to do and what you can do, given the situation. So for me now, I know that Dallas used to call me when I was at Blood Tribe administration as the HR director. He used to call me Dedikatie. I would work until 7 or 7:30 and then go home. I just always wanted to finish what I started. So it was very important

for me to be able to do that wherever I worked. I've always worked really hard. I've always, like I said, done things for our community. He probably thought it was going to be a little bit easier now that I was going to be an independent consultant. And maybe, like others, there was a lot of challenge going out on my own. Even though my background was in HR, I still didn't have that confidence. I didn't think I was good enough. When you look at it as an insurance broker, something like that was with the HR director all the time with our employees trying to get them the best deal for group insurance, life, pensions, those kinds of things. I went out and got my license to become an insurance broker. But I'm Native, I'm female, and how many First Nations insurance brokers have you see in the community? Zero. So no one had any faith in my capabilities, even though Alberta government licensed me to do that. I think that's one of the things, that as First Nations people we don't boost each other up. We question and we ignore and we just don't want to deal with you. But that was in the beginning; today I'm doing quite well. I'm also doing, I did a lot of facilitation. On the job I had to facilitate orientation, conflict management, all of those kinds of things. So I do that a lot now with various companies on the reserve and off the reserve. The best part of my job in all of my jobs was developing policy. I've had an opportunity to write policy for organizations, operational and personnel policies. That's the next step. That's the next level I want to take our policies, is to Indigenize our policies, incorporate our cultural way of doing things. For example the disciplinary policy, it's gone one, two, three steps. We need more steps than that. On my own everywhere I worked I would say, okay, this is a friendly reminder. It's not going on your record as a verbal warning or anything like that. But it's a friendly reminder before we have to actually start using those steps; then it goes into your file. So that was kind of the way that I helped employees, and that's the N[35:19] way, we help each other. We don't discourage each other; we don't condemn. That's kind of what I've always tried to do wherever I worked – encourage people and try to lift them up and help them be their best selves, and guide them if I need to. A lot of people call me and ask me for direction. I try to give them my best advice but I always leave it up to them, because there are certain things that could happen if you give the wrong advice or they don't do it exactly the way you tell them to do. They could turn around and blame you for everything. I learned that the hard way on the job where I did that and it came back on me. I couldn't do anything about it except to say, yeah, I did say that, but I thought you were going to do it this way. No, you told me this. So that kind of back and forth argument. It really hurt and that's when I said, okay I'm

never doing that again. I don't ever want to hurt myself or anyone else. It's important for me moving along in this journey as an independent consultant that I don't hurt myself, because it could hurt my business. But more importantly, I try not to hurt anybody else by giving them the wrong advice. If I don't know the answer or if I don't have any advice, I will tell them I can't do anything for you. But if I think I know, I will tell them, if that were me this is what I would do and this is how I would do it. But that's you, and our situations are very different. So you decide. I always say that -- you decide what you want to do. Right now I don't have to report to anybody. I get to choose my hours. I get to choose what I want to do and who I want to do it with and where. I could be in an office somewhere or I could be at home on my couch in the corner. I have a real comfortable couch and I sit in that corner all the time. It's more worn than the rest of my furniture, because I sit there all the time. But that's my comfort space and I feel like that's where all of these ideas come up. Right now I guess my biggest project moving forward right now that I continue to work on is the supportive housing complex for the homeless. I'm the lead innovator and vice president of Changing Horses NFP Society. We formed in 2019 and there is a group of us from the Blood reserve that are a part of this Changing Horses. Dr. Esther Tailfeathers, Tim Tailfeathers, who's a pharmacist, Annette Bruised Head is an educator, Clark Bruised Head is also an educator, and myself with HR background. In 2019 we formed this Changing Horses NFP Society and we decided our vision mission is going to be [38:52]; translated to English it means "we will assist the Native people". So we started to look for grants that would allow us to do that. We came across this one through ISC, Indigenous Services Canada. They were looking for proposals on innovative housing for a vulnerable sector. So we chose the homeless. Out of 360 plus applicants from across Canada, they were only selecting 24. Ours was one of them. When we got selected, we were given one year to answer five additional key points of our project, and that's where I became the lead innovator. I took on that task of proving our project worthy for further development. Then COVID hit. So the challenge was double. It was really difficult to communicate with people, because everybody was learning at that time to continue working. But how do we continue that communication flowing from community to the office, to our clientele and every which way? For me, not being an entity or department under the umbrella of chief and council, the challenge was it was not our mandate. I began to hate the word mandate, because that's what everyone said. I knocked on every door and they said, who gave you the mandate? Well nobody gave us the mandate, because we just

formed as a society and we applied for this grant and we got selected. But I thank chief and council; they were very quick to support us. They gave us the area, the ground, the land where we could build. Right now today we are building the supportive housing complex for the homeless. We've got some of our homeless individuals working as part of our construction crew. We've got a lot of the community now coming to us, coming to me and asking how can we be of assistance, how can we work together for the homeless? Just recently I've been asked to be a keynote speaker for the big conference that they're having in Ontario. I have never been in that kind of capacity. It just blows me away that somebody wants to hear from me and to hear how I did all of this. It's amazing. I never thought of myself as someone like that. I've always thought of myself as someone, sorry. . . So, yeah, I was asked to be a keynote speaker in a big conference down east, and I have never reached that level. I've never aspired to be at that level. I just enjoy being in the background and doing as much as I possibly can. They're using words like, you're amazing; what you've done is amazing; you're inspiring; you're so passionate about what you do and it's so obvious: we want you to spread that. So I agreed to do that. But now when I think about it I think, oh my god, what did I get myself into? I never wanted to do that. But I mentioned my parents, what they instilled in me as a person to respect, to work hard, and to be mindful of others' needs and to be always giving and to treat others the way you want to be treated. I've tried to do that in everything that I do in my life and I think that's been very rewarding. I'm happy to be where I'm at right now as an independent consultant. . . .

I am preparing right now to make the trip to Ontario in June. I've been thinking about what I would include in my PowerPoint presentation. It's important for me that they know where I came from, from the Blood Tribe. I want to definitely include that as part of my introduction. I want to always and I always have tried everywhere I go to be able to tell people, I am Tsikinaakii, that's my Blackfoot name. It was given to me by my mom before she passed away, and it's her mom's name, my grandmother's name. There are four girls in our family. She said I was the one who reminded her a great deal of her mother. Her mother was very strict, a very strong woman, had a good sense of humor, worked really hard, and usually didn't take no for an answer. I think that's why I succeeded with the Changing Horse project. It was during COVID, and I knocked on every door. Whenever the door shut on me, I knew there was another door somewhere, and I could get a little bit or even a lot from that door opening. I believe it was Annette who said, geez Katie, you remind me of those people that are selling things door to door. When the door is just

about to slam on them, they put their foot in the door so they can keep it open just enough to continue to do their pitch. Is that what you're doing? I said, pretty much. But what motivated me and what kept me going was the fact that it was for the homeless. They deserve their own space. When I was interviewing them, we said, we need to get them involved in our planning. We can't be the type of people that we say, this is what you need, when we've never been homeless; we've never experienced that. So we got them involved. We did a couple of Kentucky Fried dinners with them down in Cardston at what they call Tent City. We went there and gave them Kentucky Fried chicken and fries and whatnot, and we heard from them. We heard their stories. Those are the things that I want to share in June. I want to show some of their pictures, I want to share their stories. Then I want to talk about the challenges there are for the homeless. I want people to start seeing the importance of caring for them. Like I said, we have a few of them working on our construction crew. They're very capable. If they're given the opportunity, I'm sure they would come through. That's the message I want to leave with them in Ontario. With this I think it's important that you never forget where you came from, and in whatever you do we always try to make sure that they know where you came from and that they learn a little bit about your culture. You can incorporate our [47:17] way of doing things into just about anything in the world today. I always try to look for those opportunities to make sure it happens.

[END]