

## **We Rise Episode 36 - Water Protector Interview Ember Phoenix & Ben Joselyn on Building Community, Healing & Resistance**

### *Podcast Transcript*

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*[Music - We Rise Anthem by Pink Panther Sorority]*

*5-6...5-6-7-8*

*Chant:*

*I rise.*

*You Rise*

*We Rise, We Rise, We Rise*

*Singing/Harmonizing:*

*We (clap - clap clap)*

*Rise (clap - clap clap)*

*Up (clap)*

*Chant:*

*We Rise (clap clap)*

*We Rise, We Rise (clap), We Rise (clap clap)]*

*[Sound of soft splashes of water]*

HOST/CAT: This episode offers our full conversation with Ember Phoenix and Ben Joslyn, Water Protectors on Anishinaabe land, building community & protecting the sacred. For more on the movement to Stop Line 3, you can listen to We Rise Episode 32 called “Have you Heard of Line 3?”, Episode 35, The People are a River, and Episode 37, our full interview with water protector Jaiké Spotted Wolf. Some context, Line 3 is a pipeline expansion project that will process tar sands from Alberta, Canada and carry the refined oil across Anishinaabe treaty land in Minnesota to Superior, Wisconsin. Enbridge Corporation, the Canadian pipeline construction company, is responsible for

the largest oil spill in the US in 1991 in Grand Rapids, MN. They've been permitted by the State of Minnesota to remove 5 billion gallons of water from the Mississippi headwaters to complete this project, which has already wreaked havoc on the land, water, and water protectors. The Mississippi headwaters have dropped 10 feet since April of 2021. There have already been 28 drilling spills in the wetlands. And over 700 water protectors have been arrested by local sheriff departments, which are being paid off by Enbridge. The situation is dire, worse by some accounts than the Dakota Access Pipeline, as this pipeline will cross over 227 waterways, including the Mississippi twice. The project's destruction and violence perpetuate climate catastrophe, and the brutalization of indigenous people, the vital wild rice, the animals, and land. As we continue to experience climate emergency after emergency, we have so much to learn from the struggle against Line 3. Despite the ongoing violence and destruction to people, land, and water, mainstream media is not picking up this narrative. While the Biden administration canceled the Keystone XL pipeline, they continue to support the Line 3 pipeline. Let's listen to Ben and Ember share how Line 3 relates to our survival about the pain of the devastation to the land and people, and the joy of building community as an act of healing and resistance.

HOST/CAT: Do you want to introduce yourselves?

EMBER: Ember Phoenix.

BEN: Ben Joselyn.

HOST/CAT: And how long have you both been here?

BEN: I showed up in the beginning of April, and I've kind of been here since.

EMBER: I also showed up in the beginning of April, but I left to pack up my house and put it in storage so I can come back and just be here, and I got back in June.

HOST/CAT: Where are we right now?

EMBER: Northern Minnesota.

BEN: Northern Minnesota on Anishinaabe Territory, an 1855 Treaty area. We're on the land that's owned by an indigenous land trust called Akiing. And Akiing translates to the land to which people belong.

*[Sound of drilling]*

HOST/CAT: That's a loud sound.

BEN: Oh, yeah. That's Enbridge. They are actively destroying the land to which people belong. That's a 30- or 40-foot-high post being driven straight into the ground, adjacent to a pipeline that they've put under the Mississippi River, right next door to us and it grates on us every day and makes our existence more difficult.

EMBER: Yeah, we can feel it vibrating through our bodies.

HOST/CAT: Yeah. I was in the water this morning and could feel the vibration in the water, which was terrifying because water carries memory. So, you both got here around April after a year of uprising and lifetimes of resistance, and I'd love if you can talk about your experience arriving here and the coalescence of these uprisings and movements for our liberation.

EMBER: Absolutely, so I am black and indigenous. I am enslaved African and, you know, trans-Atlantic nonsense. I don't know where my people are from because that's a part of being brought over here and not having access to that history. And I'm also Diné with my people in Arizona and Cherokee. Sitting at that intersection of being black and indigenous, I have always tried really hard to figure out how to navigate what it means to not be of this continent and to be of this continent that has been colonized. Like, you know, part of my people was brought over here by the colonizers, and the other half of my people were murdered, and their territory taken over. And we now live in a world where, because of white supremacy culture, all of these issues are structured in such a way where creating solidarity is really hard because white supremacy would like to keep us all apart. I have spent the last few years of my life doing a lot of Black Lives Matter stuff, fighting for the rights of the black community which we all know in this country are not seen as humans. Like all the deaths that we've had to navigate, all of the oppression and segregation and harm that comes towards our people. And there's no end in sight. And being also indigenous and very clear and grounded in my spiritual practice, I always knew that there had to be a way to take the practices of my indigenous ancestors around sovereignty and community and interdependence and apply them in a way that we could build the communities of support and uprising in between different communities. I was nervous about coming up here because I do know that there's this place where you sit when you look one way but identify another. And being in northern Minnesota with like Proud Boys and stuff, looking like a black woman, that that could be triggering. But I also know that this fight is all of our fight. There is no way to talk about reparations and repair and harm and racism if we're not talking about land sovereignty, if we're not talking about LandBack, if we're not looking at the genocide and the invisibility of the indigenous peoples. There's no talking about racial injustice if we're not talking about climate injustice. The fight is the same. The problem is how do we negate what it means to be colonized as a

black person but also to be struggling with the harm caused as an indigenous person? Like, where's the healing that comes from taking these two groups of people and getting them together to work through some of the harm that is caused by white supremacy culture so that we can get to a place where we are grounded in this fight together? There's no separation for me between the two. I don't think that we can have the healing and the repair that's needed as my black community if we're not also fighting for land sovereignty and these treaty rights, this water, the peoples whose land that they've always been here to steward was taken and is being harmed. So, I knew coming here was a way to build a bridge. It was a way that I did not have to deny either part of myself. It was a way that I could figure out what it meant to be seen in all parts of who I am and all of those intersections, and to move forward with healing and justice centered in that place versus having to choose between one or the other.

HOST/CAT: Right. Do you – I mean, you don't know how long you'll be up here, and it makes me think about what it might be like to bring this experience back to communities at home, back to Black Lives Matter Movement, and how the LandBack and Black Lives Matter Movement can learn from and grow with each other.

EMBER: Yeah. I will be here until my ancestors tell me there's somewhere else to be. Next week, I'm going to start building my club house. So, like this is a thing. But how do we talk, you know, like we talk about my people, my black people. We talk about that whole like 40 acres and a mule thing. We talk about like all of the things that were promised to us when we supposedly were freed from slavery, right. But how can you give reparations to one group while this country, Turtle Island, which should be in the stewardship of indigenous people is not there. Like how do you hand land to someone when the people who steward the land don't have sovereignty over the land? And so, I think that bringing it back to the community literally is that conversation. Like, how do we honor what it means to be a people that were enslaved and brought over here and harmed and continue to be harmed when the original people of this land are having that same fight? Like, how do we figure out how to get to a place where we recognize that LandBack actually means that we're all stewarding in right relationship with this earth and with these waters together and that there is enough for all? Because that is at the crux of actually both of those cultures. You know, black American culture exists so that my people can survive over here, but we have traditions from our country, you know, from our ancestors that are very in alignment with how indigenous people of Turtle Island operate. We're about community. We don't function outside of community. We both believe in not leaving anyone behind, and we're very tribal in that we recognize that we are autonomous humans, but that our autonomy actually creates this wonderful collage of community where each person's gift is used in that community to create an existence that uplifts and supports us all. So, it's just about

getting to that place where we're willing to have really hard conversations about what it means to have been colonized in the ways that we had to be in order to survive here, and doing the work to decolonize ourselves, not feeding into these white supremacy capitalistic systems, all while still trying to survive within them, so that we can be present for what's actually necessary which is sovereignty, autonomy, land-back, and making sure that the rights of those from this land, the stewards of this land, are upheld so that we all can learn to thrive together and stop having to be in a place where we're constantly surviving and dying because of these systems that are not functional.

HOST/CAT: Yeah. Do you want to add anything?

BEN: Sure. I'm as white as I look. My grandfathers put together a chart of my ancestors. And in looking at thousands of names has yet to find someone who's not from western Europe in my family chart. My father was born in Northern Minnesota – or not Northern Minnesota but Crystal, which is near Minneapolis. And the reason that I'm here is largely because of, you know, centuries of colonization but also sort of, more directly, my father was born there, and then his father would take us into this sort of mythical north woods. And there's a lot, a lot goes into the way that Minnesotan culture talks about the north woods and the way that it's this colonized, pristine space that actually has been extracted from, that actually has been stolen. That there's this huge dichotomy and really violent difference between the way that we portray this history and this land and the way that white people have treated the people and the land and the water here for a very long period of time. But I grew up believing in that myth, coming up here. And it was the space that I learned to be myself, was the space that I learned about a very specific white form of community, but where I grew some bonds where I started to love community in its own way and where I grew a deep and profound sort of love of the water. And then where I was born is central Illinois which is the land of many people before it was colonized and is currently the land of very intense colonization. I didn't even understand when people talk about colonization as an ongoing process, because I thought it was just over. We've got a college that has a very, very racist history with an indigenous mascot. And with land that is all constantly poisoned. When you think about colonization as an ongoing process, not only as sort of society but as how we treat the land. You go two miles from any direction and you're in a corn field or a soybean field that is literally blanketed in pesticides, herbicides, you know, petroleum-based fertilizer multiple times a year. We poison the whole earth multiple times a year in order to maintain this control and this colonial practice that is so destructive and against life. And I'm sort of physically and mentally sick there most of the time. And that's part of the reason I grew and needed this connection to the earth of up here. Part of the reason I find the need to fight for something better. And as

we're here, we don't only – I'm reminded constantly, it's not about a lot of innovation and figuring out the new way within this sort of green colonial, green capitalist process, but instead about following indigenous leadership and the way that things have been and can be returned. You know, not pretending that we can return to exactly the way things were but to restore practices that were much, much better for the earth for thousands and thousands and thousands of years. So, doing my best to find my place in this fight and support the folks who were taking us that way.

HOST/CAT: You two have been holding it down, holding space, organizing folks here for a while. I'm wondering if you want to share maybe some of the most intense challenges. And this could be anything from like how folks show up to obviously the drill. And also, maybe what's been healing.

EMBER: Yeah, I think, you know, in line with like the conversation that we're having, like the question that I've consistently asked myself is like how do you find justice for a stolen people on a stolen land? I think that being here, that's exactly what we're doing, because by trying to restore indigenous practices and leadership and following the treaties, we have the ability to create a dynamic where, when we're listening to the land itself and to our elders and to the indigenous wisdom, that isn't just indigenous of Turtle Island, but the indigenous wisdom of black people. Because like our wisdoms in our tribes are very similar in those beliefs of how we walk and navigate with each other, that up here, what we're basically trying to do is model that. Because for years, you know, in black community, we talk about a thing and we try to get people to see a thing, and we talk about white supremacy culture, we talk about colonization, and we end up arguing with people who don't have their humanity intact enough to even understand that something can be different. And so, the talking doesn't work. And so, being here, we're working on just modeling it. We're doing it. Like, you know, we spend a lot of time up here dealing with whiteness inaction. You know, people come up here. One of the big things about like indigenous sovereignty and fighting these pipelines is that you deal with whiteness in the form of people care about climate justice. And so, they get attached to indigenous sovereignty, in the realm of I don't want that pipe in, without actually understanding that it's so much more than that. Yes, the corporations that keep trying to destroy this land are terrible, horrible practices that are just a continuation of centuries of the rape and pillage of this land and its people. But you can't actually care about climate justice if you're not paying attention to those marginalized who are most affected by it. And that would be the indigenous folks who nurtured and steward this land way before, you know, people from other countries came over and took over. Like they had a system that worked. That system can still be applied. It's applicable. And so, if you're not getting in touch with the parts of yourself that are holding all of this ancestral trauma of the harm done here, and like

dismantling it so that we can get back to a place where we're conscious of how we move with each other and with the land, then we're not actually going to make a difference. And so, here, that's what we do. We spend a lot of time doing trauma work here and navigating white supremacy culture and white fragility and patriarchal nonsense and trying to teach people what it actually means to let women lead. Indigenous and black women have a wisdom that is always superseded by nonsense, but it's so powerful. It's so dynamic. It's so full of magical groundedness that, here, that's what we follow. We really try to let the leadership of the people of this land and of those who sit in marginalized places create the foundations. Like we're not operating from any structure that's already set up in this colonized world. We're creating our own from the ground up, and we're doing it together and making sure to include all of those voices that for centuries have been denied and silenced. And it is very hard because of that intersection with dealing with climate and with this pipe. And so, we spend a lot of time here being really grounded and really intentional and healing, and you know, being vulnerable enough to look inside ourselves and all of us. Like, you know, and where those places inside of us where we hold our own ancestral trauma, where we hold our own colonization, and speaking it out loud, and once we know better, we do better. I think the hardest thing for me is that because I sit at that intersection of presenting as just a black person but also holding indigenous blood lines, that a lot of anti-blackness tends to show up. And to navigate that and to make the choice to be willing to navigate white supremacy culture and educate and give so much labor, it's literally a moment-by-moment thing that I have to renegotiate with myself. Like, what am I doing? How am I doing it? Is this good for me? Am I taking good care of myself? Do I feel heard? Do I feel safe? And I consistently have to remind myself that my goal is to create a world where the generations to come do not have to navigate in this way, but also to show that this fight does not need to be done in a way where I'm suffering. Like, so, I try really hard as one of the people in this camp to model joy as an act of resistance. So, dance parties sometimes need to happen. From like you know having concerts on the river to like bring awareness, to praying in the river, to singing, to moving our bodies, to cooking really good food, to giggling. You know, I try to make sure that there's time for that in between, you know, the pain and the suffering and the noise and the vibrations of that drill, and the nasty racism that infects these towns because they don't have the skillset yet to know that this fight is theirs as well. That we're not just fighting for a people. We're fighting for all the people.

BEN: Yeah, the hardest parts for me are two-fold. Well, there's all kinds of pieces, but I love everybody here. And there's a multi-billion-dollar oil corporation that is doing its best to destroy us. There's the State which has centuries of oppressive practices that it's honed to destroy us. And so, we sit here in the forest, listening to the birds and to

the drill. And we're trying to create this new way. And outside of this space, you have the desperation of our colonial empire and white people who see it destroying the earth and come here with that ecological, like we have to stop Line 3 perspective, and they show up for three days, saying I'm willing to throw my – you know, I've got three days because I have to get back to my desperate job. So, I'm here to stop the Line in three days, trying to understand – who often do not even show up trying to understand everything that we're doing but trying to understand just the fastest way that they can throw their precious little selves onto the pipe in order to destroy the Line 3, but in a way that's disregarding not only their own precious lives but also sort of what we're trying to create here and not doing much as much of the creation as they are the being against. And we struggle to – I mean, one of the things we've seen recently is how those people who come through so quickly and take their own independent actions, the repercussions of those land on the folks who are staying here on the camps and on the people who are left behind and on the most marginalized, be they indigenous people, black people, queer people, all of those folks end up holding, and the ones who stayed. Even, you know, in this camp we're got white folks who live here and whose families have been here for generations. And even the repercussions there, of the local towns who know who this person is, and these people are, bring their own traumas. They're not on the same level. And I don't mean to equate them, but the folks who stay here have to navigate the messes that people leave and where I don't – it is – there's this desperation and there's this sort of belief that folks show up would say there's not enough time.

HOST/CAT: Yeah.

BEN: And it's hard with the world burning and the ocean burning. In Canada, 117 degrees, and all the fires in California, and all the, you know, the droughts and the hunger, just all across the world, and Covid happening, you know, the catastrophes, it's really easy to just get lost in the magnitude of trauma and stress and tragedy that exists in the world. But then to say we don't have enough time and to make decisions that break yourself and break community is a destructive practice of its own. So, navigating that is something that we constantly do with people who show up for two days or two hours or two years. I mean, there's folks who come who've been here the whole time, who – and I don't mean to blame them, but – or there's, yeah, there's nothing but respect and joy I have for the folks who make this their life. But then sort of within community, building community, it's just really lovely to be with everyone and also really hard to navigate people's, you know, as community is hard. It's just hard.

EMBER: It's messy and it's supposed to be messy because we're taking you know all types of people from all types of places of all types of levels of knowledge, awareness

and we're asking that they be vulnerable enough to sit in a very, very, very uncomfortable place and do this work together. And that is messy. But it's also beautiful. It's chaos and it's joy, and it's ridiculous on some days. But the end goal is completely worth it. Because how else do we do this?

BEN: Yeah, we got to bring a bunch of people in. And there's folks who've been here for years, and there's folks who've never been here before. And trying to make a community out of that and have the patience to bring people in and to grow the movement and to say, how do we show a better world to so many people, is exhausting and necessary. And it's slow and tedious and, yes, we took some big, giant puppeteer costumes on a Ferris wheel the other day, and a lot of folks don't know what that's about. But it's about going to the world and just saying, we are here for joy. We are here and we love to have lemonade on a Ferris wheel, and we also love our planet and each other, and yeah, there's a lot of space for joy here.

HOST/CAT: What I'm hearing is a refrain, like deepening, expanding on what Ember just was saying, how so much of this is trauma healing work. And you know, white supremacy, cis-heteropatriarchal, capitalist, colonial culture runs on urgency, on perfectionism, on individualism. Listening to you, I'm reflecting on us arriving and both of you saying, go to the river, take a day, which was necessary. And I'm also really appreciating you both expanding on the creation is just as much a part of this as is the resistance, which is just like how movement work is, and I think gets left out of conversation of mainstream narratives of movement building and liberation.

BEN: Oh, yeah. People know the world is broken. I mean, one of the most unified beliefs out there is that things should be better. And you know, some folks, even the ones who are yelling, America, fuck yeah, are also complaining about the government, complaining because you know people's lives are broken right now. And so, running out there and trying to yell desperately, like can't you see the world is broken. Or even the folks who come up and say, like, don't you understand the pipe is being laid under the ground right now? How are you like taking time to look at the river? Like, of course we know the pipe's being built. Like, there's somebody who came up and literally had the gall to tell someone who had been living here their whole life – and these people have been here for a long time – like look her in the face and say, don't you understand this pipe is being built all over the state. And he like, I understand you're desperate, but you don't understand the depths to which we know, that we've been feeling the pipe be put under the ground. Yes, we know the pipe is under the ground. Yes, we know that our future is in danger. Yes, we know that this is urgent.

EMBER: And there has to be a balance. Yes, it's urgent. Yes, we have to act. And we have to act with intention. We cannot respond in the way white supremacy wants us to which is with that like fast-paced, anxious, you know, response that tends to mean we're not grounded, we're not intentional, and we're not paying attention to the consequences of our behavior. There are many ways to do this work. And everybody's way is needed in some way or another. So, there are those who like do policy and talk to politicians and write bills and do that. There are those who are on different frontlines, you know, resisting police brutality and you know standing for the lives for people. There are those who are making sure that like knowledge is being disbursed and that people are hearing about what's happening here, what's happening with murdered indigenous women, what's happening with black lives, what's happening with children in the system, what's happening with our prison, our school-to-prison pipeline. Like you know, all of those things are necessary. And then there are those who are actively here protecting in the form of building. You know, like we were in the water the other day resisting and finding joy. I was with my indigenous elders and some other people, and we were talking about how like the warriors are needed and the healers are needed. And it's so true. Like it's really important to find your lane, to stay in it, and to understand that all of the ways are needed. And up here right now, yes, sometimes we actively get in the way. Sometimes we're praying, and sometimes we're building. You know, like all of the ways really matter. And for me it's been about like finding that balance and figuring out where I belong. I've watched over the last few years, so many activists, people of color, black people, indigenous people, queer people who burn out, who are no longer with us. And it's because we're so willing to put our bodies on the line because things are urgent, and we don't have the care and the support and time to heal that we need that we're dying for the cause. And that's not sustainable. That's not sustainable. So – and it's necessary because somebody has to be yelling. Someone has to be standing. Someone has to be making sure that these voices are heard and that these murders are not going without justice. And we don't get it most of the time, but that doesn't mean we're going to stop demanding it. And so, it's like finding that balance of being in that place of urgency, because I don't want to lose one more person. Each life matters, right. And so, like I feel the urgency, but I also recognize that some people have to slow down and take the time to be really conscious and like, okay, so we trying to burn shit down because these systems don't work. All of the foundations of this country were built upon belief systems that are harmful and only meant to protect a very small subset of people. And they need to come down. But what goes up in their place? We can't just tear something down and not have something that it there to hold the people. Because then more harm will happen. And so, while some people are in the place of fighting and functioning in a place of survival and defense, some people also need to be figuring out what those

new models look like. What are we trying to build instead and how do we do it? Like, let's not just talk about it, but let's create it. Let's see what can work. Let's see what it looks like when we take all the things that we know we want, and take all the things that we know we're missing, and take all of that hurt and all of that pain and all of that trauma and open up about it and heal together, what can exist inside and outside of that place? What beautiful, magnificent reality can we envision and then turn into a new paradigm?

BEN: And if we don't practice it when we tear this down, we're just going to recreate a version of what we already have, and it's going to continue to be bad and destructive. And I also don't want to dismiss the folks who are standing in front of this line and standing up against what is just crushing. And I find so much beauty and bravery and preciousness in the folks who are standing up and saying no. I think that that is a hugely valuable part of this movement that wouldn't exist without it. I wouldn't be here if they hadn't brought me up. People who are doing those kinds of things brought attention to this said no, said no loudly, said no with their bodies and at great consequence to themselves. And that's part of the reason that I knew it was happening and part of the reason why I'm here. And I never mean to discredit that. I mean to say that there's ways to do it that are –

HOST/CAT: Less harmful.

BEN: – less harmful than others.

HOST/CAT: Yeah.

EMBER: And it's also a privilege. So, there's a privilege that comes along with the ability and comfort to physically put your body on the line or physically chain yourself down to something. And then there are those who, it literally is a great sacrifice because we're already sitting in marginalized places. And you know, some of us do choose to still put our bodies on the line, and some of us choose to do the work in different ways. And we really just need to acknowledge that and understand that again there are multiple ways to do this work. As a queer, black, indigenous female, two-spirit identifying person, I'm not locking my body down to a pipe, because that's violence that I don't need. And then the police retaliation after that I don't need. Have I done that kind of work before? Have I stood at the front lines? Absolutely. But I always stood at the front lines in defense of something or someone. So, like I stood at the front lines defending indigenous people, defending my black elders and my black, you know, niblings and siblings, like I am totally willing to put my body on the line for that. But no, I personally don't have the privilege to do this work in a way where I can take the

chance to traumatize myself and maybe not even be around for my child by locking down to a pipe and knowing that I'm going to be arrested and brutalized. So, I don't. I find what my lane is, and I find the way to do this work and not have to sacrifice myself. And it's really great to have those who can do that, who do have the privilege to do that, or who feel like that is whether they're in a marginalized position or not, that is where they best serve the cause. I best serve this cause being with indigenous women and leadership, praying and creating new paradigms and singing and dancing and talking about trauma and talking about white supremacy culture, working on racial injustice and trying to bridge the gap, trying to make this space a safe place for black people because the fight is similar but also trying to make that space a safe place for indigenous people so that, you know, all of the harms that we cause each other because of our own internal you know colonization and our own ancestral trauma can have a space to come up and be healed so that we can treat each other in a way that bridges connection, in a way that bridges true solidarity, and in a way that says no to white supremacy culture and no to staying separate in a fight that literally includes all of us. I truly believe in leaving no body behind, but in order to get to the place where we leave no body behind, we have to work through the things that cause us not to be safe to each other. Because I'm not going to put myself in a situation where I allow violence to come towards me, even by my own people, right. So, it's like let's do the work so that that doesn't need to be the reality, and let's stop this pipeline in all the ways that need to be stopped. And let's stop racial injustice and the senseless murder of indigenous women and black people, and let's do something different, and let's do it together, and let's do it in honoring the sovereignty of the people who this land has always been home. And let's do it in sovereignty to the people who were brought over here to cultivate and build upon this land after all of the harm that was done to it. Like we all serve a goal you know and a purpose here. We all had blood, sweat, and tears laid down in the foundations of the aftermath of colonization. It was my indigenous people that taught white people how to survive here. And then it was my black folks that continued to help them learn how to survive and built all of their buildings and taught them how to farm and did the farming for them and created the wealth that they now have. And so now, we're like no. Like you don't get to benefit off of our pain and suffering. We're going to return the land into the sovereignty of those who have always stewarded it, and we are going to find a way to be together that does not cause more trauma but that offers a space for healing and growth.

BEN: Yep. That. Yeah, I mean, in terms of locking down and stuff, like as I drove up, I had this – most of the time I was pretty clear with myself about how I'm showing up and going to chop wood and build toilets if that was necessary, because that's part of the work that I did at Standing Rock in a way that I knew I could be useful. And I was

doing this, you know, 13-hour drive north, and at some point, had this solemn moment where I started to like think about whether or not I would sacrifice my life if it meant that the drill would stop, and the Mississippi would be saved. And then had to laugh at myself for my own fucking white saviorism bullshit. Just like there is no world in which that scenario exists.

HOST/CAT: Yeah. Yeah.

BEN: That's just not the question and it's not useful to be thinking in those terms. And so, got back to how can I show up in a good way? How can I be useful here? And I try and do what I'm asked to the best of my ability, and then the next thing.

HOST/CAT: Yeah. Dignity. That word just popped up in my mind, and I've been doing some, there's like some politicized somatic healing work that is from lots of places. But there's some folks in the Bay area. And one of the things is dignity. And dignity is like, it's so many things, but one of the things that I learned is like dignity means I matter and I'm worth it and you matter and you're worth it and we matter and we're worth it together.

EMBER: That is just a foundational belief of my people, like you exist therefore you matter. Like creator created you and that's all you actually need to be worthy. Like you are here, therefore you matter. And like getting people to understand that in a world that has told them for so long that so much of them like isn't worthy or isn't acceptable unless they fit into structures is one of the main things that I try to tear down. Like even when it comes to people who show up and are harmful, like your worth is not determined by your behavior. Your behavior may be trash and in a lot of times, it is trash behavior, but you still are worthy human. You just need to believe it and then live and move from that place. And then your behavior will be less trashy.

HOST/CAT: And you have to practice it. You know one thing that I've been thinking about as well is the clear relationship between abolition and this work, because obviously one of the results of defending land and water is risking arrest. And so, abolishing the prison industrial complex, abolishing policing would make this work a little less dangerous.

EMBER: It would –

BEN: Absolutely.

EMBER: – make this work less dangerous. The police systems in this country are horrendous, and they're violent, and they are racist, and they are set up to harm folks.

They're not set up to protect and heal folks and to nourish folks. And you know, having been on the front lines of many resistances, like what's always the same no matter where I am is that behavior of the police forces and their brutality, and their constant warfare against marginalized people, and it needs to end. Like it's really hard to get up after being in bed at night, listening to this ground being drilled and harmed and pillaged to have to navigate brutish police protecting the folks that are destroying the land but sitting in your face and gaslighting you, and telling you that they're neutral, and they're here to protect the community. Well, the community that you're supposedly trying to protect are telling you you're harming us. Like this drill, this corporation, Enbridge, and all these other corporations, they're harming us. So, if you're actually protecting us, put your damn guns away and put your bodies in front of ours. Tell these people to stop. Don't allow them to invade our space. Don't go around brutally assaulting us and imprisoning us for standing for what's right. You know, like every time we come back to this place, whether it's someone videotaping the abuse of a black person during a protest or watching someone be harmed, or whether it's us standing in front of our lodge trying to protect the treaties of this land, and protect the indigenous women of this land whose right to religious freedom is being infringed upon, the one thing that's always the same is the a-hole cops that are harming us instead of actually standing with us. And the way they do it is warfare. It's not done in like any type of civil way, and it's because they're connected to us as humans. Like the laws that they go by were created to harm. They were not created to restore any kind of justice or like peace. And we need to get rid of them because we can actually police ourselves. We don't need people from the outside coming into communities that they don't understand and enforcing their will upon them. We need to get to the point with each other where we hold each other accountable, where we have accountability practices, where we have repair processes, where we're doing transformational justice work, not allowing outsiders who have no concept of what that looks like come in, slap metal cuffs on us, and throw us in cages, while beating us in the process because it's fun for them.

BEN: One of the other intersections that happens here is that half the folks arresting us are the Department of Natural Resources cops, the DNR cops with Conservation Officer written on the back of their shirts which would make you laugh if it didn't make you cry. When I was arrested, I noticed the fact that the Akin County Sheriffs have embroidered badges that have the outline of the county and the Mississippi River running through it. And yet our people stand there defending treaty rights, defending our land and water, standing in front of machines destroying the earth and have asked the cops, why are you here, and the cops say, because they asked us to, talking about Enbridge. Enbridge has an escrow with the State of Minnesota or any police

department that spends time policing the protestors, the water protectors, it gets billed directly to Enbridge. So, any police department that's suffering financially can just go get themselves a little bonus, can get themselves out of trouble by coming and harassing us. We know that harassment is targeted specifically at the indigenous, black voices, the queer voices that show up here. And so, we've got these conservation officers who are harassing folks in order to not let them take water samples in rivers that are supposed to be protected, right. The Department of Natural Resources, we learned about the history of police and their origin as slave catchers. I recently learned that the origin of the DNR is about making sure that indigenous folks weren't destroying the land, and the racist ass history of the Department of Natural Resources isn't something that I had understood but part of the decolonial practices understanding all of these structures set up by the State. So, abolition applies there, too. And absolutely we're abolitionists.

EMBER: I just want to highlight what he just said, because I think I just want to clarify. Literally, this county, Akiing County's police force, literally have water protector badges on their uniforms. It is the outline of this county and the Mississippi River. If that's not a water protector badge, I don't know what is. And yet they're the last people protecting these waters. They're the ones harassing us actual water protectors. But I think that that is really, really poignant, and like I really feel like it's something that is just another form of the gaslighting that we continue to suffer in this country in general. Those who are meant to protect and who literally wear the badges and the uniforms of protection are actually the least likely to protect, while us normal citizens and the ones most harmed are the ones standing up, being like, hey, wait a minute. Can you not see what you're doing and what you're saying and how it's so out of alignment with what you're supposed to be doing?

HOST/CAT: Is there anything else either of you want to share for folks listening, for folks who are trying to learn about the movement to stop Line 3, about decolonization and abolition, about showing up well as a water protector?

EMBER: Yeah, I think that like people should know that this fight is all of ours for many reasons. We all are literally beings made up of matter and star dust. Like it's magical. We are magical. And these boxes and these labels that we've given and that have literally been put there to separate us are just constructs to harm us, and that there is no separation between fighting for the sovereignty and these treaty rights, and fighting for Black Lives Matter, and fighting for trans lives, and fighting for queer lives, and fighting for climate, and fighting for all of the many isms and oppressions and injustices of this world. It's all the same fight. And we're all just going about it in the ways that we know how. And so, even if you can't be here, you know, talking to your

families about what it means to decolonize, be willing to do your own personal trauma work so that you can get more centered and grounded, and what it means to look at each other as star beings, because I just feel like we're all star beings. And you know, being in your own local towns, like fighting those systems that are harmful to your communities is doing this work. And for those who do have the time, who do have the privilege, and who do feel the call, come on up. Be willing to be uncomfortable, be willing to find joy, be willing to like be vulnerable and help in the ways you can. And for those who can't and for those who aren't safe or who don't find that there's a call inside of them to directly be here, know that the work that you are doing as long as you're doing something, as long as you're using your voice in the ways that you know how, it matters. You matter. It's all worth it. And it's all going to lead to something beautiful if we can find a way to support and uplift each other and continue to grow and expand and envision together.

BEN: Yeah, this place is hard, but I don't want to be anywhere else. And there's so many of these places. This is not the only fight. Those fights in everybody's neighborhoods for trying to make sure that there's clean water, that you're respecting your own aqua, you know, that your river makes it to the sea, that indigenous people where you're at are honored and their treaty rights are restored, and their sovereignty is restored. There's this struggle everywhere. And we need to build each other up and to find a new and an old way. Yeah, it's beautiful to be here. And I think that anyone who wants to come, sort of see a part of it, that's part of the work we're trying to do is make that accessible and to be a place where folks can come and re-learn and do all the stuff that Ember's talking about and celebrate our star beings. So, there's plenty of things wrong with the world, but we've got to celebrate those that are right and practice those that are right so we can move into the world we deserve. Because we deserve joy and we deserve a planet where we can be on the earth and not feel poisoned, where we can have access to nature and climb a tree and swim in a body of water closest to you. It's just tragic that most people can't swim in the lakes and the streams near them for fear that agriculture runoff and just for the poisons that we constantly put in the earth, and to be in a world where those joys aren't denied ourselves and our children and our children's children.

EMBER: And follow indigenous leadership. You know, no matter where you are, indigenous people exist. Follow black leadership. Follow the leadership of queer folks, of women, of non-men who are in these positions of black, indigenous spaces doing the work. You know, like follow them, listen to them, honor them, uplift and support them. Figure out whose land you're inhabiting, and then do what you can in those areas to uplift those people, because all lands were stolen from the indigenous peoples. And so, everyone inhabits a territory that has an indigenous origin. Who are

those people? Get to know those people. Get to know your people because whiteness is a construct. Where do you actually come from? Where do your people come from? Where were their beliefs? What were their practices? Get grounded back into your ancestors. And in doing so, you get grounded back into the knowledge and wisdom that we all have inside of us, we were born with, about what it means to show up in right relationship with each other, with this land, with these waters, and with this universe. White supremacy culture created this separation, but we all come from somewhere. And wherever it is we come from, those people have traditions that are indigenous to taking care of and nurturing and stewarding those lands. And even if you're not there right now, you can get grounded back in that and do the work to show up, to follow the indigenous folks of this place that we call Turtle Island. And we can all do better. And once you know better, do better, period. End of story. Mic drop, I'm done.

HOST/CAT: Thank you both so much.

BEN: Thank you.

*[Sound of soft splashes of water]*

HOST/CAT: To learn more, stay connected and join in the movement to stop Line 3, you can visit [stopline3.org](http://stopline3.org). Thank you for listening to the We Rise Podcast. You can learn more about our cultural production at [WeRiseProduction.com](http://WeRiseProduction.com). We'd love to hear from you, and you can email us through the link on our website and connect with us on Instagram and Facebook @weriseproduction and on Twitter @weriseproducers. We Rise is a labor of love and we deeply appreciate your support. If you're able, you can contribute to our Patreon or PayPal which you can find on our website. Shout out to our brilliant music producer, DiaspoRADICAL, to the inspirational Youth of Pink Panther Sorority for our theme song. Our compassionate transcription, Yolanda Mendoza, and to our collaborators, creatives, and visionaries, lifting hearts and minds in classrooms, on stages, in Zoom rooms, and on front lines across Turtle Island and overseas.

*[Music - We Rise Anthem by Pink Panther Sorority]*

5-6...5-6-7-8

Chant:

*I rise.*

*You Rise*

*We Rise, We Rise, We Rise*

*Singing/Harmonizing:*

*We (clap - clap clap)*

*Rise (clap - clap clap)*

*Up (clap)*

*Chant:*

*We Rise (clap clap)*

*We Rise, We Rise (clap), We Rise (clap clap)*

*Singing/Harmonizing:*

*We (clap - clap clap)*

*Rise (clap - clap clap)*

*Up (clap)*

*Chant:*

*We Rise (clap clap)*

*We Rise, We Rise (clap), We Rise (clap clap)*

*Singing/Harmonizing:*

*We (clap - clap clap)*

*Rise (clap - clap clap)*

*Up (clap)*

*Chant:*

*We Rise (clap clap)*

*We Rise, We Rise (clap), We Rise (clap clap)]*