

# 032625\_Kunesh\_RAW

[00:00:00] **Lemley:** So we are now recording and my name is Tasha Af Lemley, representing Urban Green Lab and Tennessee State University.

[00:00:07] The date today is Wednesday, March the 26th, 2025. And the time, approximately 2:40 PM and I'm in Nashville, Tennessee. And taking a brief oral history of Tom Kish. Uh, could you say and spell your name? Tom.

[00:00:23] **Kunesh:** First name Tom. Last name Kish, K-U-N-E-S-H.

[00:00:30] **Lemley:** And do you consent to be recorded?

[00:00:32] **Kunesh:** Yes, I do.

[00:00:32] **Lemley:** Okay. So Tom, this is just gonna be an organic conversation and, um, we're gonna, we might feel like we're going all over the place, but it's often gonna be, we will keep coming back to the weather, climate, things around that, and around your memories around those things and memories, communal memories around, um, around weather in your life.

[00:00:54] Tell me a little bit about the basics. Like where were you born? Who are your who, who are your ancestors?

[00:01:01] **Kunesh:** I was born in St. Paul, Minnesota and grew up in Central Minnesota. For 19 years of my life, and it was all in Minnesota. And between St. Paul and Ramsey County and Sterns County up in the middle. I know, I presume you know who Garrison Keeler is?

[00:01:20] I do. Well, he's not from Sterns County, but he was doing this radio program up at St. John's University and that was about, uh, 15 miles west of us. And he made up Lake Wobegon from Sterns County. Okay. From Central Minnesota. And that's where I'm from.

[00:01:41] **Lemley:** And who are your, who are your parents grandparents?

[00:01:48] **Kunesh:** I was gonna start talking about crayfish.

[00:01:50] I thought that's what I forgot to tell you. But, um, my parents and my dad, Donard Kish was a, a military policeman in the army, in the occupation of Japan, and which we didn't know about. And then he became a city attorney for

St. Cloud and then assistant Sterns County attorney. And my mom was a housewife homemaker, but more than that, she had, uh, US 13 kids.

[00:02:23] And, uh. I questioned her sanity from time to time, and which was kind of a good thing for me becoming a parent, was that I knew that kids could push you. Mm-hmm. Or I had a feeling that she wasn't organically that crazy and that it was, uh, socially derived. And, um, she was a, a good woman and she was a member of the Standing Rock, Lakota Nation of North and South Dakota, although she and, and my dad were both born in St.

[00:03:00] Paul, Minnesota too. Um, her dad had come, was brought down from the reservation to St. Paul. And, uh, my dad's dad had been born in the settler farm homestead in Nebraska, then moved up to Minnesota and farmed there. Um, apart from that, I wanted to mention the crayfish. That, that was my, that was Okay.

[00:03:25] **Lemley:** So like, before we started recording, you mentioned some of your youngest memories are crayfish and Sherlock Holmes.

[00:03:31] Was it? Yeah. Okay. Okay. Tell me about the crayfish.

[00:03:34] **Kunesh:** Well, we lived by Wtab Creek and, uh, when we moved in the town was, I remember the sign on the town saying population or pop. Period. 6 22. Mm-hmm. That's the small town. It was. And there was a, a, a old man Sar, uh, old man's store and we lived a block and a half from the creek.

[00:04:08] And that was my summer hangout place ever since I was in first grade. It was the best place to be to learn to go into the water, to get cool, to see animal tracks, and um, then in the summer to hang out there and catch curly fish and learn their ways. And, um, it was just a cool, cool place for a, for a kid.

[00:04:38] **Lemley:** And about what year, what, what years were you there?

[00:04:42] **Kunesh:** Hmm, 62 to 70, 74.

[00:04:48] **Lemley:** Okay. Okay. And we had mentioned, um, again before we started recording around, you've got one of your children's 13, and you were saying, so that's the youngest that tracks that about 13 years old. You are, you are catching the crayfish. How, how do you catch, how do you catch a crayfish?

[00:05:04] **Kunesh:** Well, first of all, you have to find them and you have to look around and you, and you can't be moving stuff around because they'll

scurry up underneath the rocks further. And what you need to do is find out. Is be quiet and let them come out on their own. But the trick is to have a cup behind them is very gently come up from behind as they're crawling or, yeah.

[00:05:30] Uh, walking around and they crawl forward, but their escape is backward. It's like with the flash of the tail.

[00:05:39] **Lemley:** Yeah. Yeah. Okay.

[00:05:41] **Kunesh:** And so they flip that tail underneath them ah, and that propels them backwards and then into your cup.

[00:05:49] **Lemley:** Then what would you do with them?

[00:05:50] **Kunesh:** Uh, I'd look at them and I'd see if they were okay and, you know, count the appendages and especially the colors.

[00:05:58] I really liked the colors. That was the more amazing thing. And I liked them all sizes and what didn't matter to me. It was, I one time had a five gallon aquarium that I kept some in over winter and I liked watching them. That's all I did. You didn't, them didn't eat them or anything? Oh no. I it like, nope, we didn't eat anything.

[00:06:19] The only thing we ever ate that we caught were carp and carp from the Mississippi. Uh, now I kind of, uh, turned my nose up on carp, but that's what we did. They were a big, i I was a small kid. It was a big fish and it was a good struggle to pull in a carp from Mississippi.

[00:06:45] **Lemley:** Those are an invasive species, right?

[00:06:47] **Kunesh:** Nope. Okay. They, I think they're car. Were they

[00:06:49] **Lemley:** native?

[00:06:50] **Kunesh:** Yeah. I

[00:06:50] **Lemley:** think carp are,

[00:06:52] **Kunesh:** uh, indigenous to all over the place.

[00:06:56] **Lemley:** Okay. Okay. Um, and so these, but I don't know.

[00:07:00] **Kunesh:** Okay. We have to, we're gonna fact

[00:07:02] **Lemley:** check, fact check that. Yeah. Um, and so the crawfish, I keep trying not to call them crayfish, c crawdads or No crayfish.

[00:07:10] Be cray. Call them crayfish. Like are c crawdads the same thing?

[00:07:12] **Kunesh:** Yeah.

[00:07:13] **Lemley:** Okay. What about, I think people call 'em mud bugs. Yeah. Oh, okay.

[00:07:17] **Kunesh:** And they eat them and they have, you know, big cauldrons of uhhuh killing things, and that's pretty hard to watch. But, um, it was crayfish and my mom and dad never came down to the creek, never saw us.

[00:07:31] Uh, I imagine that they knew I had crayfish up in the aquarium, but, uh, that was it.

[00:07:39] **Lemley:** So you say you liked the colors. What, what colors did they come in?

[00:07:42] **Kunesh:** Oh, blue, red, dark red, maroon brown, blonde, brown. Uh, my daughter was down in Georgia, just west of Atlanta, and we were messing around in a creek. She went with a youth group and here she is.

[00:08:02] I this. This person, um, picks up possums. Mm. And she picks up everything and live, live. Mm-hmm. And talks with them. And she found a, I can't remember the name now, but it was a beautiful, beautiful big dark blue crayfish. And, uh, we asked around, we talked with a specialist and he said, I've never seen one south of Chattanooga.

[00:08:34] You know, he was, I think they around Cleveland area. And, uh, so to find it down in Atlanta was a surprise. And he was trying to figure out how it could have moved down there. Yeah. And then up into that little creek. So, yep. I'm not a real brainiac about crayfish anymore. Uh, I just liked them in, um, I think that was the most catchable thing in that creek.

[00:09:02] I saw one muskrat one time. Um, of all the things to talk about when we were, when I was thinking of coming in here and talking about, I was kind of amazed in, I have been amazed in my life of how little wildlife we saw as

kids. Mm. Um, and that now I see, you know, the turkeys, the deer, the possums, the, uh.

[00:09:32] Ducks, the otters all over the place.

[00:09:36] **Lemley:** So you feel like you see a lot more wildlife now than you did as a kid?

[00:09:39] **Kunesh:** Oh, I know, I do.

[00:09:40] **Lemley:** Okay. And where, where are you

[00:09:41] **Kunesh:** hugely,

[00:09:42] **Lemley:** generally? Where are you located now? Where do you live?

[00:09:44] **Kunesh:** Uh, Mount Juliet. Okay. 15 miles east of here. You know, just south of the Cumberland River.

[00:09:49] You guys are right next to it. But we are, I'd say about a mile south of it. And, uh, we go down to the river at times and, uh, see all the bones and different birds and, you know, the cormorants, the loons, the pelicans, the uh, kingfishers, all sorts of stuff that we never saw. Mm. So I imagine somebody here has come and already talked about Silent Spring.

[00:10:17] No. Or you know about Silent Spring? No, no. Tell me. Um, this is when I have to get a device out and help my memory. Uh,

[00:10:28] **Lemley:** we've got a iPad here with a keyboard.

[00:10:31] **Kunesh:** That's, it's lovely. My youngest.

[00:10:32] **Lemley:** Oh, beautiful. Yeah.

[00:10:35] **Kunesh:** Yep. Um, silent Spring is a book that was published, I believe, in the sixties. Maybe it was early seventies.

[00:10:43] Hold on a sec.

[00:10:49] And, oh yeah, let's get that date. Uh.

[00:10:56] 62. That's good. Good.

[00:10:59] **Lemley:** Good job.

[00:11:00] **Kunesh:** 1962, Rachel Carson had a published or pub, they published it for it and she talks about how quiet that spring was for her and the absence of animals. Hmm. And I, we had deer in our garden. Um, but I never, I saw one muskrat my whole life. I never saw a beaver in Minnesota. And you could say that, of course, we weren't living right next to a lake, but that creek was pretty darn good.

[00:11:34] And we were living right next to the river, the Mississippi River, and the whole place should have been teeming with animals. And we had to go, I think, drive 20 miles north, uh, to see a place where there might have been a bald eagle.

[00:11:52] **Lemley:** Mm-hmm.

[00:11:53] **Kunesh:** But I didn't see it.

[00:11:54] **Lemley:** Why do you think there were so few animals?

[00:11:56] D-D-T-D-D-T.

[00:11:58] **Kunesh:** Yep.

[00:11:59] **Lemley:** So, okay. So what I remember barely of DDT is it affected bird eggs. Yeah. And made their shells really, really fragile. Brittle, yeah. And, um. How did, so tell me, tell me about DDT Spontaneous

[00:12:14] **Kunesh:** abortions in in mammals.

[00:12:16] **Lemley:** Okay.

[00:12:17] **Kunesh:** And, you know, one of the funny things is when we were living down the first five years, when we were living down in St.

[00:12:22] Paul, me as a kid, I have a twin brother, by the way. Uh, well, I have two twin brothers and a twin sister. So, uh, identical, no. Well, I mean, the sister wouldn't, none of us are identical. Okay. But, um, and my brother's specialty was frogs, leopard frogs in the summer of 62.

[00:12:44] **Lemley:** Real quick, when was the era of DDT?

[00:12:46] **Kunesh:** Uh, well, uh, late fifties, early sixties.

[00:12:50] Okay. I'm telling you that in 61. Mm-hmm. No, maybe it was 60. Uh, we were playing on dirt roads of a housing development. That was, you know, right after the war, the fifties, St. Paul expanded towards the east side and there were just tracted houses or housing being put up. And you wouldn't know it now because everything is tree.

[00:13:17] But back then there were no trees. It was a dirt road. Uh, we were probably, uh, six kids and my parents in this little house. Um, and, um. Let's see, that's down that street. It was dirt, the side, a big side road was dirt and there were trees off to that side. But the mosquito fogger man would come through. Oh,

[00:13:49] **Lemley:** and

[00:13:49] **Kunesh:** he would spray mosquito fogger.

[00:13:51] Yeah. And I think that was DDT.

[00:13:54] **Lemley:** Mm.

[00:13:54] **Kunesh:** And, and

[00:13:55] **Lemley:** DDT was for pest control.

[00:13:57] **Kunesh:** Pest control. And they sprayed it. The reason why he got it in Central Minnesota, or the, the reason why I think there were no so many, or the absence of so many animals in middle Minnesota, excuse me, was that they sprayed it on all the crops.

[00:14:14] Mm-hmm. To get rid of the, uh, bugs, the pests. Mm-hmm. The corn, boers, the weevils, whatever, the mosquitoes. And they were draining all this land too. So they were doing it, especially in the ditches, spraying the ditches to kill them. And of course, that's where muskrats, beavers, all these animals, shrew, mus, uh, mice.

[00:14:40] And of course where, uh, the predatory animals would hunt the coyotes if there were coyotes. I'd never even heard of them back then. Uh, but

the owls, I did see one owl in my youth, and I was a guy. And here's the strange thing, I wanted to be an ornithologist.

[00:14:58] **Lemley:** Oh

[00:14:58] **Kunesh:** yeah. Yeah. I love birds and. But I didn't see a great variety.

[00:15:04] We used to go out to Pelican Lake and there were no pelicans. I once saw a scarlet Tanager, and that was the rarest bird I had ever seen in my life. And I, uh, up through age 19, I never saw a bald eagle or an osprey. Don't remember seeing hawks. And I would, I am a person that would see those that does see those things.

[00:15:26] I would've seen them back then.

[00:15:29] **Lemley:** Then you end up leaving Minnesota while there's not very many animals there. Right. Where did you go?

[00:15:36] **Kunesh:** Um, I went to Orlando for bootcamp. Okay. California for a school, Texas for B School, and then stationed in Spain and then sent to the Middle East, the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean and, uh, east coast of Africa, Suez Canal, red Sea.

[00:15:59] **Lemley:** Oh my gosh.

[00:16:00] **Kunesh:** Good times.

[00:16:02] **Lemley:** You've been, you have, you have very literally been everywhere. Wow.

[00:16:07] **Kunesh:** Not the, not the East.

[00:16:09] **Lemley:** Okay. Okay. So

[00:16:10] **Kunesh:** Pakistan was as far east as I went.

[00:16:12] **Lemley:** Okay.

[00:16:13] **Kunesh:** And I did go into the foothills of Mount Kilimanjaro and Mombasa, and, uh, hung out an hour with the Maasai, uh, on the planes. And it was wonderful and beautiful.

[00:16:26] I had never been so. Shocked, uh, to see so much green in my life. I always think of the Emerald City as being green, but there's nothing like being on a tin. Can a navy destroyer in the middle of the Indian ocean, or doesn't really matter if you're in the middle, but out there and it's all gray.

[00:16:51] **Lemley:** Yeah.

[00:16:52] **Kunesh:** You know, the water's a little darker gray.

[00:16:54] The sky's a little lighter. Gray. It's hot, hot, hot sun. And then, uh, we pulled in and I was working in our spaces and probably sometime about 10 o'clock I opened the door and it felt like it was liquid green, liquid emerald coming into the ship. It was so green. This was Mombasa, Kenya.

[00:17:17] **Lemley:** And I would guess the quality of the oxygen also shifted when you open, open that up, like you just, oh,

[00:17:23] **Kunesh:** I don't know.

[00:17:24] I, uh, the visual stunt was great enough to make gasp and nothing else really mattered. It was just, uh, wonderful. Ah,

[00:17:36] **Lemley:** so what years, what years are you serving?

[00:17:39] **Kunesh:** 76 to 80 and that was probably eight, uh, 77. Uh. 77, 78. And then we went, uh, we were there for I think a week and I was able to take a safari, uh, into the foothills of Kilimanjaro and geez, rhinoc, lions, uh, giraffes, wildebeests, all these animals, crocodiles.

[00:18:10] It was just incredible. It was wonderful to see animals out there.

[00:18:13] **Lemley:** So this is like blowing your mind, you know, like, so as a kid when we're growing up, and, and I, I, similar to you, my favorite thing was to go to the backyard and we had woods in our backyard, and I would flip over a rock and see what there was.

[00:18:24] Yeah. You know, it was kind of like a surprise. Sal Salamanders a, it was a surprise every time, salamanders and frogs. And every once in a while I would find a little snake, and that would be very exciting. Mm-hmm. Um, so to go from something like that to be, to, to come out, like you're saying, coming out of the gray into this green, uh, overwhelming greenness and then a safari to see all those animals just gotta be.

[00:18:48] Yeah. How, how old did you feel in your heart when you're seeing all those things?

[00:18:55] **Kunesh:** I was my real age. Yeah. I was 20 young twenties. And, uh, at that time, I think most of us just want the time to be over. Mm. But now it gets better and better with every passing year. Does it? Oh yeah. Oh yeah. Oh yeah. Those were the good times.

[00:19:13] Wow. Uh, yeah. It. Uh, thinking about what I could have done if I had known, you know, you've heard that expression youth is wasted on the young. Mm-hmm. Yeah. Yeah. Uh, what I could do now, but I could still do the same thing and it wouldn't, it would be different, but, uh, it's been a good life.

[00:19:37] **Lemley:** Where do you rank in your mom's?

[00:19:39] 13 kids?

[00:19:41] **Kunesh:** Uh, four. A

[00:19:42] **Lemley:** four. What's four? A. Oh, because you had the twins?

[00:19:45] **Kunesh:** Yep.

[00:19:45] **Lemley:** Okay, so you're four A. My twin is

[00:19:47] **Kunesh:** five BI love.

[00:19:50] **Lemley:** Okay. There's,

[00:19:52] **Kunesh:** that's to make a connection, you know? Yeah. Four and five, but one is a person. Yeah, yeah,

[00:19:58] **Lemley:** yeah, yeah, yeah. Um, now I lost my train of thought 'cause I love that so much. Um, okay.

[00:20:03] So you might've done some things different. I've been thinking about that a lot lately. You know, we don't want to, in many ways I don't wanna change anything because I wouldn't be sitting here with you today.

[00:20:12] **Kunesh:** Exactly.

[00:20:13] **Lemley:** Um, that said, you said there are some things you might adjust if you did it again. Like what, what are some things you think might be a little bit different?

[00:20:25] **Kunesh:** In some ways I'd like to do just the same things, but know, uh, appreciate them more. Oh. Spend a little bit more time with the, with the mess aside. Not be so scared. Um. I would've gone sailing in a, in a real sailboat, more on the Indian Ocean and Uh hmm. Try not to think too much of how I would change it, because like you, uh, I like it.

[00:20:56] I like where I am now and I appreciate what I have now, and I know that if anything had changed, you know, like those butterfly wings in the Amazon mm-hmm. It would all be different

[00:21:06] **Lemley:** if I had not been so scared would I be where I am? You know that because that is one, it's like if I could see a decade at a time and see the things I was most afraid of in the moment change, I don't know.

[00:21:20] But is am I where I am because of also fear and all the emotions? What, what, when you say you would've been less afraid, what Maasai particularly was that moment freaky for you?

[00:21:33] **Kunesh:** It was one moment. It was a great Maasai village and we were having a good time and then this guy, this Maasai guy invited me into his hut.

[00:21:43] Yeah. His house. And you. I had to get down on my hands and knees and crawl inside into this darkness that felt like I was going into a large snail shell. Mm-hmm. So I was on my hands and knees going into this dark tunnel that was turning to the left. And then the guy said something in back of me and I turned around and there he was with a spear over his, uh, uh, shoulder aimed at me.

[00:22:18] And, uh, he's framed in the entrance with the sunlight behind him in outline with this spear at me and looking aggressively and saying, and he said, take picture. Take picture. Ooh,

[00:22:39] that was a good one. That was a good one. I don't know how I could have, you know, prepared myself for that. I was, I'm glad I had that experience. I'm glad things flip. I like it when life flips things on me and I learned something from it, so.

[00:22:56] **Lemley:** Right. It was good. Did you take picture? Yeah, I took

[00:22:59] **Kunesh:** pictures.

[00:23:00] Yeah. On my nicker mat FT two or something like that. Oh yeah, it was, uh, it was a good time. So.

[00:23:09] **Lemley:** In those four years where you're traveling everywhere, uh, what, what do you remember of the weather and, and maybe even more about the animals since they're so close to you.

[00:23:20] **Kunesh:** Uh, well, I haven't ever been that close to many animals.

[00:23:27] You know, I see them and, uh, I wish I could be closer to those turkeys and the deer that I see every day. Um, and my wife has chickens and so those are close enough and cats and dogs. I, um, the weather, uh, was really important. Be being in the Middle East, it was just hot, hot all the time. And, uh, I don't, I remember storms at sea.

[00:23:59] I remember how dry, you know, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia were, and Karachi. I remember how many people there were in Karachi and, uh, how many people that were all along the Suez Canal. And it was wonderful. Mm. And they were smiling. I mean, here's one of the more interesting contrast that I experienced is that it seemed everybody from Bahrain in the, uh, Persian Gulf all the way around past Yemen, uh.

[00:24:32] Somalia, Djibouti, uh, up until Egypt through the Suez Canal, that everybody, regardless of what they looked like, how poor they were, was essentially happy. Hmm. One time I, uh, in that was up through 80, and then in 82, um, I hitchhiked, I was in Europe, uh, going to school, and in the winter of 82, beginning of 83, I had hitchhiked up to Slovakia and I had, uh, I.

[00:25:10] Walked across no man's land. And that was very, very scary. And I got right up to Prague. I wanted to see where the Kunis came from. Mm-hmm. And I went to the small town, and I have never, well, from Prague, all through the town, all these places, never seen so much depression in my life.

[00:25:35] **Lemley:** Whoa.

[00:25:36] **Kunesh:** Depression. And these were poor people too.

[00:25:39] Same

[00:25:39] **Lemley:** era,

[00:25:40] **Kunesh:** same era, same era. Uh, it was cold, of course it was, uh, December, end of December, early January. And, uh, but the, all the cars were gray covered with coal soot. All the train car windows were covered with coal, gray soot, and all the food was awful. Uh, the beer, uh, I thought, you know, it was supposed to be the best in Europe was awful.

[00:26:08] Spanish beer is really good. This beer was awful. And it tasted like, uh, the real meals tasted like sawdust. And I was going, man, the people, the poverty that I saw just didn't make sense in, uh, Europe. So, but

[00:26:27] **Lemley:** there was poverty. The people you're observing in the Middle East also in Africa experienced poverty.

[00:26:32] Yeah. So what do you attribute the, the, the big. Gap, emotional gap between the different cultures you saw?

[00:26:42] **Kunesh:** Hmm.

[00:26:47] Totalitarianism and fascism. Uh, the people in Ch Slovakia were scared. I got arrested, I got handcuffed, interrogated, uh, interrogated again, uh, put in handcuffs driven to Prague for more interrogation. And because I, they thought I was a spy. I was, but I wasn't. But, uh, it was the fear of government. It, uh, I went to the cemetery to see Kish gravestones.

[00:27:26] There were none. They had, uh, I was told they were all taken out by the communists.

[00:27:33] **Lemley:** Why?

[00:27:34] **Kunesh:** Uh, for use, I don't know, in some road building project, I don't know, to stop the prestige of the church. All of the records, all the family records, all the church documents were taken and put in the, the, the state archives in Prague.

[00:27:49] And, um, I went to a house to talk with somebody. I was. Taken to this house to meet somebody maybe that lived there, and this guy was going to ask him some questions about the town. And I've never seen anybody, uh, in the dead of winter, in, uh, in a hovel of a house with socks, with such holy socks, big holes and thin socks in a cold house.

[00:28:27] Um, so I, one of the things is that the Middle East, that part of Africa, I've been through there all the seasons and there's still more warmth, more heat, uh, more freedom at that time than there was in Czechoslovakia. So, uh, of all the scary, the scary places, uh, that was it.

[00:28:49] **Lemley:** How long did they detain you?

[00:28:52] **Kunesh:** Uh, I was on a train and I was, well, I was, had just sat down to take the train back to Prague and the secret police came in and took me off the train and then held me.

[00:29:09] Uh, so that was like eight o'clock in the morning till eight o'clock at night. Then they handcuffed me and put me in a van and took me up to Prague and then did some more. Interrogation. And so I think I got outta there at midnight.

[00:29:23] **Lemley:** Okay.

[00:29:23] **Kunesh:** So it was eight in the morning till midnight. Then they told me to go to a certain hotel to stay overnight and not, uh, they had confiscated my passport and stuff.

[00:29:34] Mm. Um, taken, I was just taking pictures. Mm-hmm. That's all I was. And it was a, uh, a small, maybe 10 tank column of old ass tanks, you know, 19 45, 19 50 tanks running through town. And the commander waved at me and I waved at him, and I took pictures and, uh, why they thought that this could be of any use to the west is beyond me.

[00:30:03] But, uh, that's,

[00:30:04] **Lemley:** well, basically you're kind of a hippie, like, like hitchhiking through Europe.

[00:30:10] **Kunesh:** Well, I, let's see, I made sure that I, I,

[00:30:17] well, I was living in Spain at the time, and so I was trying to fit in.

[00:30:21] **Lemley:** Okay.

[00:30:21] **Kunesh:** So I didn't look too hippie-ish. Okay. And I didn't look American. Okay. And, uh,

[00:30:26] **Lemley:** what'd you look?

[00:30:28] **Kunesh:** Uh,

[00:30:32] uh, uh, how did I look? Well, I had more hair. Okay. Not, not this long, but, uh, and I had a beard. Okay. And, uh, so it, and. Being dark haired and, well, anyway, I was treated well all over Europe, um, very well, very nicely, uh, very kindly, uh, but up in Czechoslovakia, that was a different, different story. Not that I was treated really unkind, but it was just a hurting place.

[00:31:13] Mm. A very sad purgatory.

[00:31:15] **Lemley:** Mm-hmm. You mentioned no man's land. Um, what is that?

[00:31:20] **Kunesh:** It's the area of the border. Uh, let's see. I had gotten, I had hitchhiked to Vienna to get Yeah. A, uh, visa. And then once I got it, stayed a couple days in Vienna, I hitchhiked to the border and I could only get a couple miles to it.

[00:31:38] And then I walked the rest of the way and it was about a half a mile of no man's land, which is, uh, barbed wire and supposedly, um, mines. Mm-hmm. And it was a clear area so that, you know, they'd have a straight shot at anybody trying to Oh my god, escape. And then there was the border itself, you know, fenced and razor wired and everything.

[00:32:03] And then you cross through and then you get through the, uh, state, the police gate and, uh, the. Questions there. I had brought, I had bought a Playboy and Penthouse

[00:32:17] **Lemley:** Yeah.

[00:32:18] **Kunesh:** Uh, in Vienna as, uh, a way to hopefully get across the border Okay. With fewer questions and kind of a tip to them since it was illegal. Uh, okay.

[00:32:32] Those magazines are illegal and of course they were going to confiscate them, but that was one way that I could, uh, make a contribution without offering anything monetary or anything that might be more suspect.

[00:32:48] **Lemley:** Oh my gosh. So we could go another hour just on this one scene. Oh. But okay. Pull back to, so how did you end up in Tennessee?

[00:32:56] How did you end up in Mount Juliet and when?

[00:32:59] **Kunesh:** Well, uh, those are also good. Well, interesting stories. Let's do it. But, uh, um, fell in love with a young woman and I had never moved for a woman before and she lived down in Chattanooga, a nurse. And so I said, well, I wasn't doing anything with my life. I had, I had just graduated from, um, uh, second grad school.

[00:33:23] **Lemley:** Okay.

[00:33:24] **Kunesh:** And had no job.

[00:33:26] **Lemley:** You were like in your thirties by then?

[00:33:27] **Kunesh:** Uh, maybe late twenties. Okay. Maybe. Hmm. I'd have to go back and look at the timeline of my life, but, um. Came down to Chattanooga and lived there for 30 years. The relationship there didn't work out. But three years later I met a young woman and, uh, we've been together ever since.

[00:33:51] **Lemley:** And how long is that?

[00:33:53] **Kunesh:** Uh,

[00:33:59] 32 years. 32. 33 years. You were in

[00:34:03] **Lemley:** Chattanooga for 30 years. For 30 years. And then you've been with your current, in your current relationship for 32 years?

[00:34:08] **Kunesh:** Yes. Oh, no. Wait, wait, wait. Um, I arrived in Chattanooga in 90.

[00:34:14] **Lemley:** Okay.

[00:34:15] **Kunesh:** So I've been here in the state in 35, what, 35 years?

[00:34:20] **Lemley:** In Tennessee? In Tennessee for 35 years.

[00:34:23] Okay. Okay.

[00:34:23] **Kunesh:** And 30 down, down in Chattanooga.

[00:34:26] **Lemley:** Okay.

[00:34:27] **Kunesh:** And five here, essentially we moved here in 2019. Okay. For my wife's job. Uh, she got, um, she was working for a restaurant business that had, was consolidating and buying up brew pubs and stuff. And they finally bought another big chain. And that chain's headquarters was here in Nashville.

[00:34:48] And, uh, they paid, they said, we'll pay for your move. Uh, we'll boost your salary 25%. Wow.

[00:34:59] **Lemley:** All right.

[00:35:00] **Kunesh:** And, um. We will give you this extra money for the move and, uh, come on up if you stay with us. And we did. And they did. And then within what, six months, the bomb fell out of the restaurant industry.

[00:35:15] **Lemley:** Alright.

[00:35:15] **Kunesh:** So there we are stuck in Mount Juliet, uh, with nothing to do.

[00:35:23] So now she has 20 some chickens that she started raising during the epidemic. And, uh, she found another, first she found a, a bad job that she had to stick out for, what, six months. And then she found a really, really good job.

[00:35:39] **Lemley:** Okay. Well good. So you've been here about five years Yep. In Middle Tennessee? Yep.

[00:35:44] What is your experience in, I guess we said 30, 35 years? 35 years in Tennessee? I think that's right. Um, yeah, 90 to to 20, 25. Here we are. I can do that math, um, despite what I told you about my algebra skills earlier. Okay. Um, uh, what, what has your experience of climate been like in Tennessee

[00:36:07] **Kunesh:** that winter of 93?

[00:36:09] March of 93 had just met my wife and, uh, she got stuck at the house during a snowstorm. And that snowstorm of March 93 was as good as anything we had in Minnesota.

[00:36:25] **Lemley:** But the state was not. No,

[00:36:27] **Kunesh:** the state was not ready for it. And in fact, we couldn't move our cars for a week. It was so much snow. Oh my gosh. We didn't have snow shovels, so we had to wait.

[00:36:37] Well, I didn't wait. I ultimately took a shortcut down the hill and probably almost busted a tire. The Yeah. Wheel. But, uh, it did get on. I was afraid of going off on the other side. Still downhill, but caught. And, uh, but anyway, that was a big snowstorm. It was a wonderful, blowing heavy snow. And, uh, we stayed in there.

[00:37:04] It was one nice to be in a all electric TVA house. Mm. With radiant heating from the ceiling. Yeah. And that the power lines never went down. Okay. Uh, so the weather here, uh, has been hot and muggy and, um, I think the thing that I noticed most about the weather or the whole view of Tennessee is that there's so much more development, so much destruction of trees, and, uh.

[00:37:46] Housing development everywhere. And then, uh, down here, I also saw more wildlife. You know, one time I came, I was on Moccasin Bend in Chattanooga, came upon this almost herd of Turkey.

[00:38:01] **Lemley:** Yeah.

[00:38:02] **Kunesh:** Must have been 50, 60 turkeys out there in this clearing where nobody else would've ever been.

[00:38:08] **Lemley:** Did you get back in the car?

[00:38:10] **Kunesh:** No. Whatcha talking? No,

[00:38:13] **Lemley:** it's a little intimidating.

[00:38:15] **Kunesh:** Oh, you think I don't really,

[00:38:17] **Lemley:** aren't Turkeys kind of mean?

[00:38:20] **Kunesh:** Oh, I, I never thought of, I don't think of them that way, so. Okay. Okay. Um,

[00:38:27] **Lemley:** so a herd of 50, like 50 Turkey coming,

[00:38:30] **Kunesh:** 50 Not, no, not coming. Just hanging, hanging out there. Hanging out. Hanging out there. And I was with, uh, Vernon Bell Court of aim of the American Indian movement.

[00:38:40] Okay.

[00:38:40] **Lemley:** Yeah.

[00:38:41] **Kunesh:** So we had gone out there to see and offer some tobacco, and there we were met by this great, great flock of Wild Turkey. And I had never seen wild Turkey in my life up in Minnesota. And of course I had seen them in Chattanooga around, or out on Moccasin Bend or other wooded places. But this was a, an amazing thing to see so many in one place.

[00:39:11] And then. Here's the surprise is that I see all these animals down here and I'm going, how come I saw, I see all these animals here. And now when I go up to Minnesota, I don't then starting to go back to Minnesota in 93, 4, 5, 6. Ever after that, Eagles all over the place. Mm. Turkeys crossing the road. I saw a fox.

[00:39:37] You never see a fox, but I saw a fox. I saw a fox in Chattanooga, I saw a fox, coyote, you know, armadillos now. So, um, the more amazing things about Chattanooga and Tennessee in general is the amount of wildlife to see. I saw Kingfisher, I see Osprey, um, just wonderful, you know, Gar, um, egrets, herons. Of course there were herons up, uh, in Minnesota, but we didn't see them anywhere near like maybe 1% the amount that we have

[00:40:11] **Lemley:** here.

[00:40:12] We've got a pair that lived back behind the, the building. Oh yeah, yeah. I like them.

[00:40:16] **Kunesh:** Ated. Woodpeckers. Yeah. And of the most amazing bird, I think in Tennessee is the ated woodpecker. And I, I measure my years by it. I measure if it was how good a year is, if, how ma if I hear them, if I see them, if I see a pair.

[00:40:33] Um, and it's just wonderful to hear and see them. Um. One time I saw them up in Minnesota and my older brother sees them on occasion up there. So it is wonderful. But ated woodpeckers.

[00:40:46] **Lemley:** So what kind of ated woodpecker years have you seen the last few years? Like are they good years, bad years?

[00:40:51] **Kunesh:** Nope. Um, I see one or two every year and it's just steady.

[00:40:56] **Lemley:** Okay.

[00:40:57] **Kunesh:** Uh, I have been scared a couple of times of not hearing them, uh, this past year. And then, uh, my wife and I started hearing the call every morning for like three or four days in a row. That was good. Um, but I have noticed, uh, that there are fewer birds now in Mount Juliet or where we live in Mount Juliet.

[00:41:21] We never had Bluebird the way or up in Minnesota the way you have 'em or there are in Mount Juliet. Didn't see blue birds at all really in Chattanooga. But here, there are 20 of 'em back where I live. But that's about it. The um, I don't see a variety, you know, the car, there are fewer cardinals this year. Uh, never have seen an orle.

[00:41:47] I didn't know if Orioles, uh, come around here. Uh, haven't seen any real other birds there. You know, the migratory ones, king Fishers loons. Cormorants, the pelicans, those are all pretty standard out there on the river. This river. But um, like the songbirds and the color birds, no. I see crows, some starlings, but not like before either.

[00:42:15] **Lemley:** Yeah. I've got my crows that I feed. They come, they're wonderful. What do you, what, what percentage decrease do you think you're seeing over what amount of time?

[00:42:26] **Kunesh:** I'd say it's at, uh,

[00:42:32] just over the past five years. And I don't know if you've, if you know Mount Juliet and how it's expanding. No, just saw another place that's being cleared. All the ground clearance, but I'd say 50%.

[00:42:46] **Lemley:** Whoa. Yeah.

[00:42:47] **Kunesh:** Significant. Significant. I see more turkeys.

[00:42:51] **Lemley:** Yeah,

[00:42:51] **Kunesh:** I see more deer.

[00:42:52] **Lemley:** Yeah.

[00:42:53] **Kunesh:** But, uh, fewer cardinals. At least 50% less, uh, 50% less woodpeckers.

[00:43:01] Uh, that ated, let's say that that's constant. But I am not expecting him or her and or her to be around much. Oh. 'cause of, uh, what they're doing on all sides is, uh, stripping land, putting up places.

[00:43:21] **Lemley:** Talk to me about that. So you think this 50% decrease is, is directly because of development?

[00:43:29] **Kunesh:** I, uh, I haven't seen that much of a weather change in the past five years.

[00:43:34] Mm-hmm. But I, uh, but I know that the amount of traffic, the noise, uh, I know that there are fewer deer coming into our yard. The traffic, the noise, and the reduced amount of space. I mean, there was a whole, uh, kind of wilded, uh, golf course. Two of, almost two of them out there. They have now been stripped and houses built on them.

[00:44:02] Mm-hmm. I saw another, it's, uh, it's sad. I don't even wanna go there. It's depressing the amount of, uh, construction that's going on.

[00:44:17] It's a big sad.

[00:44:19] **Lemley:** So you're seeing, for the most part, a lot of fewer, fewer animals because of the development. What other effects are you seeing because of that change?

[00:44:32] **Kunesh:** I haven't, uh,

[00:44:36] the snow seemed to be about the same. Actually. We had, I think, less snow. I was still expecting a big snow this year, so it wasn't as big as the past couple of years. And, uh. Chattanooga, the snows weren't as big. I remember taking my, my oldest girls down sledding almost every year, and that stopped, and the snow was real much thinner.

[00:45:00] It came, it came several times, but not ever like 93 again or others. There were, uh, big floods in Chattanooga. Um,

[00:45:16] can't think of any other kinds of weather changes. Well, not even just I to hear the, just weather, but

[00:45:22] **Lemley:** the development, like when you said it's sad, it, it, it affects us emotionally, it sounds like.

[00:45:29] **Kunesh:** Yeah. Holy. Yeah. I grew up in rural Minnesota in a small town, 622 when we moved in. And, uh, we were driving on dirt roads and, uh, you could see for a mile on all sides and, you know, go over hills, whatever.

[00:45:52] And there were fish. Um, there were loons up north on the lakes. Not down south, but up north. And hearing the loons. Have you heard a loon apart from a record recording? Like, I'm

[00:46:07] **Lemley:** trying to figure out. I have. I heard one in person.

[00:46:10] **Kunesh:** Yeah. Should go out. Okay. And, uh, get a cabin up in Minnesota.

[00:46:15] **Lemley:** Okay.

[00:46:16] **Kunesh:** Go visit my brother and they'll set you up.

[00:46:19] And so you can hear some loons. Oh,

[00:46:21] **Lemley:** I need that.

[00:46:22] **Kunesh:** Wonderful, wonderful. Um, and my little and my oldest daughter grew up with that. But, um,

[00:46:32] **Lemley:** so these houses are going up in Mount Juliet and we're seeing what apartments? Yeah. Like, or like apartments. Yeah. So we're seeing visibly and tangibly fewer cardinals and some other creatures.

[00:46:48] How do you think that's affecting you and your neighbors on the inside?

[00:46:53] **Kunesh:** I don't think they notice. I, I think most of them would think that it's good not to have deer around because, you know, that way you don't hit them. It's good not to have possums because they're scary to most people. Uh, we had a fox jump over our fence together, our hands, and we had hawks, of course there, I should have said another big indicator hawks.

[00:47:14] There are fewer hawks. Oh, now even in the sky there are fewer hawks and it's just vultures and crows that we see up there. And, uh, an occasional hawk. And this is, you know, within a mile of the Cumberland. And there should be, and there have been hawks every day up there. And, uh, so their habitat is being destroyed.

[00:47:41] Um, trees are trees coming down and

[00:47:50] yeah, there's a, a water, some kind of

[00:47:59] territory area up there that is, they are blowing rock up. They are digging, they are expanding. It's for water treatment or something. I don't know. But, um, there's where the deer in Turkey are and where so many other animals live and they're tearing the place up. Um, what other animals, what does that mean?

[00:48:31] Oh, my, my neighbors, I don't think they pay attention to them. Uh, here's, okay. I raised my girls up or we raised our girls up on public TV with the, uh, public, uh, kids network. Yeah. And one of them was the Wildcats. Yeah. There was a Booma Fool and then it turned into Wild CRTs. Yeah. Yeah. It's live and then it turned into Wild Crats cartoon.

[00:49:03] And so, uh, we are all about animals, animals, animals, animals. And my youngest, uh, they all love them, but my youngest is the best adept at it. And, um, nobody else seems to think about them or much less care. I haven't heard of any others. There are, of course, some kids who feel like they have more connection with animals, but I don't know, I don't even know these kids.

[00:49:31] And, you know, I think most, oh, another big change that has happened. Yeah.

[00:49:36] **Lemley:** Yeah.

[00:49:38] **Kunesh:** Cell phones, iPads, iPhones.

[00:49:41] **Lemley:** Yeah.

[00:49:41] **Kunesh:** So that kids are in their noses. Even, you know, when we would go out to the bus stop as kids, there was nothing for us to do. We had a book bag, we had our coats, we were freezing our asses off. And we would wait and we might look around and see what else is out there, the squirrels, what's kind of tracks in the snow from Rabbit or Fox or whatever.

[00:50:03] So there was something to do with the wild on the side of the road, but here, kids are outstanding at the end of their driveway. Uh, almost personalized road pickup now. It used to be groups. Mm-hmm. Now it's kid per kid, and they have their noses in their iPhones. Mm. So, uh, I don't know what attraction the wild brings to them anymore.

[00:50:32] **Lemley:** What does this mean?

[00:50:39] **Kunesh:** I think there's, I hate making generalizations. I, I'm, I'm quick at it and I catch myself, and I don't say 'em out loud because you don't wanna, uh, test because there are a lot of good, wonderful kids out there who I think will save us. Uh, so maybe it's farmer kids, maybe it's kids that are grow up near.

[00:51:07] Creeks and rivers, uh, that'll save us. And, uh, parents who bring their kids to creeks and rivers and lakes and, uh, treasure animals. But that's the biggest thing is, uh, the change in number of animals. How people look at animals, you know, we even have less contact where when I grew up, where I grew up, people had constant contact with animals.

[00:51:32] Whether it was milking cows, slopping pigs, uh, shooting deer or whatever. There was more immediate contact. Uh, and now with more of us living in cities, myself included, uh, there was less farms to go to, even in my family up in Minnesota. Yeah. Less. My dad never even took us to his family farm. Mm. My mom knew, I think, knew where her side of the family, family farm was.

[00:52:05] Never took us out to see 'em. 'cause at that time, also, farmers were a lower class of people.

[00:52:10] **Lemley:** Mm-hmm.

[00:52:11] **Kunesh:** Strange. So

[00:52:13] **Lemley:** you said you think there's some good kids that are gonna save us. What kinda saving do we need?

[00:52:20] **Kunesh:** Mm, well, I, this, uh, Rachel Carson was a heck of a person. Oh. And my mother-in-law. Yeah. Oh yeah.

[00:52:31] Environmental kids. Uh. Is that Gretchen Thorns? What's, oh, yeah.

[00:52:37] **Lemley:** Uh, uh. Oh my gosh, guys, I'm so sorry. Uh, that's, uh, oh. Th th thornberg Let us not, yeah. Oh, we're gonna, we're gonna Google this. Standby. And, and please give us some grace because we know her name.

[00:52:57] **Kunesh:** Gretchen. Is it Thornberg?

[00:53:01] **Lemley:** Thunberg?

[00:53:03] **Kunesh:** Nope.

[00:53:04] **Lemley:** Uh, okay, here I go.

[00:53:06] I'm getting in on this. Alright.

[00:53:10] **Kunesh:** Greta. Greta Thunberg. There we go. Thunberg.

[00:53:14] **Lemley:** Oh,

[00:53:15] **Kunesh:** alright.

[00:53:16] **Lemley:** Yes.

[00:53:16] **Kunesh:** So, uh, she's a kind of person and, oh, she's

[00:53:20] **Lemley:** only 22 years old. Still. I feel like she's been around forever.

[00:53:25] **Kunesh:** Yeah. My oldest is a rafter. She, she'll speak up. And the other ones are big animal lovers. So I'm just hoping animal loving kids four H. Um, but I think there's a, a greater and greater differential mm-hmm.

[00:53:46] Population differential and that there are fewer kids that are engaged. I was really happy to hear that Mount Juliet had a four H Club.

[00:53:54] **Lemley:** Okay.

[00:53:55] **Kunesh:** Uh, and that they were engaging with animals on the campus there at Mount Juliet High School. Um, I don't think it's the same, um, this year as it was like that was pre covid.

[00:54:08] Mm-hmm. And so Covid has changed so many things.

[00:54:13] **Lemley:** Four H now. I've never been involved. It is, what's it stand for? Uh,

[00:54:21] let's say horses, hogs, husbandry. Husbandry, let me see.

[00:54:27] **Kunesh:** Uh, four H,

[00:54:36] head, heart, hands, health.

[00:54:38] **Lemley:** Oh, I like that. More

[00:54:40] **Kunesh:** mundane,

[00:54:41] **Lemley:** but it's particularly agriculture related or animal. Yes. Okay. Very, very. Okay.

[00:54:46] **Kunesh:** Very. Um, I wanna pivot here.

[00:54:50] **Lemley:** Yeah. Pivot.

[00:54:51] **Kunesh:** Uh, when I was told that this was gonna be about climate, yeah. I was going, what the heck? Why would anybody ask me about climate? What could I say?

[00:55:03] And so I was scratching my head a couple of days. And then, um, I don't know if you. No, the kind of work or what I do for other kinds of work here,

[00:55:14] **Lemley:** I don't, what are you doing?

[00:55:16] **Kunesh:** Okay, so I work for, with the Tennessee Ancient Sites Conservancy.

[00:55:20] **Lemley:** Okay. Oh, I did know that. Okay.

[00:55:22] **Kunesh:** Okay. Okay. And that I work down in Chattanooga.

[00:55:25] We have, uh, saved, we are saving, we are taking care of, uh, and planting Chickamauga Mound. So Chickamauga Mound is right next to Chickamauga Creek, where the, uh, where Dragon Canoe moved in 1776. This, uh, the mound down there predates Dragon canoe, but it was overgrown and nobody was caring about it, and people called it the Lost Mound.

[00:55:51] And it was just a bundle of pritt, uh, with tall trees on it. And we have cleaned that out now, and that's one of the places I see Ospreys. I just saw an Osprey, what, two weeks ago, flying overhead as we put a historical marker up there. We also work down here at Glass Mounds and, um, dragonfly Mound in Cellar's Farm, south of Lebanon.

[00:56:15] So we go to all these mounds and the, what most people don't realize is that Nashville was a urban hub, not a town hub in a way. You know, just over here where people could get some salt, some very necessary salt at the salt lick. And that. There were mounds in and around Nashville that have all been destroyed.

[00:56:44] So we do not get to tell

[00:56:46] **Lemley:** us what mounds are.

[00:56:47] **Kunesh:** Mounds are big piles of dirt.

[00:56:49] **Lemley:** Mm-hmm.

[00:56:50] **Kunesh:** And that there are old piles, uh, 2000 years old, a thousand years old, called woodland mounds. And they're generally rounded shape, you know, and, um, like a muffin top or something. And oftentimes, most often they have burials inside them.

[00:57:11] They started off flat on the ground. They buried somebody and then pile dirt on. And then they would bring dirt over the years or over a summer and pile it up to make it high. And, uh, a burial of esteem for a reved, a revered leader that's gone. So those exist all around here. What's, doesn't exist so much, which is un well what are more uncommon, but still around, excuse me.

[00:57:44] Our Mississippian moss and Mississippian just refers to. A culture that grew up around the Mississippi River and spread into the tributaries of the river, like, uh, Tennessee, like the Cumberland, and all the way up to the north.

And these mounds are different. They are temple mounds, they're ceremonial mounds.

[00:58:09] They can have burials in them at, uh, also, but, uh, they have four sides. They're, instead of being round like a muffin top, these have generally four sides and oriented either sides or corners to the directions. And then built up at least 15 feet tall. And then a top flat where somebody might have a, a chief might have their house, or a, there might be the house of a, um, mess man or something like that.

[00:58:47] Here in central Tennessee, the best places to see them are uh, what's called cellar's farm Dragonfly Mound out, uh, south of Lebanon and twice, maybe four times. The size of that is mound bottom here, west of the city. And that's in a protected area. Um, because most of these mounts have been unprotected and have been raped.

[00:59:15] Mm. By Looters grave robbers, uh, grave well thieves, and, um, looking for artifacts to take and to sell or to collect, whatever. But these mounds, that Mound Mound bomb exists, dragonfly Mound exists. And, uh, the, they existed from essentially the year 900 to 1500. Okay. Okay. And we can, well, that was the height of native culture here in Tennessee, especially in Middle Tennessee.

[00:59:57] And there were, uh, ones down in Chattanooga and Temple Mounds. And there was also a seat of authority of a great chief down in north Georgia called, uh, CUSA. And there was one to the north called Cahokia. And if you were going to look at the best sites, Cahokia is the number one site in the United States to see the largest mega mound, temple mound.

[01:00:23] You get exhausted climbing up. And then there's mound bottom in Southern Alabama, down by Tuscaloosa, Alabama. And then, uh, around like, uh, uh, Macon County, uh, or Macon, Georgia, I should say. MGI and the awa mounds in Georgia. But the, the purpose of me bringing this up is that that period of time, 900 to 1500 is pretty discreet.

[01:00:53] And it's the expansion of agriculture based on corn, wholesale, coal, uh, corn production over that, those six centuries, huge fields for, uh, feeding people in the winter. Mm. And also it aided in stratifying societies. Mm-hmm. Okay. But what I think is most interesting is that they have dated the fall of mound bottom to I think 1350.

[01:01:30] Usually when I hear, you know, um, or that, um, the Mississippian period didn't extend here longer than 1500, I think of, you know, first contact.

[01:01:44] **Lemley:** Yeah. Yeah.

[01:01:45] **Kunesh:** And the amount of, uh, destruction done by viruses mm-hmm. By European diseases, sweeping through that kill, did kill. 75% of Native Americans that came into contact with Dragon Canoe himself was a survivor of smallpox.

[01:02:04] Mm. He see, he had the marks on his face, but that was 1776. What happened in 1500 that would Right. Collapse, uh, this huge burgeoning civilization. Um, and what collapsed mound bottom before that, it wasn't a disease that collapsed mound bottom and it wasn't disease that collapsed Cahokia. Uh, or, and I think Mo uh, Moundsville went much longer further, CSA did too.

[01:02:38] But, uh, they traced, and when I say they, it's archeologists. Mm-hmm. Any archeologists in Tennessee, especially the division of archeology in the state, uh, have traced the collapse of mound bottom to a five year, at least a five year long drought.

[01:02:58] **Lemley:** Ah,

[01:02:59] **Kunesh:** in the year, around the year 1350 from tree rings.

[01:03:03] **Lemley:** So there was dependence on corn.

[01:03:05] **Kunesh:** Yes.

[01:03:05] **Lemley:** And that had allowed for population to grow and people to thrive.

[01:03:08] **Kunesh:** Expansion, yes.

[01:03:09] **Lemley:** And then a five year drought. Mm-hmm. Now, when I, I'm uneducated in this way, what would qualify as a five-year drought? Is it, it's not zero rain? Or is it next to Nothing?

[01:03:21] **Kunesh:** Not enough rain to grow crops. Okay. So if you figure that it should be an inch of rain a week.

[01:03:29] **Lemley:** Okay.

[01:03:30] **Kunesh:** And you might get by on an inch a week, every two weeks. But there have been long periods of time when we haven't had rain. You know, that amount of rain here.

[01:03:40] **Lemley:** Yeah.

[01:03:41] **Kunesh:** Uh, so that might be something to look for, uh, and measure this year, 2025 is how much rain are we getting a week and what do the crops look like and what are they using to water crops to

[01:03:54] **Lemley:** supplement.

[01:03:55] **Kunesh:** Mm-hmm. We are growing. That was another, that's another thing. We, uh, the Indigenous Peoples Coalition of Nashville and Tennessee Ancient Sites Conservancy air working together to, uh, build some milpas. Have you ever heard the word milpa?

[01:04:13] **Lemley:** I think there's even a town called Milpas. But like, what's a Milpa?

[01:04:18] **Kunesh:** Uh, Milpa is, uh, n Mexican word for a little garden. What you might, you've probably heard them called three sister gardens. Yeah,

[01:04:26] **Lemley:** yeah, yeah. Uh, kimer, the corn, the beans, and uh, I can squash. Do a squash. Thank you. Oh, sorry. You saved me. You said you could do No, I wasn't gonna get there. Okay. I'll take the credit.

[01:04:38] **Kunesh:** Um, so Kimer wrote this book called Braiding Sweetgrass. Yeah. And she talks about how there's a fourth sister. I really like this because I have four daughters now. Mm. And that is, uh, corn beans, squashed and a human to make sure that the, to pollinate the corn 'cause it is human dependent. And putting these, the, these three, uh, plants together, you know, depends on human contact.

[01:05:07] So that's the fourth sister. So we call 'em four sister gardens and we're constructing a couple around here, Shelby Bottoms. Um, can't say the others because our permit request hasn't gone through yet. But, um, we are gonna see. Yeah. And we are going to bring an inch of water to them every week and see how they turn out.

[01:05:29] **Lemley:** Oh, I love it. Okay.

[01:05:30] **Kunesh:** Yeah, we could put one out here.

[01:05:32] **Lemley:** That would be amazing.

[01:05:33] **Kunesh:** You guys could grow it.

[01:05:34] **Lemley:** Yeah.

[01:05:34] **Kunesh:** And see if it's, if you have that one inch naturally, or if you have to supple it, how much land do you need? Well, we are doing it just three meters or three yards by three yards. Okay. Real small. I love that.

[01:05:47] Nine, you know, uh, three mounds by three little mounds by three little mounds. Yeah. Nine total. And planting the corn, uh, it's coming up the last frost. That's another yes. Question is, I don't know if you felt the last frost last Friday.

[01:06:05] **Lemley:** Yeah.

[01:06:06] **Kunesh:** Okay. So when is the next one? That is an early late, that's an early frost.

[01:06:12] I mean, there still should be another frost.

[01:06:14] **Lemley:** Okay.

[01:06:14] **Kunesh:** Because, uh, but right now we're looking at the, like the first or second week of April to plant the corn. But I'm wondering what the temperature of the ground is right now. And I'm thinking that it's warmer than it has been in the past.

[01:06:31] **Lemley:** I'm thinking that it's warmer.

[01:06:33] Yeah. Okay. So I have some questions about the mounds. Um, okay. Are they, for someone like me who hasn't seen one, is it obviously something like if I were, I walked up on one. Am I going? Oh my gosh, what is that?

[01:06:48] **Kunesh:** You'd say this is a large land form that is not, doesn't look natural. It's everything else is flat around here.

[01:06:56] Why is this mound, why is this pile of dirt out here in the middle of nowhere? Yeah. And so, yes, I think it would be obvious. I don't know that it would be obvious that you would see that it's a pile of dirt. You would see that it's covered with privet and raspberry bushes. Blackberry bushes.

[01:07:12] **Lemley:** Okay. So I'm picturing grass, so I shouldn't picture grass.

[01:07:13] I should picture very

[01:07:15] **Kunesh:** few like

[01:07:16] **Lemley:** scraggly things. Yes. Yeah.

[01:07:18] **Kunesh:** There is what's called the FU mound. I have to, uh, tell you one of my issues Yeah. Is that all these Native American sites have white names on them. Mm. And so I, it kind of sticks in my throat to call it Fukes Mound. And so we have to look at better mounds.

[01:07:37] Uh, but Dragonfly mound on that seller's farm was covered with trees and brush. So you might just think that this was a farmer's pile or some aberrant land form or you know, bunch of trees that fell down and they just decomposed into this big pile. Uh, so it really requires that somebody take care of the mound mm-hmm.

[01:08:02] And, uh, take the pritt off of it. Mm-hmm. Maybe take the trees off because of the problem with so many trees being downed, uh, or. Cut. I shouldn't say down cut by humans. Uh, I have been talked into not cutting down the trees on Chick Maga mound, um, and to let them go. But like Pinton mounts has cut the trees off and Dragonfly Mound, uh, the park system has cut the trees off because I don't know if you saw the destruction that came through in Jackson, Tennessee, those derechos.

[01:08:39] Yeah. The straight line winds and, uh, blew things over and, you know, root balls huge would tear up a mound with trees on it. So pi and mounts has cleaned off the big mound there

[01:08:51] **Lemley:** because actually having the trees on it are a risk to the mound itself. Integrity when the weather systems come through.

[01:08:58] **Kunesh:** Right.

[01:08:59] And of course you can always cut the tree, uh, off at the, uh, roots or at the stump and then put it back up and let decompose, but, um, you don't want to create that situation of mm-hmm. Uh, tearing up a mound. So the mounds, uh, if you go down to pin and mounds when you see them, you will know that they are.

[01:09:23] Human made you go to awa Mounds where they are, you know, those four-sided pyramids? Yeah. With a flat top. You know that they are human made. The ones that you won't know is when they are covered with brush. Mm-hmm. And you can't see them. Or when they appear in the, I came upon this, uh, mound one time. It was in the middle of nowhere.

[01:09:47] Uh, well, it's not the middle of nowhere. No place is in the middle of nowhere anymore, is it? Uh, but it's on a back road in Tennessee on the way down to, um, Chattanooga. But I take back roads. Anyway, I come upon this huge, huge mound, 2030 foot mound.

[01:10:10] **Lemley:** Oh my gosh.

[01:10:12] **Kunesh:** And it is clean. And somebody has planted a garden on top of it.

[01:10:16] And one of the flat

[01:10:17] **Lemley:** top mounds?

[01:10:18] **Kunesh:** No, no, the, the muffin

[01:10:19] **Lemley:** top. It was a,

[01:10:20] **Kunesh:** a round mound. Yeah. So it would be a burial mound. Uh, but I said, well, is this really a mound? Is this, could this be somebody else's pile of dirt? And it was right next to a creek, or it was close within a hundred yards of a river or a creek river.

[01:10:36] And that's one of the best signs is that if it's near a river or a creek, that was a town site that was a, a habitation site of a, of some size. That would have a group of people that would build and take care of a mound like that over time. So most of the time, yes, you will know that it is a native mound.

[01:10:59] So if you go out and look at the place at Fukes or at um, sellers farm or you'll know you'll get a good idea and you can always look at it online and

[01:11:12] **Lemley:** yeah,

[01:11:13] **Kunesh:** be prepped.

[01:11:13] **Lemley:** I, I'll do that. Um, when these were active sites, they were being maintained by the people,

[01:11:23] **Kunesh:** presumably. Um, for one thing, all of this area has been, tree has been lumbered, everything cut off.

[01:11:36] **Lemley:** Did you know that even the places that where we see trees have previously been cut cleared? Yeah. Yeah.

[01:11:42] **Kunesh:** There, there is no old growth forest left in Tennessee. Zero. Zero

[01:11:48] **Lemley:** in the entire state,

[01:11:49] **Kunesh:** to the best of my knowledge.

[01:11:50] **Lemley:** Okay.

[01:11:52] **Kunesh:** Um, because in the 18th, 19th, 20th century, wood was a primary pro, was a primary source of fuel.

[01:12:03] Mm-hmm. Home fuel and then also for building. So in Civil War, if you look at, one of the best things to do is look at Civil War pictures and find out where the trees are.

[01:12:15] **Lemley:** Okay.

[01:12:16] **Kunesh:** Okay. Yeah, because it will be naked landscape.

[01:12:19] **Lemley:** Wow.

[01:12:20] **Kunesh:** Yeah. So they had to build houses, cities had to build houses. All the city or so much of the cities were built with wooden houses.

[01:12:30] And then of course, they were burning, uh, wood paper and they were, uh, lumbers. Oh man. And same thing happened with much of the forest in Minnesota is that they were all tree and sold, uh, marketed elsewhere. In fact,

my great grandfather, uh, who had homesteaded, he left Cleveland, speaking Czech. He left Cleveland, his family in Cleveland, and uh, with his wife and his sister and her husband moved down to Nebraska to farm.

[01:13:08] Uh, they had so few trees that when he was sent to Minnesota to get trees, he was shocked at how many trees there were. And he moved up there because of the trees, because of the amount, the greatness of trees up in Minnesota. And it is true, but they, all the trees around that I knew of, uh, were also younger than, you know, 1900 or no.

[01:13:38] Yes. Younger than 1900. Mm. So that's an, so the climate change that you wanna talk about has, uh, has a couple things. One, um, my mom and dad were both Republicans and I grew up Republican.

[01:13:55] **Lemley:** Yeah.

[01:13:55] **Kunesh:** And I'm still happy to have some Republican thoughts in my head. And one of them is, is that government is best, which governs least, which is a problem for trees because when you have no laws that protect trees, they get cut indiscriminately.

[01:14:16] But that's not the point of me saying that. The point was that, um, we noticed climate change up in Minnesota when I was young, and it seemed that the winters were, or Halloween was very, very cold. Mm-hmm. And then it didn't get so cold that the snows would come and they wouldn't last as long. So in the sixties there were big heavy blizzard snows.

[01:14:45] I remember, you know, walking backwards, the wind was so strong. And, uh, being able to jump off the balcony on the second floor, or just the second floor exit into just like

[01:14:58] **Lemley:** the window,

[01:15:00] **Kunesh:** it was, uh, it was a lot of snow, uh, and a lot of storms. I remember that also the friend of mine in high school had her brick house, her family's brick house lifted off of them as they were covering in the basement, or sheltering in the basement, excuse me, uh, uh, by a tornado.

[01:15:25] And I don't think that place has seen a tornado since then. But, um, when we remarked to my mother that the winter seemed to be getting less cold, I mean, it still gets to 20 below.

[01:15:40] **Lemley:** Oh, no

[01:15:41] **Kunesh:** lie. And 10 below is a week, but it seemed to be less than when we were growing up. And my mom said that, uh, that's because the earth goes through cycles, cycles of weather, cycles of change.

[01:15:59] And so I have this running in my head all the time is, is it climate change or is it something else? And I, um, I know that the, just that the lack of animals growing up was not climate change. That was DDT. I know that the lack of animals out in Mount Juliet is not climate change, that is progress, quote unquote.

[01:16:26] That is quote unquote sustainability. That's how do you sustain not human life, not animal life, not tree life, but how do you sustain construction company life? And, um, those things have changed and with, uh, with fewer trees, you know, fewer lung capacity. Did you ever smoke?

[01:16:54] **Lemley:** Not in a meaningful way.

[01:16:57] **Kunesh:** I was blessed being in the military, being in the Navy, and not smoking.

[01:17:02] **Lemley:** Not never,

[01:17:03] **Kunesh:** no. I did pick it up after I got into university politics and that was a good time. And I enjoyed, I enjoyed my time smoking, uh, but I am glad I quit it. And I What a, oh, and I was a biker too. I could bicycle. I did a hundred miles, you know, centuries and stuff like that.

[01:17:24] **Lemley:** The hundred lives of Tom Kish, we're gonna trademark that title right now.

[01:17:29] **Kunesh:** Um, so it was great. Uh, what am I talking about? Smoking and, uh, trees decrease lung capacity. Yeah, it does. Well. And smoking decreases lung capacity. So when I quit, it was wonderful to get that back and wonderful to realize what I had done to myself in smoking. Um, just walking, uh, I used to walk my kids in Chattanooga and then in Mount Juliet, there are no sidewalks.

[01:18:01] Mm-hmm. In the county. Mm-hmm. There are no sidewalks to walk. I have to walk on the street. So it took me a long time. I used to bicycle in Minnesota and there would be huge places to bike, you know, and the shoulders,

because of the amount of snow were huge. Um, that doesn't exist here. So I wasn't able to test my breathing capacity.

[01:18:21] But once the years passed, uh, or when I moved here and then I started walking. Have you heard the expression Sitting? Is the new walk is sitting, is the new smoking?

[01:18:33] **Lemley:** I've heard something like that. Yeah. Yeah.

[01:18:35] **Kunesh:** So Covid made me sit.

[01:18:37] **Lemley:** Yeah. And

[01:18:37] **Kunesh:** then when I, uh, but I had quit smoking by then.

[01:18:41] **Lemley:** Covid actually, um, getting sick made you sit or just that period of time?

[01:18:45] **Kunesh:** Just that period of time, period of time not being able to go out anywhere. Yeah. And, uh, being afraid of contact. Yeah. With other people. We would find places to walk. There would be other people walking. We would want to avoid them. And, uh, there was so much to keep up with on, on the computer, on the news.

[01:19:07] So we didn't do the sitting or we didn't do the walking. Now I am doing the walking. When I first started, I was outta breath. I could not walk a hill. And now I can, and I think of the same problem of capacity of my lungs with smoking and my lungs when I don't get exercise. With the Earth's capacity to produce oxygen or take, uh, you know, produce that amount of oxygen for animals and for all wildlife.

[01:19:40] And I don't know what it is that's happening with birds and stuff. You know, last year we had a wonderful, wonderful time with cicadas.

[01:19:49] **Lemley:** Yeah.

[01:19:50] **Kunesh:** I ho It was a good

[01:19:51] **Lemley:** brood. It

[01:19:52] **Kunesh:** was, it was a great time. And I love walking in the noise. I loved walking with. Yeah. I like the noise all, all over the lawns and stuff and, um, but I haven't seen, uh, the birds and I'm wondering what it is, uh, that has reduced the bird population here in middle Tennessee.

[01:20:18] That's the saddest thing.

[01:20:20] **Lemley:** You mentioned early on that your mom is Lakota.

[01:20:23] **Kunesh:** Mm-hmm.

[01:20:24] **Lemley:** And you just talked a little bit about she is seeing, she believes that the earth travels in cycles or lives in cycles.

[01:20:35] **Kunesh:** But before you go down that road Yeah. That was not how she was raised. Okay. She, she's a good Catholic girl.

[01:20:41] Okay. And, and she may have gotten some stuff from my grandpa and my grandpa might have gotten it from his mom, but I have a feeling that it wasn't that. So I introduced the idea that she's Republican. Yeah. And that this, I think what she was doing was reacting to the liberal ideas of like Rachel Carson.

[01:21:04] Yeah. And the environmentalist saying, we're screwing up the earth. No, Tom, it's not the, it's just a cycle of the earth. She might have gotten it from, um, her, her grandma, her dad, her, uh, cousins, uh, who did live and associate more with the reservation than she did. But I haven't thought that it's more political.

[01:21:31] So you think,

[01:21:32] **Lemley:** okay. So you think that the kind of, it feels like a spiritual concept that the earth is, is working in cycles, but you think possibly she got it from a conservative place or maybe came up with it herself to explain what she's seeing?

[01:21:46] **Kunesh:** I think it was an argument, a political argument against liberal environmentalists

[01:21:52] **Lemley:** saying, we saying things are going in all if it's headed south,

[01:21:56] **Kunesh:** yes.

[01:21:57] Headed south like her son. Um, I think it, uh. The, she was so Catholic. My grandpa was so Catholic, his mom was so Catholic that, uh, it was hard to get in an indigenous nature preserving idea into her head. And I don't, she had some, she liked birds too, did not like cats. Um, but I don't think she, uh, put those together the same way, you know, I think it was,

[01:22:46] yep. Politics and, uh, just an argument in politics. I don't, I hope that at some point she encountered Rachel Carson and the idea of DDT and the poisons that were being spread that way. Um, and we got, of course, at that time, everybody coming out of the polio epidemic. We got all of our shots, you know, smallpox, polio, everything.

[01:23:10] And so, um, she, she wasn't a dier that way at all, but I, and maybe, maybe inherently, maybe out of epigenetics, she believed in cycles. I.

[01:23:25] **Lemley:** See that that's what, that's what it's, it's not my place. That's kind of what I wanna think. Yeah. Um, was she in interested in her indigenous culture? Heritage?

[01:23:35] **Kunesh:** Uh, well, there's a yes and there's a no.

[01:23:37] **Lemley:** Yeah.

[01:23:39] **Kunesh:** And I would lean on the yes. But, um, I'm one of those people who think that religion, Christianity has just destroyed so much of indigenous religious thought that it's essentially gutted it. And that, um, most natives, most indigenous people on reservations today are Christian and they don't practice, you know, directions.

[01:24:10] They don't practice, um, songs or sweats or thing. All sorts of things I could, uh, say, but, so that wasn't her thing. And of course, the, especially the God stuff. And so she would, uh, be happy about Qari, TETA and other Native Saints and stuff, but all within a Christian context. So that is a, uh, I, I won't say collaborationist, but an assimilated view.

[01:24:44] And it's hard to. I think, uh, adapt to a cyclical way of thinking in that, although the Catholic church has cycles too mm-hmm. You know, and it has, uh, seasons and changes of colors, changes of prayers, changes of, uh, ceremony. So, uh, she did not go to church on the reservation. We didn't live in North or South Dakota.

[01:25:15] And the closest group of people that lived near us was, were the Anishinaabe up in Lacs, um, a different group, traditional enemy group. So, uh, we didn't get it from there, but we had other stuff and, uh, family stuff and uh, tribal connections that she enjoyed, she maintained, uh, the family connection very strongly, uh, but not the ideology.

[01:25:49] **Lemley:** It's interesting you brought up the cycles of the, of the, uh, the Christian faith that we're sitting here during Lent, and then we will enter Easter season, which is time of resurrection, a time of growth, and then into ordinary time. And as, so I'm kind of interested in, uh, you know, some speculation on where, where she got or appreciated seasons of cycles.

[01:26:13] Um. Are of the 13 of you who, who has embraced or in investigated, how many of you have embraced or investigated your, your indigenous culture?

[01:26:26] **Kunesh:** All 13.

[01:26:27] **Lemley:** that's amazing. Is that have your siblings been more engaged and interested than your, than your mother was?

[01:26:36] Like, is there kind of, are you seeing your, you and your siblings generation. Generations pressing in Yes. To their heritage.

[01:26:45] **Kunesh:** Yes.

[01:26:46] **Lemley:** And why for you? I mean, so let's keep it, keep it on you. Why? Well, when did that happen?

[01:26:51] **Kunesh:** When I came outta the service, I had a free summer and I was at the school and I had heard these stories.

[01:26:58] We had my grandpa, I, there, there's some things I would say to you, but I don't want them on the air. Okay. So I won't say them.

[01:27:08] **Lemley:** Okay.

[01:27:09] **Kunesh:** Um, so we have this stuff from um, my grandpa's time and our grandpa, my mom's dad was the most cherished human in our family. Mm-hmm. He was, he was grandpa, he was. But um, we really loved him.

[01:27:29] And after I got outta the Navy, I had a free summer and I was in the library one day and I said, I wonder, you know, how far these stories are true. 'cause we had grown up believing that we were the, um.

[01:27:48] Grandchildren or probably, uh, nieces and nephews, great-grand nieces and nephews of Sitting Bull. Mm-hmm. 'cause Standing Rock is, was sitting Bull's reservation. And, um, so I went into the library and I just started looking up the history of North and South Dakota and I found our family name or that fa one of the family names, and I started tracing it.

[01:28:11] And that's, I had an interest as a kid in genealogy and I had written one out and I didn't have the, uh, ability, the access to information like I do now. And so, and then even then, in 1981 or so, and so I started compiling more and more information and adding it on and then telling my siblings what I had found about grandpa's, uh, family on the reservation and the associations and everything.

[01:28:47] And, um, they've done their own, um, some of their own work, but I'm a family genealogist and, uh, so I just kept collecting and dishing out the stories and, uh, that has made them feel, uh. Greater, better, more connected and, uh, validated in a way that everything that we're, stuff that we learned, we are not related to singing.

[01:29:16] I, I was gonna go, I

[01:29:17] **Lemley:** was, I was waiting to get that question in. That was one of the great

[01:29:20] **Kunesh:** discoveries is that No, we were on the other side. Oh. Um, and that, it's good to know, uh, you know, how your family grew up, collaborators. And, um, and then I had joined AIM back in 72, I think.

[01:29:39] **Lemley:** And again, AIM is the

[01:29:41] **Kunesh:** American Indian movement.

[01:29:42] Uh, by joined it by letter I sent in five bucks, got, uh,

[01:29:49] **Lemley:** in a cereal box top. Well, yeah, but

[01:29:52] **Kunesh:** these were serious people and, and that they were not, uh, that this was not commercial at all and it was risky. And, uh, anyway, I did, and it was

[01:30:02] **Lemley:** risky. How so?

[01:30:03] **Kunesh:** That was because the occupation of Alcatraz and then the occupation of Wounded Knee.

[01:30:09] **Lemley:** Okay.

[01:30:09] **Kunesh:** So at that point, you know, black Power was the strongest racial movement in the United States, and Natives had none. And so this was the great organizing force, and there was so much land owned by indigenous peoples in the Minnesota and the Dakotas that, uh, and some, you know, there were reservations of people I.

[01:30:35] So there was more contact with natives and, uh, they're still despised. And so it was a whole lower class thing. And that goes back to my mom and how far she thought she could go or was even able to think about going anywhere or doing anything in a town that was 99.9% white.

[01:30:57] **Lemley:** 99.9% white.

[01:30:59] **Kunesh:** Yeah. That's Lake Wobegon.

[01:31:01] Yeah. Have you ever heard of anybody of color on Lake Wobegon?

[01:31:05] **Lemley:** Well, no.

[01:31:06] **Kunesh:** Hell no. No, no. That's, that's Stearns County was settled by Germans all, well, we grew up, one of the interesting things I found out in the past 10 years was that where we grew up was an old reservation that had lasted, that the HoChunk previously called Winnebago, but now called HoChunk, had been put as a no man's land to live in a no man's land.

[01:31:33] Mm-hmm. Between the Anishinaabe to the north and the Dakota to the south. And, uh, that's where we lived. But it, uh, once all the natives were removed, uh, the whole chunk removed to Nebraska, then to, or down south to Min uh, Mankato, then to Nebraska, I think, and then to, uh, Oklahoma. Um, it was settled by whites, Europeans, and.

[01:32:05] I knew one Anishinabe guy in my whole time and I remember seeing one young black man my whole time in, uh, the local city.

[01:32:16] **Lemley:** Wow.

[01:32:17] **Kunesh:** So it was pretty racist and she would not have, uh,

[01:32:23] nobody felt comfortable being out in that time.

[01:32:28] **Lemley:** So people thought she was white?

[01:32:30] **Kunesh:** Yeah. Yeah, yeah. Well, yep. And well, we told people, you know, that, uh, we were this, and at that time nobody really cared. And it was, yeah, there was no real application to it and she wasn't a social person.

[01:32:51] **Lemley:** Okay. So you started getting more interest and sent your \$5 and joined aim, which you're saying is, was risky.

[01:33:01] Risky for you at the time or the organization itself or both?

[01:33:05] **Kunesh:** Um, they didn't know and care who I was. They just needed the five bucks to distribute more, uh, literature about the issues in the Dakotas and Minnesota. So, um, it was dangerous for the leaders and dangerous for the people who believed in more traditional.

[01:33:30] Application of religion and greater autonomy for themselves, for the tribes, and less collaboration with the US government. It was dangerous for them. When I joined in the service in 76, uh, I had my AIM card. They, uh, when I went in for my, uh, security clearance interview, they, I told them, you know, they asked if I had been a member of any organization, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.

[01:33:57] I said, well aim. And they said, really Uhhuh? And they said, uh, well, how do we, what do you do? I said, well, I have my AIM card. And they said, go get it. And so I had a trot back to my, uh, bunk and get it and bring it back. And they took a picture of it. And it didn't hold up my security clearance at all because, you know, I was in central.

[01:34:19] I hadn't been in Central Minnesota all my life. So that didn't hurt me at, at all. Didn't hurt, aim or anything like that. But it did, uh, make the connection back in the late, in the late eighties, much easier for me to meet, uh, people down in the cities in Minneapolis and to, uh, go back on that road again

[01:34:46] **Lemley:** to meet other native people

[01:34:48] **Kunesh:** and to, uh, practice a, a different way of thinking.

[01:34:56] Uh. Indigenous centric way of thinking. Let me see. Oh, here's a card I can give you.

[01:35:05] **Lemley:** Thank you.

[01:35:07] **Kunesh:** There's, um, indigenize

[01:35:10] **Lemley:** Decolonize, right?

[01:35:12] **Kunesh:** So there's a, I attend a friends meeting here.

[01:35:16] **Lemley:** Yeah.

[01:35:17] **Kunesh:** Quakers.

[01:35:18] **Lemley:** Oh.

[01:35:19] **Kunesh:** And um, so, uh, I do it because I like the quiet as a, uh, as a parent. Yeah. I, I like the, the quiet time and I need the quiet time and is a good quiet space.

[01:35:35] And, um,

[01:35:40] I've been doing that since I moved up here to Nashville, uh, because there's a good size meeting here. And then, um, in doing connections, making connections with other friends, Quakers, I saw that there was this group called, uh, decolonizing Quakers. Yeah. D dq, the old DQ from our childhood. Do you remember that?

[01:36:08] So it's decolonizing Quakers. And also there had been a, uh, gathering of friends of color, and I had just mentioned this word, decolonizing, and a group of us started meeting about it and. So out of this comes, uh, part of that growth is not only decolonizing, not only taking the stuff of the colonizer out of indigenous culture, but also to indigenize.

[01:36:34] So it's not just, uh, making sure that cultural places are preserved here in Tennessee or in Minnesota, but also making sure that those places have

indigenous names and are returned to the, uh, responsibility and the care of indigenous people. So that's, and it's two sides of the same. Yeah. That one's the same card.

[01:37:03] I'd say the same coin is that if you're going to decolonize, it also means indigenize at the same time, same thing. And that, uh,

[01:37:14] so I've gone that way.

[01:37:17] **Lemley:** How can people listening or people like me who, how can, how can people like me indigenize or Decolonize,

[01:37:27] **Kunesh:** uh, first get a million bucks?

[01:37:30] **Lemley:** Okay,

[01:37:31] **Kunesh:** that's a, you have a million Steve Martin line. Do you have a million bucks? Second can borrow? No, I don't. No. I can tell Steve, Steve Martin's line, you know how to be happy and how to be a happy millionaire, whatever.

[01:37:43] First get a million bucks. So, um. How do you decolonize one is, uh, well I start before indigenizing, I would say decolonizing and realizing, um, you know, with the wars around the world, uh, who is the colonizer influence? I was just writing this, uh, that, you know, Russia is ex is trying to extend its empires, trying to hold onto its imperial identity as Russia, as mother Russia mat anyway.

[01:38:22] And, uh, push to take over Ukraine, the bread basket of Asia. And, uh, China is extending itself. Wants to take back Taiwan, did take back Hong Kong, um, and is extending itself into the Malay Sea. And I think, uh, the United States is trying to maintain itself as an imperial power by, uh, maintain keeping control on Hawaii and Puerto Rico.

[01:38:49] And also, you know, this stuff about taking Iceland or renaming Gulf of Mexico, um, Gaza, all the, and then Israel's attack on to colonize and settle Gaza is all this imperial stuff. So if you want to decolonize, it's realizing what, who are the empires today? What are the empires doing today to maintain their empire and to extend it and to resist against that, to speak out against it.

[01:39:23] And then here in the United States to realize that the, uh, manifest destiny of progress. I dunno if you've ever seen that painting of lady progress moving from the east to the west, driving the native peoples and the buffalo to

the edge to the west as white people come in from the east, uh, to, uh, decolonize is to acknowledge that these things happen.

[01:39:52] One of the more interesting things that the Quakers have had to do is to, uh, come to, is coming to terms they haven't done it fully yet, is that US President Ulysses s Grant asked the Quakers specifically to build the concentration camps for indigenous children to be assimilated, indoctrinated, and assimilated into American culture.

[01:40:17] **Lemley:** Oh my gosh. And the Quakers said

[01:40:20] **Kunesh:** us said, uh, do we get paid? And they said, damn, damn straight. And they said, all right, we're in it. And they did. They did. They did. Um, and there was a great, uh, report by New England yearly meeting August, 2024 on the, what they call the boarding schools. I don't know about you.

[01:40:44] Where did you grow up?

[01:40:45] **Lemley:** Alabama.

[01:40:46] **Kunesh:** Uh, did they have a boarding school in your town or near city or something like that?

[01:40:51] **Lemley:** Not that I knew of, but I, I, yeah. I don't know

[01:40:55] **Kunesh:** where I grew up. There was a boarding school. There were boarding schools for Catholic schools, and then there was a private Protestant school down in the Twin Cities that boarded people.

[01:41:08] And then thinking about all the stuff I've read in English, history boarding schools were expensive places. Yeah. They were wealthy places. They were places for upper class. So when I hear boarding schools and these concentration camps called boarding schools, you know, that's just white whitewashing with our concentration camps.

[01:41:32] And my great uncle was sent to the, to Carlisle Carlisle Indian School to be indoctrinated and assimilated. And, um, he and his later wife, uh, was also sent to Carlisle and she became chief of the tribe and they got it. And they also resisted later. But, um, it was a reality. So to, uh, to know the, how the empire.

[01:42:06] Has colonized Turtle Island and to help in every way and advocate for return, uh, land acknowledgements to say we know whose land this is. This is Uchi Muskogee land. Did you know that? I did not. Yep. Um, and the Cherokee sold it. But as a friend of mine likes to say, uh, Tom, I didn't say that the Cherokee, that this was Cherokee land.

[01:42:37] I just said that the Cherokee were really good real estate agents. It's like me selling you the Brooklyn Bridge. If I can, if I can get a couple thousand of you with the Brooklyn Bridge, Hey, all the more power to me, eh? So, uh, uh, land acknowledgements and then land back and people back. 'cause you, uh, there's one federally recognized tribe in Tennessee.

[01:43:05] Any idea?

[01:43:06] **Lemley:** No.

[01:43:07] **Kunesh:** Yeah. And almost every idea would be wrong. Yeah. Unless you live out in Memphis, you wouldn't know.

[01:43:15] **Lemley:** Who are they?

[01:43:16] **Kunesh:** The Mississippi Band of Choctaw.

[01:43:18] **Lemley:** Okay.

[01:43:18] **Kunesh:** Who are headquartered based in the state of Mississippi, Philadelphia, Mississippi. But there were people in the forties and fifties who had, who went up the river or up the.

[01:43:32] S uh, the ba the side, you know, went north of Memphis and worked the crops up, uh, around Henning in Ripley. And they migrated back and forth. And finally some of them decided to stay and not migrate. And then they settled. And then they wanted a, some healthcare, they wanted a meeting center. And then they wanted more and more that the tribe finally bought land out there.

[01:43:59] And then had that land, uh, turned over to the USA government in trust, made trust land. And so now the Mississippi Band of Choctaw has reservation land in Tennessee.

[01:44:18] **Lemley:** Have you been out there?

[01:44:19] **Kunesh:** Yes. Well, I've been out. I haven't been to Henning. I've been out to West Tennessee. I've been down to Chick, uh, what is that town?

[01:44:30] Chicka down to Memphis. Uh, but I haven't been to, and I've been to other parts of West Tennessee, but I did not get to Henning itself. Mm-hmm. So, but, uh, land back people back, you know, um, some, some land space for Muskogee and UCI people to come back and take care of these ancestral, sacred places. And then of course comes, um, language back.

[01:45:01] Mm. And there's one language back incident, uh, case already here in, uh, Nashville area, and it is down by, um,

[01:45:17] I hope you cut out all these ums. You will, right?

[01:45:20] **Lemley:** No, it's gotta be, it's unedited as possible. Yeah. It's world history. Yeah. Okay. Yeah.

[01:45:25] **Kunesh:** Okay. Well, I'm trying to think of all the towns. I'm not really familiar. Yeah. Oh, it's all good. Fluent with all this language here. Um, but north of Franklin. Okay. There is a place, uh, by the Harpeth River called, uh, or it was called Kelly Town.

[01:45:44] **Lemley:** Okay.

[01:45:45] **Kunesh:** And it is, uh, now called Ima just that, and it's a Chickasaw name. Okay. So it's a Chickasaw name that has come back and made here. And, uh, we could do all sorts more like calling it Dragonfly Mound, uh, with a Muskogee word. I can't remember what it is right now, but,

[01:46:10] **Lemley:** or keeping Denali Denali.

[01:46:12] **Kunesh:** Yep.

[01:46:13] Keeping Denali Denali. And we did remind, rename the Mound down in Chattanooga from Roxbury, which was a, uh, Boston based carpet mill in Chattanooga to. That gave its name to the mound or they just put the name on the mount, we renamed it Chick Maga Mound.

[01:46:34] **Lemley:** So what will it take for something like Fuchs to be renamed?

[01:46:38] Is that, I guess it does, it depend on the location, how difficult it is

[01:46:43] **Kunesh:** more than the location is the people to do it. You do, you you gotta have the

[01:46:48] **Lemley:** manpower to fight for it.

[01:46:49] **Kunesh:** Yep. Okay. Do you recall what happened this past spring?

[01:46:52] **Lemley:** Mm,

[01:46:53] **Kunesh:** no. This past winter, uh, with the Indigenous Peoples Coalition.

[01:46:58] **Lemley:** Remind me.

[01:46:59] **Kunesh:** Wasdo Park. Okay. Cumberland Park named after an Englishman who never came here. Cumberland still has the name of the river, but there it was Cumberland Park on the East side. East Bank,

[01:47:11] **Lemley:** yeah.

[01:47:12] **Kunesh:** Of Nashville and Albert Bender. And Lorraine Segovia path. Yeah. And others got together and said, let's rename this to what?

[01:47:22] The Shawnee, who had had some towns up there in the historic period called it. And that's where they got, was let's call it was ETOs. So it took them and the coalition that they made to affect that change with the, uh, park system.

[01:47:43] And so there's land back language, people back, language back. Uh oh. So language back and then there's religion back and that. Is a way of indigenizing. And that is more to, uh, I guess the way that most people, I could say it for most people, would be to learn what the native groups are, uh, to follow that path.

[01:48:04] You know, land acknowledgement, find out who was here, how they were here, what they did, and who really was here, and what makes this place special. So that's land acknowledgement and then, um, land and people back, language back and religion back.

[01:48:26] **Lemley:** What has religion back looked like for you?

[01:48:29] **Kunesh:** Uh,

[01:48:35] um, doing stuff in Lakota way and learning more about Lakota language, uh, Lakota traditions and, uh, singing Lakota songs, sweats, uh, ceremony, things like that.

[01:48:54] Are you gonna sing? Nope,

[01:48:56] **Lemley:** I do. It wouldn't even, let me get the question out.

[01:48:59] **Kunesh:** I, I knew where it was going. Oh, it is, yeah. Is wonderful to sing. And we have sung, uh, but I do like, I'm, I'm shy here, but, uh, we have one time we had a multicultural, uh, ML King Day down in. Chattanooga, and it was wonderful to work with the Unity Group down there.

[01:49:20] And I asked if we could, uh, bring, uh, Lakota song to the interfaith Yeah. Uh, gathering. And they said, sure. Quish. Yeah, you're in charge. So, so you had to sing so Well, I didn't have to sing. I wanted to sing. Okay. I liked to sing. Uh, but, uh, there are I think five or six of us who went to that gathering and sang a good song.

[01:49:50] So, um, I guess language religion back would be calling indigenous people back to their original religions, their original beliefs, or to something close, like, uh, the Code of Handsome Lake, you know, was a, uh, later revision of Hani, if I'm saying that correctly. Beliefs, um, and of course the Native American church has a lot of Christianity mixed into it, but these are still.

[01:50:27] Good indigenous beliefs and for white people looking to help out indigenous people, it would also be to find out indigenous European native religions. 'cause they, they are, they do exist. Uh, it was what everything existed before Christianity and even before that, um, before, you know what Indo Europeans brought, there was still a native religion before the, I don't know if you know about Indo-European invasions.

[01:50:59] Mm. Like around 3000 bce. Oh,

[01:51:02] **Lemley:** I'm an expert. Yeah.

[01:51:03] **Kunesh:** Yeah. Well, all of our languages, every language in Europe except one, is a result of the Indo-European invasions. The people that came up

from the Indu River Valley, that river between what's now Pakistan and India. Mm-hmm. Uh, people who migrated north from there and then took a left and then swept across Europe.

[01:51:30] And this was long bef a thousand years before the Greco-Roman empires and stuff like that. They swept through and changed all the la cited new people there with a new language or, I dunno if they killed the people that were there. I don't know what the population was, uh, 5,000 BCE. But the languages, um, Celtic.

[01:51:56] Mm. German Saxon, French, uh, Latin Greek, Slavic. All of the old languages are Indo-European. Mm. There's only one natural still existing native language in all of Europe.

[01:52:17] **Lemley:** Alright, I'll bite. Who is it?

[01:52:18] **Kunesh:** Alright. The Basque. Ah, uh, but they don't have their native reli, the religion anymore. Um, or most, I don't know about that.

[01:52:30] I would just say that it's, I presume it's Catholicism.

[01:52:33] **Lemley:** Okay.

[01:52:33] **Kunesh:** Um, but it would be to, for white people to help, uh, with Indigenize is to learn what their own indigenous roots are, uh, and to see how they match, mix, and match with, uh, traditional Turtle Island beliefs. And I think there's more similarity than difference and to respect and to ask for those things to be recognized.

[01:53:05] And it also to, uh, resist in some ways the continued, uh, push of Christian imperialism and missionization is that there are still Christian schools, essentially embassies. Um. Missions of European thought, European, uh, Christianity, uh, being taught and pushed on reservations. Mm-hmm. So to, uh, to learn about, uh, how empire takes over countries.

[01:53:42] And we're watching it as Israel tries to take over Gaza and Palestine and as Russia tries to take over Ukraine. So that's how you can do decolonizing and indigenizing.

[01:53:59] **Lemley:** Got it. Oh man. Thank you so much. Um, you know, and just a few minutes left. Uh, I was just so grateful for your time. This is, this has

flown by and, um, is there anything, is there anything you wanna say or something?

[01:54:17] I mean, there's so many directions we could still go. I, you know, anything I should have asked that you, um, wanna say, particularly when it comes to our relationship to this planet?

[01:54:52] **Kunesh:** It's to me a, a sad time of being a boomer and realizing that, uh, we have not succeeded in stopping, uh, destruction. And that, uh, what I leave my kids is, uh, is a scarier time. We grew up under the threat of atom bombs, nuclear bombs. And one time, I think it was when I had moved back to the Twin Cities in late, in the late eighties, that it hit me that the twin cities were, uh, targeted for a nuclear bomb.

[01:55:34] And that got me, and that was the big existential threat I think at the time. And now I think the existential threat is what we, uh, what the great generation and what the boomer generation has in the silent generation has done, uh, in large parts, unknowingly, unwittingly. But with Rachel Carson's book, we start to learn.

[01:55:58] And, uh, there are still people who would, who don't care. And to me, that's about the scariest thing is, uh, that there are religious ideas out there that, you know, wanna precipitate. The end that want us, that are happy about bringing it on, that this is what is called stewardship in, in the, in the name of the Lord.

[01:56:22] And, um, that we have a manifest destiny to promote, to, uh, succeed in. And if it means, um, gas cars, if it means, um, more exploration, better, that is hard and sad to see. And I, I remember wondering about whether I should have kids, and I really like kids, and I, of course, I wanted kids. And, uh, I didn't feel so bad about it, you know, in the, in the nineties, late nineties, early two thousands.

[01:57:00] But now, um, the way that Greta Thunberg is, has been treated and, uh, the way that some people wanna turn back the clock on government, on government environmental regulations, uh, that is sad. And I, I don't regret having kids at all, but I do regret, uh, not

[01:57:33] having more of a good minded majority, uh, to push through. Uh, climate preservation and better things. I have a mother-in-law that's a very, very active environmentalist, and I am glad for her. I'm glad what she's taught, uh, our kids. Uh,

[01:57:58] so I have both fear, regrets, and hope that, uh, these girls will survive it and create a better world.

[01:58:10] **Lemley:** Tom Kish. Thank you.

[01:58:13] **Kunesh:** Thank you, Tasha.

[01:58:14] **Lemley:** Uh, so this concludes the climate related brief oral history of Tom Kish on Wednesday, March the 26th, 2025 that took place on Uchi and Muskogee Land in Nashville, Tennessee.

[01:58:31] **Kunesh:** Yep.

[01:58:31] **Lemley:** Thank you. And I think the running time right over two hours is all. Thank you. Thank you.