

We Rise Podcast Episode 34 - Telling Our Stories: Youth Re-Envisioning the Future

Podcast Transcript

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[Music - We Rise Anthem by Pink Panther Sorority]

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

Chant:

I rise.

You Rise

We Rise, We Rise, We Rise

Singing/Harmonizing:

We (clap - clap clap)

Rise (clap - clap clap)

Up (clap)

Chant:

We Rise

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

Singing/Harmonizing:

We (clap - clap clap)

Rise (clap - clap clap)

Up (clap)

Chant:

We Rise (clap clap)

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

[Music]

SABREEN: We are change. We are the next generation, and the world needs to hear our voices because we impact the future. All of our stories are connected. If we don't understand others' stories or listen to them, we might miss this vital connection. We might begin to believe that our story is all of life, when it's actually one branch of a really big tree. Sharing our stories brings a connection to one another. Our stories can bring new insights to people who may have never experienced or known about our stories. Stories are empowering and are one of the first steps to taking action and making change. Our voices are worth hearing. They offer something for people to relate to and open up possibilities for others who may never have experienced or heard about what we share. Telling our stories can make people feel less alone, giving inspiration to others to write their own stories, too. There's such power of storytelling that could make a difference in someone's life. It allows us to connect with one another and create community. What you are about to hear comes from youth from across Turtle Island from occupied Ohlone land in the San Francisco Bay Area to Shawnee territory in Louisville, Kentucky. As we learn and explore media making, we bring you the wisdom we carry in our voices and the seeds of our vision for the future.

[Music and the sound of soft splashes of water]

KYLER: [Introduction in Navajo language] My name is Kyler Williams, and I live in St. Michaels, Arizona. I live on top of a mountain in a small hogan. I briefly introduced myself in Navajo at the beginning of this recording. I guess when I was small, I was always told half of my clans are from water. So, my mother always used to say like, you were born, you're half-born from water and half-born from earth. You are a combination of both. Everyone is a combination of both, but water is the most important element and water is very important to your life. I'd say that water is very symbolic to my life, I suppose. It's always symbolic in everyone's life, I think. Water is always changing. It's always direction. It's never still. Even when it is still, it's always looking for a bigger water or body to join. And I think that it says a lot about a lot of people because people can be very changing and very, I guess very powerful in some way. Here at my hogan, we don't have running water. And this requires us to get water from other places on the Navajo Nation, whether it be wells or my grandparents' house or other people's houses to get water. We get the water by hauling water through, hauling water with barrels or buckets. We haul the water with trucks, or some people use SUVs. But we use our trucks, and I have a favorite truck. My little green truck. It's a 1997 green Ford Ranger, standard edition. It creaks every time you open the door. The windows are scratched. It does not have any air conditioning whatsoever. The green

truck is my favorite because it's the oldest and most reliable truck in my family. It has hauled wood for us, it has hauled water, it has hauled hay. It's hauled us around. And every time we thought we weren't going to make it back home, it would get us home safely. There were times where it would drive itself home. It kept us warm when we didn't have electricity. And there were times where we thought that our truck was going to conk out and we were going to be without transportation for a while. But somehow, I think that truck knew that it was our lifeline. It did a lot for us. It got us home through the muddy rain and snowy winters. For a small truck, it is reliable and very tough. We haul the water in giant barrels. I think they were originally meant for soap. Although they weren't meant to haul water, my grandfather decided to give them to us because we had no other way of hauling water and we were too, I guess were too poor to actually buy those giant barrels that were actually meant for water use. My grandfather worked at a power plant or gas plant. And that's how he got a hold of those barrels. And he cleaned them out for us, and he told us to use it. And that's what we've been using for the past 20 years to get our water. The barrels are heavy, but they're not heavy enough to be immobile. You can move them around and throw them in the back of the truck and then go on down to the well or someone else's house to fill water. You cannot go over 15 miles per hour without inhaling dust. And it is not a good idea to be right behind someone when they're driving, or else you will get a lungful of dust, and you will start coughing everywhere. The roads are a bit rough, but the payoff is enormous. Because when the roads are rough, usually that means that no one else has been there in a while or that the scenery is pretty nice. There's no cars. There's no buildings. It's just you and the forest or the prairies or even just a fence or something. When I was small, my favorite well, it was at the beginning of a canyon. And that canyon had the nicest red rocks I've ever seen. They would seem to glow in the evening. And I used to love the scenery there because there were trees. And you could sit underneath the trees and just kind of sit there and take a breather for a while. There was also a smell of water and dirt and mud. The smell of sort of rain, it was kind of like. Because everyone used to use that well so much, the well would always be wet, or the ground would always be wet around the well. And that would give off the smell of dirt or mud. And it would just be awesome.

[Music and sounds of soft splashes of water]

KYLER: A lot of people kind of abused the wells, and they kind of like throw trash and it basically, it becomes very grated over the years. And eventually the water becomes toxic because people keep dumping stuff there. And it's really sad to see a lot of – well, there is one well, particularly. I used to love going to that well. And now it's just kind of like a trashy perch. People would dump their trash. And because of that, the well that's there is kind of toxic. We can't really drink from it anymore. It was really nice before. It

had these big cottonwood trees that would overlap it. And me and my sister would always get a kick of trying to pump it the fastest. Each time I drive by that well, I remember the nice memories of how me and my sister used to play there, or how me and my dad used to sit there and drink a cold Chasta. Most of the time they'd be warm, which kind of sucked. We didn't have AC or anything. So, now it's just kind of a trash dump for other people to throw their trash, their old junk away. Now we get the water from either my grandparents' house or we get the water from another well. When we get home, we use the water in almost every way we can. We use the water – we have separate waters for separate sinks. For example, the big water barrels are used for cleaning and washing, basically. There are small gallon barrels that are meant for cooking and drink. And it's like a little system we have, I suppose. It's kind of hard to explain. There was one time in winter where we had only three barrels of water left. And we had to make those three barrels last at least a week. And usually, we have five barrels to last us a week. So, it forced us to use and conserve water to our fullest. We had to strategically plan our washes and our cooking to the fullest. We couldn't just waste water on washing our face or washing dishes or something like that. At some point, it snowed really bad. It was also kind of good, but it was also kind of bad. Because we had to go outside and grab snow and melt it back down for water use. And then we used the snowy melted for washing and cleaning. But it was okay, I suppose. It wasn't as bad, but it was like sort of alarming to the point where we were like, if we run out of water, what are we going to do, basically. And it really kind of opened our eyes because straight after the little snow, we like three more barrels. I love going on vacations and having to go into a hotel and be able to wash without heating up water, without having to wait to heat up the water. I don't have to concern myself with how much water I use. Like I can just sit in the shower and just steam-bathe all night. And another thing that I love about going to a hotel is I can actually take a bath. That is one thing I can't do here. We could when we're small because the tubs were bigger. But now they're all small for us, and we can only take sponge baths. Water is very convenient because you can just flip the switch on and wash away. Save water. You don't know how good something is until you don't have it.

[Music and the sound of soft splashes of water]

KYLER: My grandfather, my actual grandfather, he and his daughters and his son, they always said that when he was around, there was always an abundance of water. It wasn't as nearly as dry as it is today. There was always rain falling. There was always water going through. And there's a wash that's actually right next to his house. One of those guys used to say there was always a little stream that used to go down there. And now these days there's not as much water. It's actually getting dryer, I think,

because I remember when he was around, too, that we used to have big snow. And I remember when I was small, we used to go outside and have fun a lot. Nowadays, we hardly get enough snow to roll around in. It's been a dry summer. I think like last year we got a pretty good, decent amount of snow. That was fun. But mostly it's always dry summers, dry winters. I do hear stories about like when, my mom tells me, she's like, when your grandfather was alive, this thing always used to be here, or this used to be like that. And I'm not, really? I'm not the only one that doesn't have water. Like other kids from my school don't have water as well, so. There are a lot of grandparents and grandmas and grandpas that live out like really far, and they have to go way farther than we do to get water. And they have livestock there, like 10 times bigger than ours. They have sheep. They have cattle. They have horses. I think they're probably tougher than all of us to be honest. Tough on their nails, they say. I have heard talk about building up infrastructure. I heard that Navajo Nations are trying to get more water lines out there, but I haven't really seen any. I think Covid-19 kind of slowed us down a lot. And I probably think it probably slowed down a lot of people, too.

[Music and sound of soft splashes of water]

KYLER: To us, water is like, water is very powerful. Our culture, a lot of people seem to forget that water is very important. I have taken it for granted as well. Well, I'm kind of grateful that I don't have water, because I'm more grateful for having it when I do at times. I think that's one lesson it taught me. But in my culture, yeah, water is everything. I could probably say for everyone, water is technically probably one of the most like important resources on the earth, I'd say. And almost every culture has something that's affiliated with water. Water is like, it's basically the life-giver of everything, kind of like creation.

[Music]

SABREEN: The following story goes down a deep hole in the life of earth. I hear cars driving. Birds chirping. People get blamed. Environments change. I feel that change, and it's not a good change. I feel the earth crumble. I see colors of the leaves change. It smells like difference, but not a good one. It sounds like the earth is crying for our help. And I know ways for that to work. I'm Sabreen. Pronouns are she/her. I live in Louisville, Kentucky. The world needs to hear my story because voices need to be heard, stories need to be told, lives can be helped and saved.

HELEN: This story takes place everywhere. It takes place in America, in China, in India. It feels like being suffocated, and it smells like chemicals. It sounds like people are yelling for help. My name is Helen Xin, and my pronouns are she/her. I live in Louisville,

Kentucky. The world needs to hear my story because it can help educate others and bring people together by connecting them with a shared experience.

SOL: This story takes place in all of our waterways, like oceans and rivers. It sounds like animals almost in pain because of all of the garbage in their ecosystems. It looks disgusting because of what we've done to our water. It smells, smells like plastic and garbage. My name is Sol Armstrong. My pronouns are he/him, and I'm in Denver, Colorado. And the world needs to hear my voice because our oceans are in danger.

SABREEN: This story is for people who want to help but have completely no idea how. This story is for people who want to become educated about the world and what destruction is being taken upon it. This story can also help people realize what big of a difference they can make. This story is for the home I call Earth. This story can help, not just the Earth, not just the people, but the land that has been taken away from a bunch of people. This story can help me. This story can help animals with their environments, their habitat, and their families. My story begins by talking about different environmental problems, not just the pollution, not just the dirty water, not just the ruined habitats, but the injustice. I see land being taken. I see trees being cut down and made mulch. I see animals losing their homes, and I see fires are happening in the west, just completely breaking things down and destroying things, but not on purpose and also not on accident. I can see different variety of people trying to help and making differences. One of those ways could be simply by recycling and not throwing plastic into trash, but figuring out how, even by protesting, going to these big communities. Even sending emails could help. Even talking to people who want to join a community to help. The future can look much more cleaner. The air can look much more prettier in the day and can smell much more prettier in the night. The clouds won't look as dirty as they usually do. Less garbage would be found in the water, on the ground. Less homes would be burned. Less homes would be taken away. We would feel relieved to know that we made a difference in our world, and we helped our home. We can hear birds chirping more than now and much more louder. And that will help us know that we have created a difference, and we have brought back what our home used to be.

DAYDRIANNA: So, this story is for anyone who wants to make a difference in the world. Here is what is happening. Air pollution continues to affect people and human health by making the air less healthy to breathe. Gasses released from burning fossil fuels and even gasses from cars continue to pollute the environment, causing breathing problems for people. Here is what we can do to help. We can use cleaner sources of energy and try to avoid using cars when we can. Instead, we could walk or ride a bike. The future will smell fresh, look clearer, and feel healthier. I learned about it in one of my classes. I took ecology, and we started learning about all of these like

human-induced problems. I learned more about air pollution and global warming. And I just learned about how it affected human health and how it's like important to speak out for. I see it like it in my neighborhood because we live near, I live close to the highway, so I can always see like the gasses from the cars around our neighborhood and like all the smoke. I think like it can suffocate others, too, especially like for people who live like more closer to the highway than I do.

SOL: What's happening is that there's trash in the oceans, and it's contributing to the extinction of ocean animals. And to fix this, we need to recycle more with our trash, and we need to clean up all the trash that's already there. In the future, we can have more people enjoy being in the ocean and around more different types of animals. We'll know we made it when we can go to the beach and not see any trash anywhere. It is important to me because I like the oceans and I like water. And my mom has told me like water is life, so we don't want to I guess mess it up. I'm not really sure like where I first started learning about it, but right now at my school I'm doing like a project about it and researching about the impacts and everything. The water pollution can affect me and my family because it makes it more difficult to go and enjoy where there's water and enjoy seeing all those animals in the oceans.

[Music and sound of the ocean]

BECCA: My family recycles all the plastic bottles and cans that we drink. Water, soda, juice, and milk are all contained in a transparent lightweight material that will soon lead to the destruction of our biosphere. These plastics are used by nearly everyone in the world every day. However, I do not use single-use plastic water bottles. I use reusable cups or water bottles that last a lifetime. Therefore, I have a leg up in recycling. My family and I also create eco-bricks or bottle bricks. Bottle bricks are plastic bottles that are stuffed with other plastic so that the bottles are dense and hard as a brick. All of the plastics come straight from my home and mother's at-home daycare. They're, eventually, bags, full plastic bags, accumulate in my room by the end of the week from containers and packages like personal care products or food wrappers, especially Nutri-Grain bars from the daycare. We barely have to take out the trash anymore when we save up plastic. After my friends and I make the bottle bricks, we drop them off at a location where they send them to developing countries to use as sustainable bricks. People in those countries use bricks to build houses, buildings, and infrastructure. Our world has so much plastic, it is disgusting. I did the math and calculated that we recycle at least three trash bags full of plastic and cardboard a week. That is 156 bags a year that we recycle. That is a lot for a family, and that is not counting other plastics either. Every other family that is not recycling is potentially putting 156 bags full of plastic and more in somebody else's backyard, landfill, or

ocean. I wonder if they would recycle if the plastics ended up in their backyard. Large power-hungry corporations need to take responsibility and stop using plastic. Sure, plastic is cheap and an easy way of packaging products, but there wouldn't be anyone left to sell the products to if our world gets destroyed by climate change. Plastics in landfills release carbon dioxide when they break down. When plastics are burned or incinerated, they release greenhouse gasses. There are no environmental benefits to plastics. I feel mad, angry, irritated that I have to recycle at all. Humans are brilliant and intelligent species. We have created and invented some amazing things in the world. So, my question is, why can't we use alternatives to plastics? A more sustainable option for packaging can be paper or cloth bags for groceries or limiting the amount of single-use water bottles a person uses. We need to take action and start implementing other sustainable options for plastic.

[Music]

DAYDRIANNA: Together, by Daydrianna Jeffries. The many fights from past years and decades have put a wound on one's heart, our heart. Therefore, it causes my people's voices to not be heard. The cries of our pain from racism and plain torture has imbedded trauma into our incoming ages to this generation. We have been killed for things we cannot change. Our race, our culture, the way we live and love one another. The hatred from within has broken our spirit. We gave you a base and you have taken to , put back into pieces and claim as yours. We help out daily but our pain is so sore from our hearts. We built this country from core. Together we will fight for what's right, to make us feel safe, and still be us again. Our voice matters, and so do our lives.

[Music]

SOLYANA: We as a human race are particularly bad about limiting our own time, so I would not be asking to take just a minute of yours, which could translate into altering the trajectory of your own lifestyle, if it was not important. Whoever you may be, if you are listening to this, you live on planet Earth. And chances are that you will probably still be here on planet Earth for a long time. There's no way to sugarcoat this because, like I said, we have whittled away our time enough. We are killing our planet. And if you for whatever reason do not believe this to be true, then I hope it does not have to come to the point where you will regret it very much because there will be no one left to say, I told you so. As the ones with the ability at our hands to administer mass messaging worldwide, we the youth have the responsibility, should we choose to uphold it, to make our voices be heard. It is our job to get the right people to listen. Climate change is real. The icebergs are melting, the forests on fire. The weather is fluctuating from hot to cold the same way an ill person does. The only difference is that the person, with the advances in medicine and health care, is pretty much guaranteed a

speedy recovery. They need not worry. They can take a few sick days, sip their medicine and herbal tea with honey, put an ice pack on their head, because they can trust that the work and inventions of other humans will heal them in a timely fashion. This person can bounce back good as new and forget they were ever sick. Why can the Earth not do the same? It is people like us who tell people like you, if you're a non-believer or an activist, who perform as a middleman between the earth and the people who can actually really do something. The Earth is depending on us, and we are letting our home planet down. This is disgraceful and embarrassing and dangerous. It is very dangerous. So, listen. Do some listening, be the listener, then be the protector, the activist. The more people we can bring in to relay our message, the stronger and more powerful we become as a united community. Adjust your lifestyle, encourage others. It is not just important that we are heard but seen. Eventually the voices of many create one picture, and this is what everyone else will see when they think of us. If we paint a pretty picture with our voices, we will acquire the attention that we made then redirect back to planet Earth, our Earth who needs us. Mother Earth provided for us, continues to deplete her sources like a mother who would give anything for her child, sacrifices every last resource. What a way to show love to our mother than abandon her.

ATAIJAH: If trees were a gang, they'd be poor, plentiful in expansion, potential through the roof, dangerous to the economy and yet it's biggest franchise. If trees were a gang, we would all reap what we sow, for the air they have gifted us we have soiled. The fresh water feeling of oxygen in our lungs turn to smoke. If trees were a gang, it'd be hard to separate one from the next, and a turf war might erupt into a million leaves, trickling down past crowds of people chanting, we can't breathe. We can't breathe because our lungs are filled. We can't breathe because our oceans are dying. We can't breathe because our throats are too busy sucking in our last breath. I can't breathe, we said. We can't breathe, we said. If trees were a gang, we would all fear violence because without them we can't breathe. Breathing essential air is a privilege granted to only those worthy. If trees were a gang, they'd be one of those 80s gangs, creating peace amongst communities and bringing a fresh sense of life to neighborhoods mistreated and scarce in all things healthy. They can't breathe. If trees were a gang, they'd become a barrier between long pistols, batons, and masks, surrounding crowds shouting with their last breath to make things better. Trees are like people, living, breathing, neglected people. Trees are a gang, ready at every moment to protect, but chopped and beaten and refurbished to lands where houses grow out of the woodwork every day. If trees were a gang, they'd bring air missiles to every fight, ready for the axis of reality to split one last bill, to write one last essay, to read one last petition, giving its legs for the battle and its heart for the air. Trees are like a gang.

Once used in moderation for protection and shade from the unknown, now misunderstood and protected from those whose power comes from their voice. This gang has given us air to project into the ears of the next generation. If trees were a gang, we'd all be protected. We would all remember what beautiful looked like. If trees were a gang, we would be crewmates.

[Music]

SABREEN: Thank you for listening to our stories. They're unfinished because we are still living into this future of safe and clean air, water, land, and communities. The health of the world matters and so does the health of the Earth's creation. There are so many ways to care for this future and act now. You can donate, protest, convey with scientists, leaders, and community members. You could organize and you could tell your story. The more we share our vision and wisdom about climate resilience and collective liberation, the more we will make it a reality together. You can find out more about our collaboration and our mentors by checking out myceliumyouthnetwork.org, bioneers.org, and weriseproduction.com. Thank you again for listening. In solidarity, the Telling Our Stories Youth.

[Music]

[Music - We Rise Anthem by Pink Panther Sorority]

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