

Samantha

I'm Samantha I'm from Peguis First Nation,

Tanya

It's nice to meet you.

Samantha

It's nice to meet you too. My family is from East Selkirk, along the Red River.

Robyn

Robyn Medicine and I'm, as you know, the Indigenous liaison at Thunder Bay Public Library. My mother's family is from Manitou Rapids or Rainy River First Nation and I am a band member of Mitaanjigamiing First Nation which is literally across the highway from Manitou Rapids.

Tanya

Yeah, well thank you guys, you have done such great work I have to say right off the bat and you were the first person to reach out to me.

Tanya

Well the work you're doing is really, it's really, it's leadership for sure.

Samantha

Cool, okay, so we're just gonna ask you a few questions on the role you think libraries can play in reconciliation.

Samantha

Okay so, what role do you think libraries can play in ending indigenous suicide and homicide. I just wanted to start with something easy and light.

Samantha

I was gonna start with "What's your favorite book?"

Tanya

By doing what the Thunder Bay library is doing actually helps a lot, not just increasing people's knowledge about literature, about our stories and our books that are out there and sometimes haven't been promoted or prominently displayed but you're going that extra mile by reaching out to the people that are actually coming into your library, you know, you're making your library, it's-it's a community center, right?

Tanya

That is so innovative because a lot of people say, you know, "oh we are turning towards digital, there's no more paper anymore, things are all going to computers and things you can get online" but you're making the library more relevant by drawing people in and people come in, I mean, I did. I hung out at the Brodie Street library when I was writing

Seven Fallen Feathers and I would see everybody coming in and what you've done at that location is brilliant because the people need it.

Tanya

For sure.

Samantha

If you could direct a library without any restrictions, what would the ideal library look like?

Tanya

I think the ideal library has to be a civic engager. It would be a place that would have lots of windows, lots of comfy and hard chairs, as it depends on what you're doing. Yes, iPads and computers. So many books, and I would like a library to be a civic leader, I would like a library to do what you're doing with the public health nurses. I would like social workers coming in, you also have job retraining at one of your locations too, I think that's incredible. Education. Holding nights that are important in bringing the community together, You're already doing all those things and that's what the city needs. The city needs somebody to step up and do that, organize nights in places where people feel safe and they don't feel like they're being yelled at or talked down to but instead it's an inclusive space where everybody's welcome. That's what libraries should be.

Samantha

If you were to give advice to a white library staff worker whether they're a library assistant, or a library technician, or a librarian or any member of library staff who is white, what advice would you give to them about how they can better end white supremacy, better support indigenous nation building, better engage reconciliation?

Tanya

It's all about education. It's all about educating yourself in reading more, getting involved more, not being scared of someone that's different than you. That very much begins when you're a child. Sometimes it's hard to re-learn but, a book is a good way to do it.

Samantha

Is there a book that you think all libraries in Ontario should have? Besides, besides yours?

Tanya

It is very good in a very tough question One book off the top of my head is *An inconvenient Indian* by Thomas King, absolutely is a good overview, just lets you know. I would also suggest *The truth about stories*, Thomas King's Massey lectures are brilliant.

Samantha

They really are, yeah.

Tanya

They are, they really are. I had that book beside me when I wrote both my books that I'd flip to it often about his style and what he can do, I would absolutely say that. I would say, so hard, I could pick a whole bunch.

Robyn

What about children's books?

Tanya

Joanne Robertson's book on the water *Water Walker*.

Samantha

This is the one about Josephine?

Tanya

Yes, yes, yes that book should be everywhere, absolutely. *The marrow thieves* for young adults. I think it really helps engage young adults and it doesn't matter what colour your skin is, when you read "The Marrow Thieves" you'll just think so much more about things, right? And that's like, maybe young people will think of Indigenous people in a different way.

Now whose, *Half breed*, the book?

Samantha

Is it Marilyn Dumont?

Tanya

Marilyn Dumont, yeah, it's her son. Now that's also a book I think should be everywhere because I remember reading that book, I found it under my mother's bed when I was like twelve or thirteen, and I read it.

I would also like to say poetry, there's so.

Samantha

I just ordered like twenty new books of poetry.

Tanya

Indigenous storytelling is mostly oral and when I read poetry by our writers, I often think this is the best forum for us, right, is poetry, you know? There's so much, Leeanne Betasamosake Simpson's work is beautiful.

Samantha

So good. I was thinking about this because I was ordering all this new Indigenous... books by Indigenous authors that have come out recently and it was, a lot of it was poetry and I was thinking why, why is so much of this poetry? Is it because I just like poetry, but I was thinking like what you're saying that I think it's because a lot of Indigenous cultures have such a high value on oratory, and the oral tradition, and that comes out in poetry.

So in a lot of Indigenous cultures really have a - are much more oriented around like oral tradition and oral culture and libraries are all about the written word in a lot of ways, whether physically or online resources. Do you think that besides or ordering more poetry books, which I did, are there ways you think that libraries can better make space for oral tradition?

Tanya

Absolutely. Story circles. Special nights, maybe, where you've got, you know, tea and bannock. Can you invite an elder and to have a story, I don't even know, you might be doing that, you are? Yeah, that's perfect, yeah, I think that's amazing, you know, and bring the youth in too. Ask them to come.

That is how you do it and you're already doing it, which is great.

Samantha

So earlier I asked you what advice would you give to white library staff and you were saying education and to self-educate. I had sub questions to that and I'm curious if you have any advice for racialized minorities who are ie. not white and not Indigenous who work in libraries. Is there anything that you would say to them specifically as settler Canadians or settlers who are people of colour working in libraries, what would you say to them to encourage them or what advice would you give to them?

Tanya

To do the same actually, as non-Indigenous people, just get involved. Read as much as you can, attend those nights where you've got storytelling and tea and bannock and just be a part of what's going on. I think that that's all any of us can do really to learn about each other. And it's not, that, it's not - It's not rocket science in a way, you know. But, they're simple things.

Samantha

But it's not easy.

Tanya

But it's not easy, I know.

Samantha

What advice or what would you say to Indigenous library staff workers? The unicorns that we are.

Tanya

Keep on being unicorns. Actually no, no, change from unicorns so you're not the only ones, you know? How important is it that we have our people in libraries. Our stories are ancient, they go back through generations, they absolutely need to be part of a public institution like a library. You cannot just have stories from one side. There has to be both and that's so important, and I know that your library understands that but it needs to grow. I know too that, it would, there's a movement to get First Nations libraries as well.

Like, wouldn't that be wonderful too, you know? Having libraries. That's so needed. Look how well used your library is, everybody comes, right? So wouldn't that be great if there were libraries in communities. It'd be a safe place for everyone to go.

Samantha

Yeah, I think it really would be. I feel like a lot of my questions are, like, the same question with different.

Okay, here's a more fun one. What is your first memory of a public library?

Tanya

I think my first memory definitely was story time. Going to story time with my mom, yeah, and sitting in a circle.

Samantha

And were those positive experiences or?

Tanya

Oh for sure, yeah, I always love story and I remember that very much as a little person. I like being told stories and I like to listen to them. And my very, my favorite book was *Corduroy*.

Robyn

Yeah, that's a classic, isn't it?

Samantha

Okay, I think we're almost done. So just two maybe shorter questions. What film/DVD who would you recommend that all libraries have? Because in Thunder Bay, we're kind of the exception where DVD circulation is still thriving. People always come for DVD's. So is there a film that you think every library in Ontario should have in their collection?

Robyn

It doesn't have to be a documentary, it can be a comedy or of Indigenous films-

Samantha

Could be Smoke Signals, just kidding.

Robyn

Yes, it's on our list, by the way.

Tanya

I'm going to say *Rumble*.

Samantha & Robyn

Rumble?

Tanya

Put *Rumble* in there.

Samantha

That's about the, rock, the history of rock?

Tanya

It's about music. It's about music but I think that, you know, I think Rumble would appeal to all sorts of people and I think that music and art is so important - as ways to open doors.

Samantha

Oh, for sure.

Tanya

You know? We saw it just, we just saw it on the weekend at the Juno's with Jeremy Dutcher and The Arkells and so I think that music can bring people in, in a different way and so I would say ...

Samantha

Yeah.

Tanya

And I know a lot of people would probably, they'd come and rent it.

And Angelique's Isle, for sure, specifically to this area, yeah.

Samantha

What are you currently reading?

Tanya

You really don't want to know the answer to that - I was reading the Thunder Bay Budget. I just got finished reading *There, there*.

Samantha

That's the ...

Tanya

Tommy Orange.

Samantha

Tommy Orange. Oakland, California.

Tanya

Yes, which is incredible.

Robyn

So, do you read books cover-to-cover? Or do you read like me and have like ten books on the go and just read what you read?

Tanya

No, I do read them cover-to-cover..

Samantha

Thank you so much.

Tanya

Oh, thanks for coming, it was really good. I'm honestly really proud of the work you're doing.