

Title: Conversation with Smokii Sumac

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Samantha Martin-Bird (S.M.B.)

Aaniin, Boozhoo. Samantha nidishinikaas, Peguis Nidoonji [Ojibwe]. My name is Samantha, I'm from Peguis First Nation and I'm sitting here today at the Brodie Resource Library in Thunder Bay with Smokii Sumac.

Smokii Sumac (S.S.)

Hi.

S.M.B.

Smokii, could you introduce yourself a little bit?

S.S.

Sure. ki?uk kyukyit hu qak#ik [Ktunaxa]. Hi, I am Smokii Sumac. I'm from the Ktunaxa Nation, located in southeastern, what we call British Columbia today, and what our people call [Ktunaxa]. And I am excited to be here in Thunder Bay.

S.M.B.

Yeah, I'm really excited to have you here. You're currently travelling across country?

S.S.

I am. Somebody asked where I lived yesterday and I said, "Well, all of my stuff is in the car in someone's backyard here." But um, yeah, I'm on my way, moving actually back home to [Ktunaxa], to my home territory to teach at College of the Rockies.

S.M.B.

So, as you've been travelling cross country, you're here in Thunder Bay for a couple days and we had you here at Brodie just a couple night ago for a poetry reading.

S.S.

It was a really big gift to be here. I've been wanting to visit Thunder Bay for a long time because I know that this place has very, very big problems with racism and violence against Indigenous people. But knowing that also having read Tanya Talaga's book about *Seven Fallen Feathers* and about this place and witnessing that, what I also witness is the strength of the Indigenous population here and so to be able to come and visit uhm, was very exciting. And actually, to be able to read my work and gift some of my work to the Indigenous community here that came out. Uhm, and it was incredible because it was just a strong Indigenous presence in the audience and I don't often get a chance to read to mainly Indigenous, uhm, people so it was a gift and I actually read different poems than I normally read because of that.

And I also want to honour our other poet who, uh, you invited local poets which is an amazing, if there are any event organizers listening to this, I want to share that it's an amazing way to connect, whether you do music or poetry or art, to connect somebody coming to visit with local people because it also brings a crowd because they know they're friends are going to be reading. But it also just created such a beautiful relationship. And we had Elton, who read for the first time, which was so beautiful. And then we had two Anishinaabe Kwe, ah, who opened for us, Ardelle and Jana-Rae, uhm,

local Thunder Bay poets. I almost didn't want to read, I didn't, I wouldn't need [Samantha laughs] to, it was so great. It was such a gift to be able to share our words and sort of lift each other up in that way. [Samantha, uh uhm] So I think it was such a beautiful night so [Samantha, uh uhm] thank you.

S.M.B.

Oh, [Smokii: for that] my pleasure you know. My job involves so many different things that I think, when I get to create spaces that, like centre the dignity of Anishinaabeg, that's a highlight for me. It's really fun to host people like you, and Ardelle Sagutcheway, and Elton, and Jana-Rae Yerxa, are all super amazing individuals doing great work for the community here in Thunder Bay. There's often, at, at those sorts of events, this like little clique of Indigenous woman youth. I'm, I always see them and I always think, "They keep showing up" [laughs] to, to these things [laughs]

S.S.

You must be doing something right [Samantha laughs].

S.M.B.

Yeah [laughs]. They're people we only see at these events, right. They're not like regular library users. But there's something about the programming that we're starting to create here that's drawing them in. And that's encouraging to me because maybe they'll sign up for a library card too [laughs]. Yeah, before we talk about your work actually, I was wondering, you've been in Thunder Bay for a few days now. So, how is your experience here lining up with your expectations for this famous, racist city.

S.S.

Famous, [Samantha laughs], famous for racism. Although I think Winnipeg got that title, the most racist city in Canada, right, but I think Thunder Bay probably... [got that title]

S.M.B.

We take turns [Smokii: oh yeah], we're kind like that

S.S.

Hands it back.

I will be honest, I was fearful coming here and I think we'll talk a little bit about gender, uhm, cause I do identify as two-spirit and I identify as transgender so I think part of that is I present masculine, I use he/him pronouns and so, being an Indigenous man in, in this space, I was nervous about it. Somebody used the term the, the other day, we brace ourselves, we're always sort of braced and ready for anything that's coming. An Anishinaabe Kwe actually wrote to me and said, you know, "I'm grateful that you're coming to Thunder Bay but be careful, whether it's on the street or whether you're doing a workshop and get a question, that racism is here and it's strong." So, I think that was my expectations coming in, being ready, trying to prepare myself. We were saying the other day, I, I wear rings and I think I put my armour on for those events. So I was sort of ready for that but I think whenever I know that there is that kind of divide in the community and that kind of violence that Indigenous people are facing, I also know that that's the strength of the community, of protecting each other, of searching for our children when they go missing, even though the police aren't doing anything. I got to meet one person, or a couple of people, that do the night patrol here and that was a gift. In that way, the Indigenous people have exceeded my expectations and I was thinking, you know, I knew that they would be strong. Something I got to share yesterday, I also did a workshop at Lakehead, and I got to share that being in that room the other night here at the library with those Anishinaabe people and mostly Anishinaabe women, could

feel power and strength. Well, my workshop was on land acknowledgements and one of the major things that I try to teach people is that we are the land so Anishinaabeg people are the land here. And I think that the best way for me to explain that is that power that I felt, those women in that room, is the same power that I felt when I went to greet that lake and went to go to the water. That strength of this place is just everywhere. I, I had the gift of going up Fort William and going up the mountain, as they say, it's such a powerful place as well. And for me, as somebody who practices ceremony, practices these ways, connecting, listening whatever you want to call it, that space to me, it's been a gift to be here.

Then it snow stormed in Winnipeg so I'm here for an extra day, which is nice. I feel like I wasn't quite ready to leave and I, I do think that lake is not quite done with me so I'm hoping that I will be back to visit again.

S.M.B.

I moved here just over a year ago, Anemki Wajiw [Ojibwe], Thunder Mountain, like Mountain McKay, is a really integral part of me deciding to move here. And also the lake. Now that I'm here, I know that like, when I'm having a rough time, I know that I need to go to the lake or go up to the mountain, that relationship to the waters and to the land is important to stay grounded in a city where it is hard to be an Indigenous person. I think I'm realizing the issue is not just for Indigenous people who are in poverty but that there is something about this city where, in so many workplaces, there's like often toxic cultures [Smokii: uhm, uhm] in so many different organizations and there's racism in the workplace. I think Tanya's book is about the Indigenous youth who are being killed, that's happening as well, but are other dynamics of racism. Personally, I've never feared for my physical safety, would I wind up dead in this city. But there are so many other ways in which this city can really suck the life out of you [Smokii' Right] but there is a sort of paradox between that and the land, which is so powerful and that lake.

S.S.

Something I was sharing yesterday was the need of men to control women. To me, that's because of that power that we feel, that I feel and can witness, and think they need to learn how to be in the room with that power [Samantha: uhm uhm]. I think it's the same thing with the way that colonizers needed to control land here because they couldn't sit with that power or acknowledge that power or let that power be so they needed to take power over it. It's not just outright violence, that is easy to say, those murderers are bad racists. What is much more difficult and what I was grateful to do the land acknowledgement workshop, yesterday I had mostly settler population and they were the good settlers. They were the well meaning white people who have a bit of education, who were there to learn and they knew that they are able to identify as settlers. I don't get the audience that is outright racist because they actually want [Samantha: uhm, uhm] to learn. But I think that it's really, really important for those people, for the people in positions of power, to recognize that we are all racist, we have all been taught the same things, we are all products of colonialism. Colonialism didn't just happen to Indigenous people, it also happened to white people. The good ones are just trying to learn what that means. The first thing they have to start to go inside and, and break apart that stuff. What is your relationship to Indigenous people, is the first question. And then in every action that you do in that relationship, you have to think, "Am I helping this person?"

We had a woman yesterday sort of go, "You know, land acknowledgements help me to remember that colonialism happens." And I was sort of like [Samantha laughs], what a privilege to be able to forget that colonialism happens. And I said, "If that's, if that's where you're at, you need to make sure that you are reminding yourself every single day because we don't have the luxury of forgetting." So, whether that's in our workplaces or whether that's, that, you know, violence doesn't always have to look like physical violence, there are many different ways that Indigenous people are held down or shackled by these rules. How are you supporting Indigenous life and Indigenous futures is, really to me, the question of reconciliation. It's not even how many Indigenous bodies you have in your institution or that is, or are working for you. Are they happy? [Samantha: uhm, uhm] Have you checked in with them? Are you challenging your other staff? I challenged them a lot yesterday and I hope that they rise to the challenge.

Sometimes you have to suck all the air out of the room [Samantha; uhm] and have them feel it.

S.M.B.

Something that you are sort of touching on, that you also talk about in your book, which is called *You are enough. Love poems for the end of the world*, which you guys should all have in your libraries. It's like an anthology of poetry that talks about relationship with the land, queer and trans topics and love, different political incidents, mental health. So one of the themes that comes up in that book is around the relationship to the land. So I was wondering if you could talk a little about, you've been living in Nogojiwanong [Ojibwe], [Smokii: yeah] which is now known as Peterborough [Smokii: Peterborough, yeah] ah, and you're moving to Ktunaxa Territory [Smokii: Ktunaxa Territory, yeah] and you also have ceremonial family in upstate New York. What has the relationship to the land looked like for you across borders, [Smokii: All over], across regions?

S.S.

Yeah, there's a poem, one of the lines that sort of always gets a "Uhm uhm," there's a reaction sort of sometimes, that people, sort of the nod. It's a poem about how I was born out here and that I feel like that the big water was calling me back, the lakes were calling me back. One of the lines is, "I must have known that the lakes could teach me what the mountains could not, just as the aunties can teach what the mothers cannot." For me, relationship to land, wherever I am, I think, I was actually born in Scarborough, Ontario, which is Anishinaabeg territory. We won't get into the Mohawks, no I'm just kidding, [Samantha laughs]. Uhm, Gitigami Migizi [Ojibwe] Doug Williams, if you want to talk about that, check out Doug Williams' book on that territory. I was born there and then I was adopted. I am from the Ktunaxa Nation, I am from B.C., so my story is kind of complicated. But my mother was Sixties Scoop, and so she was in a white home in Toronto. And then I was put up for adoption and I was flown back and I actually grew up

in my nation. When I moved back out here, I was, spent time with Leanne Simpson, incredible scholar and artist and uh she's actually my PhD supervisor.

S.M.B.

I didn't realize that was the connection.

S.S.

Yeah, such a gift [Samantha: uhm uhm] to have her. And she just said to me, "Well you were born here so what is your responsibility to Anishinaabeg?" so in that way I think I am a visitor and many settlers were born here, in somebody else's territory. What is your responsibility to Anishinaabeg? That challenged me to think about what does this land mean to me as a space I was born in, as a space that my body remembers. And then also, how do I connect to those people and do what I can for those people? And then, travelling all over, I do my best to connect with Indigenous people. I do my best to stop in at the reserve gas stations and say hi, even just to put the money into their hands.

What I was taught with my ceremonial family, they actually moved to Ithaca to work at Cornell and when they got there they wanted to put a lodge up on that land. So they've been given rights to build a sweat lodge and to run a sweat lodge. They did not have rights to do it on that land so they asked around, "Who do we ask?" And they actually found out that their Bear clan chief of the Cayuga Nation lives there. They went to him and asked. Him and his wife were so honoured by that, that they were in tears because they had not been respected all the time for that role that they hold and because it was being so respected and they were happy to give permission to put that lodge on the land.

And so that is the way that I try to introduce myself. I go out, went to the mountain, I try to introduce myself. That is my connection to these places. And it's not just going out to say hi to the land and the people, cause it's, they're connected. To me, connected to both of them wherever I go as much as possible. If I'm only there for a short time, you know, I just do what I can to support whatever that is.

S.M.B.

One of the other themes that comes up in your book is around dating and gender and being trans [Smokii" Yeah] and being two-spirit. So, I'm not on social media so I feel very behind when it comes to [laughs] learning about what is allyship and all sorts of topics around the queer community. And I recently devoured Lindsay Nixon's *Nítisânak* and then I had to have friends help me like to interpret it. There were things that came up around queer community that I didn't understand why the theme partying and drug use, like what the connection was there. And didn't understand really the intense distrust for the police. It was a lot of, like, new things [laughs] for me [Smokii" Uhm, uhm].

I really enjoyed that book because I felt like I got to like peer into this other world that I'm not as connected to. Similarly, like reading your work, yeah, and just learning a lot that I wasn't really aware of.

S.S.

It's funny because I also teach Indigenous literature. And when you say that, I'm like, okay, like I know my students do the same things sometimes. My favourite moment was having sort of a white student go, "Yes, this work is really relatable about something"

and I sort of went, "You didn't read it, did you?" [Samantha laughs]. And she was like, "No I didn't." And I was like, [Samantha laughs] "I know, you can't fake it" cause [Samantha laughs]. And I mean, you know, you can't tell what someone's life is by looking at them, but in, I knew her a little bit and I, it was like, [Samantha laughs] "I don't think your life is like what we're reading here" [Samantha laughs]. But I think that's the beauty of our literature.

But I think the other space is to recognize, [Samantha: Uhm, uhm] Lindsay didn't write that for you. They wrote it for other queer Indians. It doesn't mean don't read it [Smantha: Uhm, uhm]. And the same thing with me. Some of these poems are for the Indigenous community. Some of these poems are for my trans community. For me, when that overlaps, that's the gift. For me to have two-spirit youth come up after a reading and say, "I never thought I could start hormone treatment because I thought that was a white thing but seeing you and knowing you've done it, makes me want to think about it some more" you know. And I was able to talk to them about that and the ways in which we can make these decisions for ourselves and we have the freedom to make these decisions for ourselves. I think with Lindsay, even with the partying, I think that to me is saying, you know, it's owning that that's a space that, that gave them community. I think a lot of youth, Indigenous youth, we need harm reduction, we need stigma about that to go away.

My own work is on recovery. I am three years sober. I don't want that in my life. I also don't think that as native people, we shouldn't be allowed to have those choices and just as anyone else. I hope that people stay safe. I hope that our communities and those kind of things, when I read that work. When I read Lindsay's work, I was like, "It's my life!" I mean, it wasn't Saskatchewan but many of those things I could relate to and especially the playlist cause she writes a lot of music into it and I was always like, "Oh my God, that song! Oh my God!" [Samantha laughs] Or going to punk shows when I was a kid and that kind of stuff, right? [Samantha: Uhm, uhm]. But I think the beautiful

thing about Indigenous literature is that it gives those windows, it gives that representation [Samantha: Uhm, uhm]. I am grateful to you for reading this work and challenging yourself. I have some poems that talk about what it's like to be trans in ways that people don't know or understand. And as much as I write for those two-spirit youth, it's a gift when I have like a white, older woman come up and go, "You taught me a lot! These are questions I know that are inappropriate to ask but I got to learn," right? [Samantha laughs] So I think that we can do that work. What you did to say, "I don't really understand this." [Samantha: Uhm, uhm]. "I want to talk to some people about it." And to try and go to those people who have those voices. We talked a little bit and you say, oh you were in the military. And I sort of go, "I don't understand that" [Samantha laughs] you know. And many of my teachers back home were in the military [Samantha: Uhm, uhm] and I will tell you I had a very hard time wanting to start to spend time with them because I thought, "Oh my gosh, these are big, scary military dudes." [Samantha laughs]. I can respect Indigenous people in the military and yet I am very much opposed to those things. But we can sit here and have a conversation.

S.M.B.

It reminds me of a story. I, uhm, was in Winnipeg one time at a conference and met this two-spirit guy, Indigenous guy, from Saskatoon and we were going for a walk. As we were chatting, I realized that I wanted to tell him a story about being in the Reserves. Then I realized, oh if I tell this story that's like related to what we're talking about, I'll have to reveal to him that I'm in the military [laughs] and I was like nervous to do that [laughs] [Smokii: Yeah] but then I decided, I'm going to do it anyways [laughs] [Smokii: Right] so then I turned to him and , "You know, I'm actually a reservist in the military," and he's like, "Me too!" [laughs] [Smokii laughs] And I was like "I was so scared to tell you cause I, I was thinking like you'd be totally like ideologically opposed to it." He's like, "Oh I am, I am!" [laughs] [Smokii laughs] "but I'm a student, you, know, I gotta have a job." And I was like, "That's why I'm in!" [laughs] [Smokii laughs].

S.S.

Well, we have these contradictions. I always sort of say, whenever I do a workshop, whenever I do a reading, I always say, "Okay you've met me, I'm a two-spirit person." Sometimes I do talks about what two-spiritness is and I say, "If you ask a hundred different two-spirit people, you'll get a hundred different answers. And that's okay." [Samantha: Uhm, uhm] We live these contradictions every day, everyone does. It's not just Indigenous people, everyone does. We can't hold each other to these black and white standards. I can be opposed to the military still respect my teachers because of that and figure out how to show that respect and how to challenge some of those conversations but carefully. And as a two-spirit person, going into ceremony as an example, a lot of our youth will say, "I'm not welcome in ceremony" and I'll say, "Well have you ever gone?" And many of them have not even ever gone.

And so, what I learned to do was to go and talk to whoever was leading, I would tend to bring medicine and say, "I'm a two-spirit person, am I welcome here?" or "I can offer this help." One time, I went to a sweat where it was women and men sitting on different sides and there was a lot of women and so I said, "Can I sit over here? I'm a two-spirit." To me, they said yes, it was okay. I managed to find people that were good. If that person had said no, I was ready to leave, I was ready to take care of what I needed to but it's on us as well to step into that circle and to try and change that circle. There is nuance into these discussions, there is so much grey, and we have to be able to negotiate our way through those things. It is on our communities to reach out their hand to us and then it is on us to decide to take that hand, that takes a movement from both sides together cause often I hear two-spirit youth sort of say, "We need our own ceremonies!" Okay, on one hand just as I think women need specific things sometimes and men need to, I can see that. However, I'm always, if we remove ourselves from the community, then what are we teaching them? How do we ever get to a point where we're all working together? We all need to be in that circle, we need to learn. I just like sitting with the power of the lake, we need to learn how to sit with the power of, of each

other and. In my nation, in Ktunaxa, they just say, "Ktunaxa, we're small, there's, there's not enough of us to even lose one." That means everything we do is working towards keeping people in our communities, bringing them back after they go get educated [Samantha: Uhm, uhm], supporting them when they're out on their own.

That's the lesson that I try to take into everything and I think it's true of Anishinaabeg, it's true of Indigenous people in general. That's the goal to me. Ally's an action word so if you want to feel like you're doing good, you should probably get uncomfortable. I'm always like, "If it feels good, it's probably not decolonization," [Samantha: Yeah, laughs]. But if you want to support us in that, it's always that question of how are you continuing and imagining and helping Indigenous futures. How are you helping us get our land back? How are you helping us get our language back? How are you helping us get all of these things that were taken from us? I think people throw their hands up in the air and go, "I don't know how." One of my elders, again I've spoken about him, from Curve Lake, Doug Williams, Gitigami Migizi [Ojibwe], he says, "I only know what I'm supposed to do. That's my job. It's your job to figure out what you need to do." So I always challenge, "What are you good at and how can you use it to help?" And people are creative, people can figure it out.

S.M.B.

I really appreciate your work, and Lindsey's work too because I feel like it causes me, well, I choose to be more self-reflective and response. I just take for granted agreeing with my gender or like sexuality. I think I've never really questioned those things and so works like yours and Lindsay's make me think, "Maybe I should think about why I actually, naturally feel this way?" It was just making me think about how I was chatting with a friend, like a year ago, and I was like, "Oh, like all my friends are women. I need more like men in my life. There should be more balance." And she was like, "Sam, you work in the military." And at the time, I was working like a full-time contract and I work

with all, overwhelmingly men [laughs] [Smokii: Right] and I was like, "Oh, like I don't think that counts [laughs]. That's not real life." Like maybe a day or two later, I was at work and the guys had just, had just got back from a weekend exercise and they were getting ready for lunch and I was with them, like I was eating with them. But before we ate, I watched these two men, like have a discussion amongst themselves. The one guy was like, "I smell so bad" [laughs] and the other guy was like, "I think I smell worse." And then I watched them smell each other's arm pits [laughs] [Smokii: Oh my God] to like, see who actually smelled worse after three days of not showering. And I watched this and I was like, "Oh, I'm actually good for like male energy in my life." [Laughs.] [Smokii laughs.] "I've met my quota." [Laughs.]

S.S.

The funny thing about that is like in transitioning, what I learned was men touch each other a lot, like a "Hey" on the shoulders or whatever. And so in transitioning, I had to sort of go, "[Huge breath in] Why are you touching me?" like cause as a woman, that's just, "Oh my God, he's," you know, it's fear and it's a different type of interaction when they do do that. And so, I had to train myself to recognize what it was and then I was speaking to our Cherokee uncle, Daniel Heath Justice, who's incredible. It was right around the time where I was starting to be perceived as male more. And I just said to him, like, "I just don't understand this, like." And he goes, "Oh, me neither. I never have." He's always been a man and [Samantha: Uhm, uhm] is cisgender. There's also that spectrum of what is that energy, right. I think there are a lot of men who would maybe smell each other's arm pit [Samantha laughs] or farts or whatever [Samantha; Yeah] and there are also men that are not interested in that kind of energy. I can understand that, right, that it challenges concepts of gender and I did have the privilege of working in my community to do a two-spirit workshop, uhm, where we sort of just talk about some of these conversations and I said, "Well, what does it mean to be a man in Ktunaxa? And what does it mean to be a woman? And I was mentioning, like "Go to the language" and that's [Samantha: Uhm, uhm], that's some of the work I want to do next.

What do these words actually mean? Do they mean men and woman as the way that English means? What are these energies? What are the roles and responsibilities of people? Cause from what I've learned, the relationship is more important than the pronoun, mother, auntie, all those things, cousins, all of those things versus his or her.

S.M.B.

So, some of your poems are about Colten Boushie and Tina Fontaine and Trump. I think there's a poem where you talk about tender age care and [Smokii: Tender] that's a reference to like to the U.S.-Mexico border crisis [Smokii: it is, yeah. They call them tender age shelters]

Those poems are really striking for me I guess because all three of them are about grief [Smokii: Uhm], uhm, and, and lament. I was living in Saskatchewan when [Smokii: Uhm] Colten Boushie was shot and killed, uh, by Gerald Stanley. And I was following, just a little bit, the trial. But by the time the trial happened, I was living in Montreal and I remember joking with a friend, saying, "Oh, like he'll be found not guilty, like I don't care, I'm not following this trial." And then I remember like, receiving the news that he was found not guilty of manslaughter, and I just broke down and sobbed. And I was surprised at my own grief [Smokii: Uhm, uhm] and it felt similar in a way to also like, I lived in the States for many years and the election in 2016? Like I remember like drinking a lot that week and oversleeping and totally checking out [laughs a bit].

S.S.

So my sobriety, I got sober because Trump got elected. I'd been trying and trying and I had a few months here, a few months there. And then I had started a week here, a week there, and then he got in and I, and same, being in so much pain that I had to get out of my body [Samantha: Uhm, uhm] to the point where I was finally able to say, like

"No, I don't want this" because that grief is real and that grief is, with Colten, with Tina, my poems about Colten are, talk about how he's our brother, Tina's our baby girl [Samantha: Uhm, uhm], Barbara is our auntie, you know, Barbara is my mom's name. It could be any of us. I don't always walk down the street thinking, "Will I be killed today?" but at the same time, the reality is that it's possible.

I lived in Saskatoon too and had gone to Biggar before. I actually had a flat tire one time in B.C. My jack was all rusted, I had a bit of a rez car. I had a sign, "Does anyone have a jack?" And people drove past me, and drove past me, and drove past me and someone finally turned around and came and stopped and they said, "No one's probably stopping cause you look like a little Indian boy" [laughs]. [Samantha laughs]. But that's the truth. And not only is no one stopping, but something worse could have happened to me in those moments [Samantha: Uhm, uhm]. I know that there's actually not very much between me and Colten. Luck is not the word. It's circumstance, that could have been me. I lived in Vancouver around the time of the Picton trials as well and I have been in the Downtown Eastside prior to my transition when the world saw me as an Indigenous woman. So it really is just recognizing that it could be any of us. There was a hashtag that went out, like #AmInext? Whether or not it could be me, there is that own fear, but they are our relations. I know Colten's sister well. It was just after his passing, I got to meet her and spend some time with her. This is not impersonal for us. We can try to say we're not going to care but that reality.

Speaking of Trump's America, people up here will go, "Oh, how is it like living down there? That kind of seems so scary." And then when I, I was travelling to Saskatchewan and, and I was telling some Native people in America, and they went, "Don't go up there. It's open season on Indians up there." [Samantha laughs]. So, it's recognizing that anywhere we go, this is existing. My poems challenge settler Canada to look at it [Samantha: Uhm, uhm] My poems challenge settler Canada to grieve with us [Samantha: Uhm, uhm]. Being someone who is, who has gone through my own grief

process of losing a mother to me this year and following very closely our grief practices and having grief practices, I believe that one of the core problems with settler society is that they don't know how to grieve.

S.M.B.

I think I notice this problem a lot too, especially because so often when you talk about issues of racism with white folks. They're like "What can I do?" like, "What can I actually do to help?" which feels frustrating because actually, if you haven't made space for like lament and mourning, then you're in no fit state to be helpful.

S.S.

That we can see for anyone who is listening who has lost somebody. I was told right in the beginning right after my mom passed, that grief draws a line. I've interpreted that in many different ways since then but I always think the people who have grieved [Samantha: Uhm, uhm], know what it's like and a lot of people who have not, don't know what it's like. And you don't want to join people into that club. I'm sobbing in the airport, I'm sobbing on the airplane, I have a poem about that, about flying over Saskatchewan, and, after the verdict had come out, and saying that I hope that somebody in the seat next to me knows what I'm crying about because it seemed like the rest of the world didn't even know that Colten was gone, that Gerald Stanley had been acquitted of all charges [Samantha: Uhm, uhm]. They don't know what that means.

I want to see the same kind of energy that happens for Humboldt, Saskatchewan, which was a horrible tragedy [Samantha: Uhm, uhm]. I mean, I grew up in a hockey town too. I know what it's like when we lose people. I want to see that same grief for our people [Samantha: Uhm, uhm]. I want to see us as this, these nations that are together. I mean, there's how many nations in what we call Canada? I want to see us all grieving

when a child dies, any child. A refugee child. That is how we learn how to be in relationship together, taking care of each other in grief for those that are living on Indigenous territory, Indigenous people have survived genocide, we know, we know what to do with climate change, we've faced things like this before, we know what to do with that grief, we know what to do when it comes to all sorts of things and so I think as I see some of my non-Indigenous friends start to get really scared about the end of the world, to me I'm like, we've been through it, over and over again. So, come to the people who know what to do and learn grief practices.

And also, go look for your own too. There are some beautiful grief practices out there. But also even in our own society. We actually used to wear black armbands, like early on in the late eighteen hundreds, nineteen hundreds, you'd wear black arm band and people would know you were grieving [Samantha: Uhm, uhm]. And I think, "Man, we need that again, we need kind of stuff to come back." You would be standing in the bank in grief going, like you have to get things done and you don't really know what you're doing and you're a little bit lost [Samantha: Uhm, uhm], wouldn't it be great if you had a way to signify that and someone could come over help you do, or get, what you need to be done [Samantha: Uhm, uhm] Taking care of our communities, taking care of each other [Samantha: Uhm, uhm], in that [Samantha: Uhm, uhm], recognizing. I tell my professor, "If you want to help Indigenous students, you need to pay attention to what's going on in the news," because during that time, for people to check in on me [Samantha: Uhm, uhm], to know that it was difficult [Samantha: Uhm, uhm], to cry with us [Samantha: Uhm, uhm], that's important, that is what [Samantha: Uhm, uhm], we need. Instead of, there is no fixing grief and anyone who's been in it knows, there is just learning how to carry it [Samantha: Uhm, uhm].

S.M.B.

Thank you so much uh, for sharing your thoughts on all these things and for coming to Thunder Bay and sharing your poetry with us.

S.S.

Thank you, for all of your hard work [Samantha laughs].