



# Accomplice

## Learn the Truth (Audio Transcript)

Madolyn Wesaw (Pokégnek Bodéwadmik) in conversation with Josie Flanagan  
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- 00:27 **Wesaw:** So this area has a really strong Potawatomi presence since we're the people who were here. And if you look, we actually at my job at the casino we talk about this in our orientation for all our new employees, and we show a map of all the land that was Potawatomi prior to colonization versus now and it's like, three little dots.
- 00:47 So it used to span all the way from, like, Minnesota and Wisconsin through Indiana, Illinois, and Ohio, and now we have three little dots along Lake Michigan. And I think what's really upsetting about this country and this area in general is that they like to pretend that the Indian wars are in the past and that stuff isn't happening any more but it very much is. So there's this kind of refusal to acknowledge it or talk about it because if they do, they're going to have to do something about it. They're going to have to and it's going to be really uncomfortable and no one wants to be uncomfortable.
- 01:26 **Wesaw:** If you look back to the beginning, to the Indian Removal Acts, I think some schools—not every—but a lot of schools talk about the Trail of Tears and some people are familiar with that. The Potawatomi people had our own which was called the Trail of Death. And so, basically, what had happened is like with a lot of other Indigenous communities was that the government of the United States saw that we had land and that it could be profitable for them and so they said "ok, well you're going to leave this land or you're going to die". And so they rounded up a bunch of Potawatomi people and moved them out west, and people died because of this. You'll also find a Potawatomi community in Oklahoma now as a direct result of the removal acts.
- 02:12 But our leader at the time, he saw what was happening and he understood that if our people were forced to move it meant that our people were going to die. We have very strong religious connections to this land; we believe the Creator told us to be here and so to leave was really just not really an option. And so [Leopold] Pokagon he went to the Catholic church up near Detroit and he had asked for help: "help us not have to leave we'll do whatever we have to do". At first, the Catholic

church did not want to get involved because I believe it was a Baptist presence in this area and they didn't want to start beef essentially with the other church.

02:58 **Wesaw:** And so at first they didn't want to help, but then Pokagon he got on his knees and he recited the Lord's Prayer in Potawatomi. That was really moving to the Catholic church and so they decided to get involved and help, but basically they had to strike a deal and that deal said that if you want to stay here, you're going to have to cut their hair, you're going to have to send your kids to school to become good Catholics, essentially, you're going to have to live in a "modern" world and you're going to have to do away with your "savage" roots. And so that's what they did with the hopes that one day we could rise back up and go back to that traditional way of being but right now we have to survive. And that's actually where Notre Dame comes from is out of that deal.

03:44 I do [indiscernible] about who we are. If you Google search "Native American", a lot of images that come up are those antiquated photos of Plains Indians. There's no such thing as a pan-Indian; there are over five-hundred Indigenous nations in the United States alone, and that's not including Canada and Mexico. We are all different, we all have our own languages, and religions, and beliefs, and practices. So educate yourself about the people whose land you are currently occupying.

04:15 **Wesaw:** When we think about—it really sucks—we think about the founding of this country: people can tell you about your founding fathers and about Columbus, and about all these other European players in this game, but they can't really tell you about Crazy Horse or Sitting Bull or Leopold Pokagon. If they do know about these people, all they know is "reservation Indians" and "drunk Indians". But really Indigenous people today we owe our lives to those "drunk Indians" because what happened in these boarding schools...you look: they survived reservations and then they, the children, were scooped up and snatched starting in the sixties all the way to the nineties, like, this is modern. The children were being snatched out of their homes and sent to these residential schools. You can hear stories of people who survived them talking about, you know, watching their friend get his tongue cut out for speaking his language. Or there was an elder who talks about she was raped by a Catholic priest and forced to give birth to that baby, and then they threw that baby into an incinerator in front of her. She was just a child herself. It was horrific what happened to Indigenous people here.

05:29 Hitler, when he wrote his book, he talks about how he modeled his concentration camps off of Indigenous reservations and the things that were happening to our people here. No one knows, no one will acknowledge it, and no one will learn about it. These people, they

	survived and they knew that they couldn't be Indigenous because they would be killed for it, but they didn't want to be like the oppressor, and so instead they just drank and got through it, you know what I mean?
06:00	<b>Wesaw:</b> I kind of want to rework people's perception of us. Yeah, you have the "drunk Indians", that happened. But wouldn't you? If those things happened to you, wouldn't you drink, too? They did their time and they survived, and they did for the next seven generations so that we could process. And so what I really want people to do is start at the beginning. The truth about what happened in this country: it's uncomfortable and it's horrific and it's really hard to hear and to see it because it still happens today. It's hard to witness that, but you have to because if you don't it is just going to continue happening and it is going to get worse.
06:44	Indigenous people we have so much to contribute. We are brilliant people. We have doctors and lawyers and teachers and brilliant businesspeople who are functioning in modern society and they are doing it and tying in our old ways of being at the same time, and it's working. Learn about that as well.

Featured music & additional resources:

Brown, Dee. *Bury Heart at Wounded Knee*. New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, 1970.

Campanelli, Stephen, dir. *Indian Horse*. 2017, Toronto, Canada: Devonshire Productions & Screen Siren Pictures, 2018. Streaming.

Weda Skirts. *Many Moons*. Perf. Elexa Dawson. "Many Moons". Independent. 2016. CD.