The Hum Podcast

Episode 17: "I Had No Idea What Being Native Was"

[Theme music begins]

[Colleen's voice begins to come in over top of music]

Colleen: Our children are the ones that are in care now, and our children's children are the ones that are in care now. It's a systemic and it's been passed down from generation to generation.

[Music increases in volume]

Male voice: You're listening to The Hum.

[Music decreases in volume]

Gilad: We share a lot of human stories here at The Hum, but I don't think I've ever shared an animal one. I love animals, so much in fact that I'm usually that guy at parties showing pictures of puppies or kittens. One of my favorite animals is the butterfly, a beautiful little creature that represents transformation, resilience, and new beginnings. Animal Stone brings the spirit of the butterfly to life in solid, sterling and 14K gold jewellery charms. If you or someone you know is like me and loves butterflies or simply just going through a transformation in their life, visit animalstone.com and take a special look at "Kamama the Butterfly". Every time you or someone

you know purchases “Kamama the Butterfly”, proceeds go toward mental health educational programs at the Native Women’s Resource Centre of Toronto. Visit animalstone.com to learn more.

[Music fades out]

Gilad: We’re here in Ottawa today with Colleen Cardinal, a beautiful mother, grandmother, author of *Ohpikiihaakan-ohpihmeh*, founder of the National Indigenous Survivors of Child Welfare Network, and also a survivor of the Sixties Scoop. For our listeners who might be unfamiliar with this term or part of history, the Sixties Scoop, can you guide us through what this was?

Colleen: Oh um, so I mean the Sixties Scoop is kind of like a slang term created by like this social worker, this non-Indigenous social worker and it’s a term that refers to like a period between the 60s and the 80s, where like thousands and thousands of Indigenous children were taken from their homes and from hospitals, and they’ve been through the foster care system and eventually adopted into non-Indigenous homes all over Canada, in the United States, and overseas.

Simona: How old were you when you were taken from your home?

Colleen: Well I was a baby, I think I was only one month old when I was actually taken from my parents.

Simona: Okay.

Colleen: And then my sisters and I were all taken at the same time. I have two older sisters and we were put into foster homes and we went through a few foster homes and eventually we were adopted into a non-Indigenous home in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario. You know and it's only been like the last three or four years that I found out like that the system that they used to like adopt us out was literally like through catalogues and TV programs and ads in newspapers and catalogues of soliciting, you know, Indigenous children.

Simona: Essentially, selling children.

Colleen: Yeah, I can't verify that yet but the research, you know, that's coming out, we hope that we find some kind of like - you know, people constantly ask us why would these people adopt Indigenous children, what's their incentive, was there money behind it. And some survivors say yes, they know that there was money exchanged, but until we actually have proof, I can't verify that.

Simona: What is your one month old - you're a baby, you're growing up and you start to realize that you don't look like the people raising you.

Colleen: It's such a funny thing like, I had no idea. I had no concept of what being Native or Indian was like. I just had brown skin and I - my sisters and I would be in the water, all summer we were active outside all the time, so I thought like I had a tan and I never really questioned why my parents turned red and my sisters and I turned brown, I just thought that's just the way it

is. Like I didn't even know there was differences in skin color but it was like, you know, in our household there was racism. Of course, we didn't know it was racism, but it was when in school where I started learning that I was different from the other kids. You know, I got called names - funny story, kids listening, you know, because I ate brown bread, that's why my skin was brown. You know, and I just like not understanding like why, what is wrong with having brown skin like, and then you start feeling dirty and self-conscious about how you look, and it wasn't until like I was, you know, a preteen where I actually learned that I was Native, you know, and that - it's where my first internalization of racism began for me.

Simona: How did you find out?

Colleen: It's such an awful story. You know, I grew up with stereotypes of what Native people look like and what Indians look like, and my stereotype was like they're on horseback, they wear breechcloths, they have headdresses, and they have bows and arrows. That's what I knew.

Simona: Like the John Wayne movie Indian.

Colleen: Yeah, that's the stereotype I grew up with. So I was asking my adopted mother one day, we were walking through the mall and I said, how come we don't see Indians anywhere, like at the mall or anything. She goes, well you are an Indian. And I was just like shocked and I'm like, no I'm not. I was angry right, it was like everything I know -

Gilad: A casual stroll through the mall is when …

Colleen: Yeah, yeah, in the mall and I was just like absolutely disgusted that she would think I was an Indian or call me an Indian like, everything I knew about being Indian was bad. You know, we would drive through - so in Sault Ste. Marie, there's only one highway in and out, you have to drive through the reserve to go anywhere. So we go down south to visit our - my adopted relatives and we'd have to drive through a reserve called Garden River, and my adopted father would say, you know, these Natives, watch out for the Natives. And there was a lot of rock cuts and stuff like that, so I'd be looking up at the rock cuts for these Natives, you know, thinking we're gonna be attacked. He would say derogatory terms about Natives and, you know, everything I knew about that reservation was bad. There was a lot of shacks and poverty and I didn't understand it. So when I was being called a Native, I was like, it was bad, you know, and then you just - that stays with you, you know, that something is wrong with me, you know, because I look like these people too.

Simona: Which is like, it kind of like - it kind of is a little confusing to me where you have parents who have actively adopted a trio of young Indigenous girls, who are raising them, yet still are holding on to this demoralizing racist behavior.

Colleen: I think like in recent conversations - not recent, I'd say, you know, conversations I've had with my adopted mother as an adult where I've confronted her on how they treated us, she said that that's just the way things were back then, you know. She used derogatory terms for black people too and she said that's just the way it was, that's the way we said things and - but yeah, but it's not acceptable anymore, and you know what, funny thing is, it's not even funny. My adopted mother was Native herself, but yeah -

Simona: Plot twist!

Colleen: Yes plot twist, so I grew up - she was a very light-skinned, with blue, blue eyes. They had their own biological son, but because she married a non-Indigenous person and had to leave the reserve, she lost her status and it was only until she left him and divorced him and moved back to the res that she fought for her status. So I grew up with a mother who knew she was Native, who had an Ojibwe father, and a English mother, a white English mother. Her status comes from her father and she knew she was Native. She didn't tell us, she didn't say anything to defend us and now benefits from - and he's benefitted too, her son is benefitted from his status rights where it's paid for his education and everything, but you know, imagine growing up in a family who talks derogatively about Indigenous people and makes fun of their - our culture and who we are, and they are Native too, you know. So talk about confusing eh?

Simona: Yeah, god damn.

Colleen: Yeah, why do you think I wrote a book [laughs]?

Simona: She wrote a book and we need to all read this book [Colleen laughs]. I think my - and I also wanted to just make a point, point out so when Indigenous women would marry non-Indigenous men, they would lose their status, they would lose their Indianness essentially.

Colleen: Right, they were disenfranchised.

Simona: Yes and then - so they lost all rights, they lost all identi - like identifiable opportunities that they could benefit from a system designed for them, and it's not until they actually come back or leave or due, usually due to the breakdown of a marriage do they have to - it's not an automatic …

Colleen: No, she had to apply for it, she actually had to like ask the band if she could be on the band list and get property, she inherited her parents' property. So they had like a big chunk of property, her father had a big chunk of property on - of land that she lives on now. So it's really - it was very confusing for me when I found out later on as an adult that she was actually a status Indian, and I was actually quite hurt to know that she was status, that she was Native herself and didn't stick up for us, and actually contributed to the internalized racism that I knew.

Simona: I think that was the goal right, like that was the entire goal of forced assimilation like, you know, it's not just - it didn't just happen in the 60s, the residential school system has been happening in different shapes and forms since first contact.

Colleen: Oh yeah, like the making of Canada has been inherently violent to Indigenous people, like it - and people wanna talk about like what is like, you know, what contributes to missing or murdered Indigenous women. And I'm like what, you know, the making of Canada has contributed to the murdering and suffering of Indigenous people, like it's all, in fact all violence against Indigenous people. So we can't talk about anything without talking about the making of Canada and how that's like dehumanized Indigenous people.

Gilad: We had this conversation in the car right up here, you know, we're both pretty socially active. I started a human rights charity and, you know, it wasn't until I was in my late 20s, maybe early 30s where I first heard the term the "Sixties Scoop", and I wanna throw this back to you. I'm not - there's nothing unique about me, you know, in that situation, having heard that term so late in life, why is that? Are we doing enough?

Colleen: No, no, you're not doing enough [laughs]. There really - this is like, we're at the tip of the iceberg right now. Canadians are just starting to learn how devastating it was for thousands, not just the survivors, but the families of the adoptees and the foster care survivors because they, they lost children like - you know, it wasn't until I realized my mom had three of her children literally taken from her, and they didn't work on keeping families together, like the government says they do now, they - you had no legal recourse back then, there was no social workers to help guide you through the system or help you get your kids back or focus on addictions or anything. They just took your kids and you had no idea where they went to, and Canadians actually believe that it was in the past and I'm like heck, we're still alive! And our children are the ones that are in care now, and our children's children are the ones that are in care now, it's a system that it's - it's a systemic and it's been passed down from generation to generation. So my mother went to a residential school, you know, and one of the things when I go into classrooms and talk about what these policies look like and how they've impacted us, I start with the making of Canada and I start with the segregation and isolation of Indigenous people. I start with residential school and then we talk about the Sixties Scoop, because all these things have contributed to the Sixties Scoop.

Simona: What you are talking about is the full process, why we're here today, why we're still seeing the, you know, the foster care system hasn't really changed. They're still busing in youths from different Indigenous communities from all parts of Ontario and bringing them in Toronto where they have no community. They have no access to their family, they have no access to cultural relevant education, and then we're still seeing drug addiction problems, alcohol addiction problems, mental health issues, so we haven't really come a long way.

Colleen: No, in fact like, you know, people that refer to it now as like the Millennium Scoop but I'm just like, there is a difference between the Sixties Scoop and what's happen now, and the difference is the trafficking has stopped. The trafficking is in the province now and it's basically we're housing children right. And, you know, it - because of the Kimelman decision, the report they did at moratorium on child welfare practices of taking children out of the country and across provinces, so they don't do that anymore, but we're bringing back to ground zero where we have thousands and thousands of kids in foster care again and the province is not getting better. It's actually getting worse where kids are literally falling through the cracks and committing suicide and are living on streets, and it's really - it's not getting better.

Simona: And I think a term that we've been talking about is the idea of generational trauma.

Gilad: Intergenerational trauma.

Simona: Intergenerational trauma. It doesn't stay static, it doesn't just stay with you, and there are now medical reports coming out that trauma, especially intergenerational trauma, can actually change like the DNA …

Colleen: Oh yeah.

Simona: Of the next generation, which makes you more likely to have addiction issues, mental health issues, anxiety and depression issues.

Colleen: These are things that I'm actually dealing with in my own - with my own children now who are young adults and, you know, I quit drinking in 1998 and I started working on my healing and going to counselling and I literally, because of my trauma that I experienced in my adoptive home, and then as an adult, as a young adult and then as an adult of living in constant states of like fear and anxiety and hypervigilance and unresolved grief and unresolved trauma, I've unconsciously put this onto my children who are now actually dealing with that too, who have issues of addiction, who have health issues. You know, my daughter is diabetic, my other daughter has mental health issues. Both my sons have depression and cope with - use like alcohol to self-medicate and, you know, my biggest fear was that was - that is what was going to happen, you know. I wanted my children to kind of like learn from example, you know, mom went to college and mom went to counselling and mom did all these things to make life better for them, but the one thing that they needed from me the most was my love and affection, and I didn't know how to give that.

Simona: I went to - so I'm a trained youth facilitator and leadership development facilitator, and a few years ago I was in Moosonee, at the Moosonee Education Conference which was probably my first immersive experience in Indigenous culture. It wasn't kind of the Toronto experience where you're going to a set space where it's devoted to it. I saw it for the first time

everywhere and I got to learn more about, I think what was really interesting, so you take a - it was the middle of winter, so you take, you drive to Cochrane, you take the polar express train up to Moose Factory, and then you take the ice road across to Moosonee. But what was really interesting is I did go to a workshop on trauma and it was - the best example that I can draw from that was how can you expect to parent when you aren't parents, when you are disconnected from the people and the network that will teach you how to be a young adult, an adult, an el - you know, an older individual. So you have your grandparents going through the residential school system which disconnects them completely, so not only are they told that they are not good people because they were born this way, but the school is going to kill the Indian in them and they will be just as white as the next person, and then their children then go through the same system, so they're still not getting the love and support that they need to develop healthy habits.

Colleen: No role-modelling, nothing, right?

Simona: Exactly.

Colleen: No nurturing. I have to say like until I moved here in 2011, like I was performing as a white person, as an adopted daughter, as a fake person right, because that's what was expected of me. I was constantly performing to appease the white gaze, right, to be accepted, to fit in and not happy about it at all, hating it, feeling obligated constantly, and - and putting up with a toxic family, you know, that didn't even like me. And it was until - like I didn't know who I was, I literally did not know who I was and wanting to identify as an Indigenous person, as a First Nation person not knowing who you are was so confusing for me because I - everything

that I knew about being Native was bad or was hyperfeminine, like you had to be a dancer, you had to know how to drum, you had to know how to bead, and that's what I thought I needed to do too and I wasn't good at any of that stuff, I was like … [laughs]

Simona: You didn't get to learn!

Colleen: I don't know how to do it and I just - I don't even like wild meat, I'm like so [Simona laughs]. So people would say these stupid things to you like, what kind of Indian are you. And I'd be like, an adopted Indian [laughs], like you know I grew up with white people, I don't like wild meat, like I - I like the city, like these are things that I'm comfortable with, that I know. I don't know how to live on a reservation, I don't know, I'm not comfortable in the bush unless it's in like, in like a cottage.

Simona: Yeah, glamping.

Colleen: Yeah [laughs].

Simona: Who - why would you want to?

Colleen: Yeah, like ew.

Gilad: My mom's an immigrant here. She's been here for thirty years and she still can't like handle white people food [laughter], so I totally get jumping onto the other side.

Simona: Same, same, like I think we all went through that experience of like I just want mac and cheese and like baloney sandwiches to go to school. I don't want curry and roti in a thermos [Colleen laughs].

Gilad: Right.

Simona: Like I'm not making any friends!

Colleen: That sounds delicious actually.

Simona: And it's amazing now.

Gilad: Colleen, now I wanna go back. So you're fifteen or you're in your teens when you first discovered that you were in fact Indigenous, was there a support system there? Like you talk a lot about showing love to your children, was there a community or anything around you at that time that could help you deal with?

Colleen: There was nothing, you know, even - even as I entered high school, you know, there was two reservations around Sault Ste. Marie. One of them right in the city and one of them is just on the edge, and there's this thing where if you grow up First Nation and you're not from that area, they don't know who you are, you're an outcast right. So I went to school with Indigenous people, with First Nation people from the reserve. They didn't know who I was, they don't know my family, they don't - they need to know who you are, who's your grandpa, who's your grandma, who's your mom, who's your dad. They don't know who I am, so I got lots of dirty

looks. I didn't get to hang out with the Indigenous people at school, I wasn't accepted by them, I - and I always felt like I never fit in with Indigenous people. I always felt like they would know that I'm not really Native. It sounds so messed up. It's a real mindfuck to look Indigenous but not feel like you're Indigenous.

Gilad: You're not white enough to the white people and you're not Indigenous enough …

Colleen: For the Indigenous people. I always felt like they would be able to see right through me, that they know I was not really …

Simona: And then you have to up your performance, you have to go harder.

Colleen: Exactly right, right, and I didn't know how to do that right. I don't know how to up my performance as an Indigenous person cuz I don't know anything, so I would shy away from going to ceremony, going to anything that - I was scared, I'd be terrified to go to like ceremonies because if they went around with a smudge bowl, I'd be afraid that I'd do it wrong or that they just know that I wasn't really Native.

Simona: On top of this, you're a teenage girl, like …

Colleen: Yeah.

Simona: Coming into your own and you're now not only going through this huge identity crisis, but you're getting your period and your boobs are coming in and all these other things are being compounded on this -

Colleen: It's hard enough being a teenager in a loving, supportive family, never mind like in an abusive, unsupportive environment where you don't fit in right, and high school was hard, being at home was hard. You know, I ran away when I was fifteen and I was escaping like a physical and sexual abuse in my home and, you know, I was on my own when I was sixteen years old and I went back out to Edmonton. And, you know, my older sister was already out there and she had found our biological parents, so you know I get to see the extreme other end of the spectrum, where I'm dealing with family members who are self-medicating with solvents and alcohol and everything that I knew about being Native was reinforced. Indians are drunks, Indians are bums, Indians live on the street, Indians are on welfare. This is what I came home to, you know. Nobody had any stories for me, nobody had nothing to share for me. I never, never got to spend time with my mom sober, my biological mother. She had no stories for me and I think, like I understand now, now that she's passed away, now that I've gone back to my community to visit and reconcile my anger at her, you know, cuz I was angry at her for a long long time, and a lot of adoptees are angry at their biological parents because they feel like they should have done more or they blame them for the abuse that they experience. But they don't understand that, you know, they're grieving too and they're living with the grief and the loss and guilt, like tremendous guilt, right, of having - I can't even imagine having my kids taken away and not know where they've gone and our - my grandchildren, so why would you talk about that? You know, like you go back to a community who have no stories for you, who don't talk about you and then all of a sudden you show up one day and they have to talk to you, but what

do you - what have you got to talk about with these children that have come out of nowhere? You know, so it was not a happy ending story. You know, for some it is, but for a lot it's not because you're coming home to families who are still hurting, who are living in trauma and self-medicating …

Simona: And there's also not a lot of access to those resources that could help deal and like help reconcile and help heal because, again, that's not a priority of our federal or provincial governments, that we need to call that into effect. One thing that I do want to say is that a lot of people will say well, they just didn't take your kids, like they just didn't do that, we're not - we don't do that, we just …

Gilad: We don't live in that kind of country.

Simona: We don't, we're not our neighbors to themselves, we don't separate families, so they - those parents had to be doing something.

Colleen: Oh yeah, there's always that connotation, even like when I do presentations, you know, there's always that one student who's like, well why did you get taken away? And I'm like, well the context of it, in context is important to understand when we talk about people who went to residential school, who experience trauma or even - that even have to experience trauma to be taken away from their families and be forced to go to these schools and separated from their siblings and learn - be forced to learn a foreign language. And then they're only educated up until grade eight, until you're sixteen years old and then you're kicked out. You go back to a community who's hurting from having you taken, but also there's no jobs, there's no resources,

you're just going back on welfare, so they go to the cities where they experience tremendous racism there and you can't get a job. You're lucky if you can get a job, cuz you don't have any skills cuz you're only allowed to get educated up till a certain point, so you know we never really stood a chance and it's only now that we're starting to heal, right. When you look at the head start that settlers had when they came here, as opposed to Indigenous people who actually are original people, settlers had like decades to advance and be established, whereas we just started in the last few years, you know. I think that context is missing right and even like, settlers will say like oh you just need to get over it, I'm like - like it happened a long time ago. It really didn't happen a long time ago, like less than fifty years ago.

Simona: Right now, we're in a conversation while the government is about to come out - the federal government is about to announce actually an unprecedented 800 million dollar settlement to victims of the Sixties Scoop. Your organization, an advocacy network for the survivors, wanted to reject that settlement.

Colleen: Yeah, so the lack of information for this case has been like ridiculous right, so when they announced it - so I've been following the case since it first started in Ontario back in 2009, was when Jeffery Wilson started the Ontario class action. I signed up for it because originally the definition said if you experience your loss of culture and denial in Ontario, then you qualify. Then they changed the parameters to: you had to be taken from a First Nations reserve in Ontario, which excluded me because I was taken from Alberta, so you know I still support survivors, I still want them to win right. I've been watching and it's taken this long and then all of a sudden February 14, they announce yay, they won, like great, great. So we're gonna watch Ontario get paid out and then we're like okay, so the other provinces are gonna follow suit. And

then we were like blindsided on September 6 when they announced the national settlement. And at first we were ecstatic, we were like great, oh this is awesome, you know. But then there was a lot of questions of well, why do we have to accept this settlement, who - who negotiated this for us, like we had the sole - there was a huge lack of information of how the settlement came about and who negotiated it, and so at first, we were very heavily against it. We were very much advocating to collect signatures, to opt out and it wasn't until I found out from one of the lawyers Jeffery Wilson and one of my contacts that there's a history to this case right and it's specific, it's actually like a civil lawsuit right. So Marcia Brown, who's the plaintiff, it was her win and she negotiated to share her settlement because she knew that other provinces would possibly not be successful based on the wording, because this case was only won based on that wording, that the Crown had a fiduciary obligation or the state had a fiduciary obligation to protect our culture, other child welfare - or other child welfare agreements in other provinces do not have that. They would not be successful and she knew that and her lawyer knew that, so they agreed to share and negotiate her settlement so they, they collaborated and negotiated with the other lawyers across Canada who had the most plaintiffs signed up. So Alberta, Northwest Territories, Saskatchewan, they all had like - they already had claims in different stages. None of them were certified and they negotiated the settlement, and knowing that information changed everything for us, cuz we were like oh, it's not gonna get - there is no other better deal than could come out of this, they've literally put us in a corner where you either accept this or you lose out because nothing else is gonna come. There's not gonna be another lawsuit, there won't be any other successful provincial settlements, so what they've decided to do is - so it's a national settlement for Sixties Scoop survivors, so all those other …

Gilad: When we're talking about Sixties Scoop survivors, how many are we talking about, out of curiosity?

Colleen: What they've done is they've hired an actuary to study based on records and archives of how many actual survivors are qualified for this settlement. They estimated 22,500 based on this study done by Peter Gorham and they estimated how many might be dead by now, how many are status, how many are non-status, like and you know. INAC has ledgers of who's status and who's non-status, or who qualifies for status. They have ledgers, I've seen it, I've seen it when I was sixteen years old cuz I'm listed under my mother along with my sisters as that's where my status comes from. So they have ledgers of who qualifies for status based on their parent, their lineage, right, so they know how many out there qualify for status and haven't applied for it or just have passed away or whatever. So this is how they've done their numbers, based on their records, that's how they know how much to negotiate, cuz I asked them, we had a meeting with the ministers and I asked them straight up, how did you come up with this 750 million? They're like well, based on studies, this is what we would offer because this is the highest amount that we've ever offered to a large class. 50,000 is a lot and based on the numbers that we've calculated, we estimate 22,500 is a high number. They don't think that many is going to apply and that includes permanent Crown wards who have grown up in foster care, in non-Indigenous environments. That doesn't include any foster people, so the people who were foster care and were deemed Crown wards qualify. You can't just be a permanent wardship, you would have had to like been deemed a - your records would have to say you're a permanent Crown ward of the government.

Simona: So it's kind of just like using your level of suffering as the abli - like as your …

Colleen: Well as your loss and, and the whole case is precedent on loss of culture, it doesn't even - they don't care how much abuse you experience and how much trauma. They only - the only way they won was due to loss of culture because if - the government had a fiduciary obligation to protect it, right. So a lot of people don't know that right, they think that, you know, that I experienced this much trauma in this home and this is peanuts compared to what I've experienced, but they don't understand that this is just loss of culture. It's a common experience payment. Everybody's gonna get the same amount and what the federal government has stated is we can sue the provinces now for abuses and trauma, which is another class action, which will take more years and I think it will be more traumatizing to survivors because they'll actually have to talk about their abuses and trauma, and have it measured and gauged and then decided on what they should receive based on how much suffering they endured.

Simona: And will not have any aftercare, like access to aftercare after sharing something that …

Colleen: Probably not, no. There's so much work right, this for us, the settlement is not a closed chapter. It's actually opening a new chapter where we have to be prepared, because survivors are gonna be getting money and to us, we know that it's not - money doesn't heal. It might actually open old wounds right, and those people are going to be looking for help, they're going to be looking for support and right now, there's nothing. I mean there's, there's Indigenous places where you can get support, but not specifically for cultural loss and loss of identity right. And we know, as Sixties Scoop survivors, we have specific needs, like half the time we have to educate our providers, our care providers on what the Sixties Scoop is, which is so ridiculous in this day and age, where we have to say, you know, I've had to educate doctors and nurses as

to why I live with PTSD and why I have chronic health issues from abuses and trauma I experienced as an adoptee, so …

Gilad: To me, it's regardless of who ended up adopting these children, it's still unacceptable that anyone but their birth parents raise them unless they're unable to, unless they're unable to. And being Indigenous is not enough of a reason not to be able to raise children.

Colleen: No and that's a story that's reflected in our paperwork too, is your parents were drunks, your parents neglected you. It doesn't say your parents, you know, we put your parents through a residential school and because of this, you know …

Simona: They couldn't raise you.

Colleen: Yeah and they were drinking to self-medicate and they didn't know how to be proper parents because they didn't have role models, so this is why you grew up in care, you know. They don't include that narrative right, so even reading my paperwork I'm like oh my god, my parents were drunks. You know, it says right on there on my paperwork, it says male, it says his height and it says alcoholic. And under my mother, it says alcoholic, and their skin brown. I'm like oh my god, this is awful, awful.

Gilad: A couple years ago, when Harper was still around, people were starting to get tired of - I think he was around for what nine, ten years.

Colleen: Yeah, he's still around.

Simona: Oh, he's still around.

Colleen: He's awful.

Gilad: He's still chiming in in the background. Trudeau was elected on - I find like it was a few things. A lot of people were tired of Harper, they liked this young guy coming in. There was a huge movement also with Syrian refugees I remember, which was …

Colleen: Yep, yep.

Gilad: Really big for him, but then there was also a huge platform to try to repair relations with the Indigenous community, which also included moving forward the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. Just curious to get your thoughts on how much has been done, compared to how much was said was gonna be done, and where are we with all that?

Colleen: You know, I don't think we've progressed at all. I don't think - I think he used First Nation people as a platform to get voted in and I don't think he - I think he's done more damage now. I don't believe in the inquiry, I don't think it's done anything except retraumatize people. There will be no results from it, there'll be no recommendations. If there is, they've already been done by grassroots people like years ago and we're just seeing our work reflected back to us, where we've talked about how these things need to be deconstructed and how this state is a contributor to the violence we experience and how they've, they perpetuate that constantly. So

no, I don't believe in the inquiry. I'm sorry for the families that are duped by it because they really believe in that process, but nothing will come out of it. The inquiry I think is just - it's an awful sham unfortunately. I think they could have, they should have engaged more families and let families decide how it should have went, instead of, you know, dictating from a government point-of-view on how things should have went. And we were ready, on standby, saying okay we don't believe in it, but if you give us a chance to express what we need from you and how we think things should go. But they didn't even do that, so how do you believe in something that doesn't even engage you, you know? There are families out there that are testifying for this, that believe that something meaningful change is going to come out of this, but I don't think until Canada addresses its own racism and contributing to violence that it's - it's status quo. You're funding status quo, you're funding families to be retraumatized, you're exploiting families right. It's almost - we have this term, we talk about trauma porn right, and the media just loves trauma porn. They love to see First Nation people cry on camera, you know, the more sadder, the more trauma that they can get to get ratings, and we don't do that. I don't cry on camera for anybody, you know. I refuse to do those kind of interviews.

Simona: I'm not gonna be your victim. I'm not gonna be your model victim.

Colleen: We actually rehearse and are quite prepared for media when it comes, cuz I don't think they're ready for that, they're not ready for somebody who's well-spoken, who's not gonna cry, you know, when talking about trauma and stuff like that. We don't do that. We have so much work to do, like there needs to be education and awareness about the Sixties Scoop, but by survivors, not by government and not by organizations that don't know shit right. We are the ones that are the experts in our healing and what we need. We are the ones that need to be

consulted and be out there, you know, spreading this knowledge. And I'm working towards that right now in trying to get access to like unions who do frontline work and social services, and health and doctors and nurses and community centres who work with First Nation people, so they can recognize what survivors look like and what we need, you know, how to talk about cultural identity and loss of culture and where the resources are and there's so much right. And I would like to work with other survivors but it's hard, you know. Every survivor is in different stages of healing and some of them are just focused on their stuff right, whereas you know I would like to work cohesively with more survivors, you know, and do the work together. I think, you know, we're stronger together and collectively, but everybody's in different stages of healing.

Gilad: Colleen Cardinal, thank you so much for joining us. If anything, I hope our listeners understand that there are several realities here in Canada. Thank you.

Colleen: You're welcome.

Simona: Thank you so much.

Colleen: Yeah, if you wanna learn more, you can go to www.sixtiesscoopnetwork.org.

Gilad: Thank you.

Colleen: You're welcome.

[Theme music fades in]

Gilad: My name's Gilad Cohen.

Simona: And I'm Simona Ramkisson**.**

Gilad: This podcast is edited and produced by Brandon Fragomeni and Alex Castellani. Our associate producer is Ron Ma.

Simona: The Hum is an initiative of JAYU, a charity that shares human rights stories through the arts.

[Theme music fades out]

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