

TAKE ACTION, EVEN IF YOU'RE SCARED

MINISODE

M♀I

@mothersinvent  

Maeve:

Hi Tara!

Tara:

Hey Bishu - How are you?

Maeve:

Great! We have been dying to catch up with you at Mothers of Invention because we have been watching and listening!

Tara:

(Laughs).

Maeve:

So today's minisode is a much needed catch up on the climate justice wins of our friend, Tara Houska, who we had on [Episode 2](#) on the podcast in our very first season.

[Music transition]

Tara:

Right... And I still wear a business suit sometimes, you know It's a little different nowadays, I live in the woods now. I live in a pipeline resistance camp...

Maeve:

You live in a pipeline resistance camp?

Tara:

I do - I have for the last two years - so I'm living outside, I just came from there I put on lipstick to talk, try to like spruce myself up a little bit!

Maeve:

Well you look beautiful!

[Music transition]

Maeve:

Tara Houska is Bear clan from Couchiching First Nation and founder of the [Giniw collective](#) - an indigenous-women led frontline resistance to protect the earth.

Maeve:

And her work is living proof of how our individual and collective actions really do have impact.

[Music transition]

Maeve: Tara is a tribal rights Attorney, she was also a former advisor on Native American affairs to Bernie Sanders and now, well right now, she is in Minnesota protesting the Enbridge pipeline there.

Tara: Got the hat for mosquitos and flies everywhere.

Maeve: *(Laughs).*

Maeve: So she's living in the woods... but we managed to seek her out, and we got a call in with her.

Maeve: And it's so funny because a lot of us have just been indoors for months because of the pandemic but you look so healthy, like you've actually been outside.

Tara: Yeah, that's one weird thing with Covid everyone's like 'How's it changed?!' but we were already isolated living in the woods together! So it's kind of not...

Maeve: Yeah.

Tara: It's been harder to organise that's for sure. That's been much harder.

Maeve: We were really keen to catch up with her because honestly, if you just take a look at her instagram (which I do a LOT).

Maeve: I love what you do. I love what you do with your (insta)gram.

Tara: Yeah? The Gram?

Maeve: *(Laughs).*

Maeve: Or catch some of the headlines she's been generating...

[Archive Audio]

Democracy Now: Was ordered to shut down the Dakota Access Pipeline in North Dakota...

NPR: Work on the Keystone pipeline is being halted...

BBC:

The Washington Redskins launch a review on it's controversial name after demands...

[Music transition]

Maeve:

It's clear that since we've been off air, Tara has been working with communities all over the US to smash victories out of the park...from halting pipelines, facing down banks, to changing the face of American football - through determination, power, and a lot of help and support from people everywhere.

[Music transition]

Maeve:

You're such a busy, busy person. We just adore you on this show. You've been an early Mother of Invention. The last time we spoke to it was back in, I think it was like our second episode ever, it was called *The White Man Stole the Weather*. And it was two years ago. So tons and tons and tons have happened.

[Audio of football stadium]

Maeve:

So we're going to talk through three of your latest triumphs because they are pretty huge. There's Fossil Fuel Divestment, the oil protests that you were a part of and... well, let's start with the #NotYourMascot campaign, which you set up to help fight against the stereotyping of Native Americans in Sport. So in the middle of July, thanks to public and financial pressure you helped organise, change finally happened at the Washington Football Team in Washington DC. Here's NBC Sports take on it.

[Archive Audio]

NBC Sports:

"Washington football team owner Dan Snyder had for years said he'd never change the name. The infamous quote was "NEVER". Put it in All Caps."

Maeve: Yup, they decided to change their racist team name because as Whitney Cummings very astutely pointed out on the Jimmy Kimmel Live show...

[Archive Audio]

Jimmy Kimmel Show: “The football team has finally taken a stand in changing the name of the Redskins, and I must say in their defence back when they named the team the Redskins, it was only VERY racist”.

Maeve: Could you tell us how you got involved in, and also like how you're feeling? It's been a huge story, I think, all around the world.

Tara: Yeah. I went to D.C. to do this work on Capitol Hill. And picture, you know, I'm a brand new lawyer. I've just accepted this position and I'm super excited to represent tribes all over the country, doing this work on the Hill for my people. And I'm in the subway sandwich place, and I look in front of me, there's a guy wearing the jersey. All the employees have the logo on their outfits because they're running like a Redskin special.

Maeve: Oh.

Tara: And I'm like, I'm sitting there, like if I were a native kid living in this place, *how would I feel?* you think that we're like this mascot caricature, and you're like putting feathers on your head and like painting your face and I couldn't believe that so I started tweeting about this team and we ended up forming an organization called "Not your mascots" and I started organizing protests around it, demonstrations, writing about it.

Tara: When I started getting involved, like one of the first things I recognized right away was like the resistance to this had been happening for decades. Like we're talking like my grandma, you know what I mean? Like her age, there's been demonstrations against the Washington football team and all those other racist teams since the sixties, the 1960s. And so we're talking 60 years of advocacy, 25 years worth of lawsuits led by Suzan Harjo and Amanda Blackhorse versus the plaintiff, you know, I mean this is like decades of work.

Maeve: Wow.

Tara: And the change I saw that really took like the final nail or whatever, and then, in the coffin of that form of racism. That particular team, it's not only one team. All the rest of them are kind of like "No - But not us though". And it's like, "yes, you too..."

Maeve: *(Laughs).*

Tara: What I see is that it took the murder of George Floyd during the pandemic when everyone was paying attention.

Maeve: Hmm.

Tara: To have millions of people marching in the streets to have cities burning, to have a conversation about racism brought into the national narrative. It opened up the window to so many other issues around systemic racism.

[Music transition]

Maeve: Yeah, it's a powerful time for change.

[Music transition]

Maeve: Okay, so now, let's talk about your mega pipeline victories against the Dakota Access Pipeline and the Keystone XL pipeline.

[Archive Audio: Protests]

Maeve: You fought back against these massive oil pipelines that crossed into Native American land and endangered people's drinking water, the environment and the human rights of indigenous people. Because leaks are known to happen frequently.

[Archive Audio: Protest audio]

Maeve: To catch the listeners up... when we spoke to you two years ago, you told us about your inspiring, but also really horrific experiences working on the protests at Standing Rock.

Unicorn Protest Archive:

[Soldiers yelling] "Don't reach for anything, keep your hands... don't reach for anything!"

Maeve: But just in the past few months, there's been some really big back-to-back news and I've been so excited to talk to you about it. So would you be able to in your 'lawyerly way', sum up?

Tara: In my 'Lawyerly way', I'll put on, I'll take off my camo and put on my suit.

[Laughs]

Tara: So there's been incredible wins in the judiciary, around the suspension of the Keystone XL pipeline due to its water crossing permits and the potential decommissioning, or at least the stopping oil flow in the Dakota access pipeline also by the judiciary.

[Archive Audio]

Deutsche Welle: The judge ruled the pipeline possibly threatened people's water supply there and ordered a review of the structures' environmental impact.

Tara: The judge straight up said 'no, empty the line, decommission it you're shutting the flow of oil off'. That's incredible, you know?

Maeve: Wow.

Tara: To hear that kind of message being sent to the fossil fuel industry, you don't get to go around environmental review. You didn't play right. So the game is done for you, you know, fix it and we'll talk again, you know, like that's literally what happened.

[Music transition]

Maeve: I remember seeing news on both these pipelines and all these sad oil men being grumpy about prices and jobs.

Tara: Yeah, you know the US secretary of energy said that he wasn't, he blamed the activists, which I thought was kind of, you know, I was like, Oh, good. You saw that we've been, we've been quite busy out there huh? And said, I'm not sure what they're against if it's jobs or what...

Maeve: Yeah, here he is speaking to Fox News.

[Audio Archive]

Fox News:

It's just very disappointing because it's a lost opportunity because of the number of jobs that would have been created...

Tara:

Why are those the only jobs? Like, that's my question, you know, why are they the only jobs? Those are decided by massive corporations who are hell bent on destroying the planet for profit.

Maeve:

No for sure. It just doesn't really wash anymore.

[Music transition]

Maeve:

But then an area you've been working on for a really long time is "divestment" which is basically getting big banks to take their money out of fossil fuel investing. And you've just had a win, and this win is BIG. You got Deutsche Bank to pull the plug on their fossil fuel investments! So ... I mean... How did you do that?

Tara:

I mean, you've always got to follow the money. I learned that a long time ago. It's always helpful to know who's pulling the strings.

So I've personally been involved in divestment since, we were barricaded in, at the standing rock encampments, started doing, you know, direct actions at bank branches and, you know directing people how to pull their money out, which banks were funding the projects, but also doing these kind of like face to face meetings with banking and banking and financiers.

[Music transition]

Maeve:

So when you actually go to meet, say Deutsche bank, what is that like?

[Music transition]

Tara:

So I've been to a number of banking meetings, uh, in both groups of women and also individually as just me. You are, you know, after, months pushing or organizing

a meeting, you finally get the 'Yes' and 'Okay. It's going to happen' right. So in the case of Deutsche bank, you know, you're at this massive stone building made out of concrete and all the glass and it's all dark and all those things. Lots of security guards at Deutsche Bank. Lots. The guy with the little ear headset is like 'They're here, they're here...'

[Music transition]

Tara: Then you're sitting at a long table with all these bankers across the way and telling them your story.

But not only telling them your story, but giving them the substantive things that institutions like that need to believe your story, which is here are the lawsuits that have been filed that say that we do not consent to this project that we were talking about. Here is the documentation from the United Nations about the human rights abuses that occurred. Also here is a copy of your policy on Human Rights. Here's a copy of your policy on Indigenous peoples. If you have one, why are you continuing to engage in these issues and -

I feel like a lot of times people think like, 'Oh, that must feel so powerless'. I don't feel like that at all. Like I feel quite frankly, I feel sorry for them that, like they genuinely truly believe in this world that's been created around them. And that, that is the right thing to do. And that we won't show up with like a thousand people and like be screaming their name, holding signs outside, we're not coming from a position of weakness. We're coming from a position of power.

Maeve: Yeah. I would be shaking if I was in that room and I was a banker.

Tara: They are straight up are. Some of them are like, so just like nervous and like shaking and like... 'uuuh!'.

[Music transition]

Maeve: I did actually record myself for Mothers of Invention, calling up and divesting from my bank. I mean, it was a great feeling to do it. It was tricky. I called them up and I said, you know, the woman from customer service hung

up on me. And this is like my little sheltered experience. I was like, how -

Tara: *(Laughs).*

Maeve: She hung up the phone on me! Like I got real *Karen* about it! *(Laughs).*

Tara: 'How dare you?!'

Maeve: *(Laughs).*

Tara: Yeah. I mean, for us, like, I mean, when you're like not the customer service rep on here being like the head of oil and gas investment and they're like, "Oh, so your people are dying. Okay. You know, you show me these pictures of people getting bitten by dogs. I mean, we are a banking institution and our customer isn't saying that that's happening". So, you know, you're like what you guys are so disconnected from your enemy, you know?

Maeve: Wow... wow.... We have a ton to learn from you, and your teams and the various battles that you fight on different fronts. And I think that you are evidence that like our actions matter, so key things that we can do. Okay. This is what I've learned, please correct me if I'm wrong. Mmm. Take action. Even if you're scared.

Tara: Yes, please!

Maeve: Any money you have is power. Follow that money, divest it any relation you have to money. If you're in college or an institution, make sure they divest.

Tara: Yes.

Maeve: What's the best way for people to make that decision and take those actions to divest?

Tara: I'm part of a coalition called "[Stop The Money Pipeline](#)".

Maeve: Stop The Money Pipeline.

Tara: Visit "Stop The Money Pipeline". We have a website, you can learn how to pull out your money and learn what banks are much better when it comes to investing in sustainability.

Maeve: Hmm.

Tara: So that, and also, uh, teaching each other, you know, like. Once, you know, you can't not know. So tell other people, raise children to be empathetic and compassionate and educated about these issues.

Tara: I don't know. The last thing that I always tell people to do is I encourage them to try to find ways to put their feet in the dirt and to remember that they're part of this earth.

[Music transition]

Maeve: Ok, and like you say, it's so important to acknowledge that you started work on most of these wins years ago. And in the case of the Washington Football Team name change - there have been generations of activists before you too. Sometimes it's a slow burn, isn't it?

Tara: I would say that it is a representation to me that, sometimes it takes a really long time and it takes every single angle possible to then receive this, this moment. And you're building for that moment where it's, everything is right. And everything is, um, come together to create that space for that change to finally happen. So don't get tired along the way. Remember that, like, even if it doesn't happen in your lifetime, that it might happen in the next lifetime.

[Music transition]

Maeve: Oh Tara, you're the best, thank you so much!

Tara: Thank you, appreciate it!

[Minisode ends]