

**Nina:** So I am going to ask you first what was happening in your project that made you apply for an ITP grant? And how did it feel to carry out your work amidst the covid-19 pandemic? How did you have to innovate, to come together?

**Leah:** So at the time I thought it was the final edit, but it was the final edit before the final edit of my novel, *The Whale Dreamer*. And you know, this whole story was about how to really hold people, especially young people, through the sixth mass extinction. How do we give them a greater narrative around what's happening in the world, how to meet a quickly changing world and how to give them a place in that world that they want to be in? So it's been this, you know, this little project I've been working on the last decade and at the center of this novel, this series, is this creation story that really looks at Earth's unique role in the universe and what is our responsibility to the universe as being on the planet that is holding the DREAM. And who are we as dreamers and whose dream are we dreaming? You know? And so it really does give young people this framework, this mythic framework of getting out of the story that people are bad, getting out of the hero craze of narcissism, getting into this more collective expression and getting out of the story that like it's doomsday forever ahead of us, you know, that there are many possibilities and that we're creating them, that we're dreaming them into reality every single day. So as I was looking at the course of what it was going to take to get this book out and that I actually really, really, truly believe that this centerpiece, this creation story was of great value now. I came to Invoking The Pause with that dream of just pulling out that narrative of the creation story and making it into an animated film. And we put together a great team that was so impressive and so exciting.

**Leah:** One of them was the head of all the foundations of L.A. and how they could do social impact grants. And it was a really great team. And then covid happened and it just felt like grinding gears, like Hollywood froze. Nobody knew where anything was going, what anybody was doing. I was, like compelled to have our group meeting just because we said we'd do it. But when I met with them I just like had this honest moment where I was like, do you think this is the time to do this? And they all just looked at me and they're like, look, we're happy to do this. We're happy to support you. But like, we actually don't know if we can create any momentum with you. Right now, everything is at a standstill. And at the same time, Nina, I honestly had a conversation with you that also kind of stopped me in my tracks. And you asked me this question that really brought me to a very humble place. And I wish I could remember exactly what you

asked me, but you really encouraged me to slow down and you really encouraged me to, like, take some deep breaths, do some deep listening before I charged forth. And I really took that to heart. And in the back of my mind, what was happening was that I had had this dream for myself that I would go and study not just as a step on the commitment to mastery and understanding, like really understanding what story is to go sit with indigenous cultures to sit and receive their wisdom stories and their prophecy stories.

**Leah:** Now, as particularly in the belief system, if these prophecies stories were designed to support us through these times, now is the time to amplify them. So that running in the back of my head and then running in the front of my head or the middle of my head was this other piece of like, who am I to write a creation story? It's like it came through me. That's great. But creation stories are nothing that you mess with. And so I was also in this greater question of I think I real fear came alive in me where when the world slowed down and I could feel everything that was going and all the gears seemed to be grinding when it came to move forward, it just seemed to make sense to redirect me. So I thought and then I also saw kind of like the ridiculousness, of why would I go around the world sitting with indigenous culture and listening to the wisdom of prophecy stories before doing that on the continent that I live on. Like it was so obvious. It was ridiculous. So I drove across the country. And I made it part of the listening tour to meet with indigenous elders as I traveled to receive their wisdom stories and to receive their prophecy stories as, I guess, the preamble to releasing this other creation story. And what came out of it, which was very unexpected, was I didn't end up working with all those people - they're still there, they're still ready. And they're like, let's do it. But I think how do I use this money in the best way and have the greatest impact with it? And is me just meeting with them - yes, it's a great networking opportunity - but is that really going to move the project? I don't know. I think I was having that greater inquiry because it's not like they were collaborators. They were they were thinkers. And then that listening tour is now becoming a podcast. And it's actually birthed itself into a podcast that's much bigger than just amplifying other people's stories. But it's a true weaving of what is it to be a storyteller in our time and what is it to understand story and what is it to really ignite and encourage the sacred storyteller in all of us. So there you go. It was a very long explanation of what happened. That is what happened.

**Nina:** It's beautiful, and it almost sounds like you got down to the nugget of what was most deeply motivating you in what you originally applied for in a totally different form.

**Nina:** Well, I would suggest you answer this question whichever way feels truest to you, because based on the story you just told me, it feels as though it's more about the project and its evolutionary life than it is about the people you originally applied to do the parts with. So the question is, what made the pause or project feel special or unique? Please share some aspects of what you did together.

**Leah:** I think what really made it possible through this was it was an invitation for deep listening just in the name of it, you know, and I also feel like this spirit that Maggie and Kelly and the whole crew held was to be real to what these changing times are, and embody this grant. And I think that permission really allowed me to truly, deeply listen to what I wanted. What was the creative impulse of the moment like, what truly wants to emerge? And, you know, the essence was I really believe in these old creation stories and I believe that there are stories that are designed to help us to heal, to bring healing, to support us, to thrive in these times, to give us the tools to be great humans. And my impulse was to say, yes, this is a great big book and blessed be, may it be a great service, but wow, it's also a journey and it takes a lot of time. And I really felt the impulse to be alive in what's coming through and let that be alive and not wait and have be on the computer. And so, ironically, you know, I thought I was taking a big novel, make it into a short film. But now I took a short film and made it into an hour-long podcast. And so this spirit of saying, look, there are things I wanted to come through and don't overproduce it, don't make it into the biggest thing. What small nuggets can you be handing out right now? What bread crumbs can you be throwing to the collective that will be of service now while also understanding that, you know, good things take good time? Also, there are good things that can be made in an hour and be doing the job of a greater project at the same time. And so I think that having that time in the process to distill, distill, distill, distill, distill, and in hearing you speak to, well, what was the essence of it? That really was the intention,

**Leah:** And so it's not what I was planning in any shape or form of anything. It was what I was avoiding.

**Nina:** But I I find myself kind of having shivers up and down my spine because of how essential what you are describing seems to me as medicine in this time, that we are all

being force fed narratives that are not only not healthy and often false, but they greatly limit our capacity for imagining and as dreamers and story weavers for you to open up the field in a way that really invites people into that experience seems incredibly important to me at this moment when we are. And also, interestingly, the other thing that I hear in what you're saying is that, where the Whale Dreamer began to be about how to help young people navigate the sixth great extinction, we are living through a time that has the confluence of all these disasters; of the pandemic, of the economic collapse of climate change, all of it at once. And there's never been a time that I'm aware of, certainly not in my life, when stimulating people's capacity for imagining alternate worldviews and pathways is more important. So thank you. That's really cool.

**Leah:** Thank you. I think what's coming alive and interesting is also - and this is a big question that is carrying right now - what is in the human system that can register a lie is true? I've been so fascinated by that. Something that one of my teachers says "And it really happened". And what he's saying is, that there can be a true story with facts that aren't real, you know, and we've become so attached to the facts and information. And yet we're storied animals, we're not numbered animals. I think I have been really fascinated by like what tools can you give people to understand who we are in relationship to story so that we can be more discerning and that we can say, wow, that conspiracy theory is really freaking crazy. But, is there something in the narrative that is reflecting something that's happening? And how do we become more attuned to that than some crazy story that's like whatever?

**Leah:** So, I thank you for saying that because I think that's the thing that I'm just so committed to right now is I feel like we do need these skills and the imagination. All we're doing is staring at screens and like all I want to do sometimes after a day of staring at screens, and I can't believe this, is I want to watch TV. Because I want to turn off. And as it turns off, you know?

**Nina:** OK, what are a few key moments or highlights that stuck with you on your journey or in this process?

**Leah:** I mean, one, honestly, this project gave me the best gig in town where I live session where my job was to listen, and that was like in the time when it was so complex and so confusing, it was just really that was one of the things where I was like,

my job is to listen, not to argue, not to not to make meaning, not to do anything, but just to give a place for these voices and for these stories to be heard. You know, Arcons story at the time that I was talking to him, I was really trying to figure out what would be the good questions to bring to these, like how do you call it a wisdom story? And at the time, there was a lot on hate crimes erupting. And so I went to him for this question about how do you handle hate? And, what is a story that would that would help us understand, how to live with hate or how to heal hate. And I asked our permission to tell the story, and it takes place in the Peruvian mountains. So he said yes. And he told me this story about going to the Peruvian mountains. And the land had only been conquered. And there were local people that were managing this land with a CÉDULA and they noticed the stream was drying up and they knew that this was a problem. The cattle would starve, the plants would starve, the people would starve. And so they went to the man that was the land owner of that land. And they said, we have a problem, our well is drying up. And so he said, well, show me. You know, so they take him out and he sees that the water is drying. He yelled at the water you've got to flow now! Are you going to come on, don't do that. And he yelled at the water and the water disappeared. No one knew that they're in big trouble. And so they went to the witch that lived up in the mountains where she been banished and was absolutely in a life of hiding. And no one was allowed to know her because they would have killed her. And so they begged her and they pleaded her. And like in many of these stories, you know, when the old witch that is hiding that knows how to speak to the water is come to in life and death situations still respond even at the potential death of her own life. Just as you're putting me at great risk, because the only way I can come to this is if the venture comes down and is there for the ceremony. OK, so the rancher, the witch, all the people come and. She sings to the water, she pleads to the water, she courts to the water, and it will not come. And she turns to the rancher and she said. You're going to have to apologize and something about being in her song, being in her presence.

**Leah:** He cried and his tears that hit the ground called forth the water, and she started flowing again. Right. So it's just like I learned about teaching stories. I think that was like I really learned about. How like just getting to sit with these old elders and listen to receive their stories and how not literal they are and to get to be like it did its work, I started to really get the old transmissions of what do these stories offer us? And like, they're not going to tell you what to go do and facing hate, but they'll share with you a time and they'll reveal some of the magic of when something was healed. And I feel like

as someone who wants to be deeply in service to these times and as someone who feels called to do the storied way, I'm understanding more and more and more the mysteries of story and what's and like just really excited, honestly just excited to be able to share those stories and amplifying them to get to hear them through Arkan's voice. I mean, oh, my gosh. You know, beautiful.

**Nina:** How great! What were some innovations or collaborations that resulted from the pods?

**Leah:** Well, strangely enough, when I was driving through Santa Fe, I ended up meeting this woman, Clara, and her working partner, David, who wrote The King's Speech. And we were just introduced and they look on my website and they saw the listening project and they said, oh, my God, would you please come over for coffee? You're working on one of our passion projects and we want to talk to you about it. And so over to their house. And we have this total passion with indigenous storytelling and amplifying these voices and getting the prophecy stories. It was so much alignment, and they said we have like three or four other stories projects on board and we don't have time or capacity to do anything with them. So we can't we can't give this our full time. But we would love to come on and offer ourselves as executive producers for you. I said, OK.

**Leah:** We're still working our way through it. But I feel like they really are advisers for the creative telling and storyteller. And I'm really in awe of the grace of it all. And that the driving across the country during covid put me in the place to be able to meet them.

**Nina:** And how do you feel the ITP funded work has impacted your relationships and communication? What are the changes you've noticed in the aftermath.

**Nina:** You could even focus on the second part of it because. Really, you shifted from one course and goal and orientation into another. Yeah. What are changes you have noticed?

**Leah:** I think the greater overarching, a mega change that's happened is trusting the impulse of the creative emergent process. There was impulse to say, hey, the creation story, this this could actually help people give a bigger narrative to what's happening in

their world. You know, I didn't miss that impulse. And then that impulse said, that's great, but who are you to tell this story? And what do you need to really have a strong foundation to hold this kind of storytelling in the world of these times. I think it gave me such freedom to continue to not know exactly what I was doing, but to trust that there is a creative impulse, an emergent impulse that is a like a North Star being in service, and people and the tools to come alive and thrive in these times to really know the next seven generations and how do we consider them. And that emerging process continues to evolve. But it feels like it's on a clear path. You know, I mean, the book's still happening. That creation story is still going on there. But now there's also a podcast which feels like a really beautiful alignment, expression of all of it woven together. It would have never been without this grant in a million years.

**Nina:** It's beautiful, huh? And where are you hoping to go from here, what comes next?

**Leah:** Well, who knows? If I say I know then it's all over.

**Leah:** What I'm dreaming is really designing a podcast that's like true to the nature of story and that weaves in the great stories of our great questions of our time with these old stories that support us and understanding them while also being designed to support other people's creative impulse coming alive. So there's some kind of creativity invitation. There's something that invites the community to come together around story and to share their own and all of that. So it feels like it's lots of sparks wanting to come forth. I'm still very committed. I mean, obviously, I'm still really working on the dream. But honestly, I think when I got out of the craze of the hyperventilation that happens in L.A., I got to have something to show like I have on this. I was like just finish the book, don't you dare stop for a second about completing the book. Like that whole idea of pulling out the short story and making it into a short film was great. But I just need to finish the book and then things happen out of that. So I think there was some wisdom. There is there is an intelligence with that compulsion and there is a wisdom to saying no to it.

**Nina:** You may be able to let the path meet your feet as you come to completion whenever that is with the book. YIt's a big body of work to come through you, and it does take the time it takes. And you don't get to dictate how long that is.

**Leah:** I keep trying to tell it I'm in charge.

**Nina:** I wonder if there's anything else you want to say to the ITP team before we pause the recording.

**Leah:** I just have a lot of gratitude for being able to have, the funds but also the structure and the community and that voice in my ear of, to listen, to pause. Just the whole premise of the grant gave me a kind of permission that would have been very different if I'd gotten a grant to produce a short film. It allowed me to really come to the core essence of what is it to be a conscious creator in our times and what it really wants to come alive in our times of deep listening. So. I really, really believe that, like in the big picture, this couldn't have served my project better in terms of really getting to the roots, getting to the depths of what wants to emerge. So I'm just really grateful. Really grateful.

**Nina:** Beautiful. Well, I think you've named really clearly and succinctly some of the power and the beauty and the uniqueness of Maggie's vision with ITP. And it's why I have been there a long time and continue to love serving it. So thank you. Now, I want to get to hear some of your podcasts.

**Leah:** Yeah, they're coming. They're coming. They're coming.