

Second Transition Podcast Episode 3 - The End of the World

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SPEAKERS

Philip Loring, Waub Rice

W Waub Rice 00:08

We totally went there. You know, we thought that blackout was was the end. We were prepared for, you know, the upheaval of the world, right. But we prepared in a way that was inspired and influenced by being raised in a communal setting like that. What our nation went through and what Indigenous people more broadly went through was in Apocalypse, you know, that is indisputable, you know, there was genocide imposed upon our people.

P Philip Loring 00:40

What would happen if it all came crashing down around us? If stores closed, the power went out? If we were cut off from everything, and everyone except our neighbours? And how important are the stories we tell ourselves about these features should crisis actually arrive? This is the Second Transition Podcast. I'm Phil Loring. This podcast is about radical change. In August of 2003, my guest today was sure that he was confronted with radical change when the power went out in multiple southeastern and Midwestern states in the US and in Ontario and Canada. Anishinabe, writer Waubgeshig Rice and his brothers experienced the outers from their community and their first nation territory near Georgian Bay. Decades later, Waub Rce wrote a fantastic novel moon of the crested snow, to explore what he learned that day, and the wisdom of enduring change that he's learned from his people's collective experience with the colonial holocaust. Their end of the world as he puts it. The day that I picked up Moon of the Crusted Snow was the day I knew I had to ask Waub Rice to be a guest. When we had this conversation, I had just experienced the near miss with wildfire evacuation in Northern California, So I was keenly interested in how Waub thinks of crisis change, and the power of story to help people connect with a better future. This interview is just as much a gift as the book is. So let's dig in.

P Philip Loring 02:16

Okay, today we are diving into the world of speculative fiction with author Waubgeshig Rice, and Anishinabe writer and journalist from the Wapoching First Nation near Pelee Island

and Anishinaabe writer and journalist from the Wasauksing First Nation near Parry Sound, Ontario in Canada. Waub's novel, *Moon of the Crusted Snow* is just fantastic, rich and honest. It offers a tremendously tense and sobering exploration of a world when things fall apart, and how people come eventually, to put things back together in a new way. But novel is gripping and as full of angst and uncertainty as it is of love and optimism. He's currently working on a follow up to the novel titled *Moon of the Turning Leaves*. Well, thank you for this novel. And thanks for joining me today.

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Waub Rice 02:54

Oh, Philip, thank you very much, Miigwech. I really appreciate your kind words about the novel. And I appreciate the invitation to join the chat today. Thank you.

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Philip Loring 03:01

Maybe we can start by talking about the power of story in general, because a good story is far more powerful and motivating and relatable than even the most carefully crafted science or messaging. One of the biggest obstacles, I think, to achieving the the major changes and that we need to see to solve problems like climate change is that people can't envision what life is like on the other side. To me, that's where story comes in. And so I'm curious to hear your thoughts on story and why you chose to tell this story now. And in this way?

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Waub Rice 03:32

Well, I think it's probably the lived experience, the relatable moments in stories that really connects people across communities, across cultures, across generations, landscapes and so on. You know, before we started recording, you had mentioned the threat of wildfire in Northern California, where you currently are. And, you know, we can watch the stories on the news, we can hear it on the radio, we can see the links being shared on social media and read the articles and so on. But I think until we really have someone in our personal radius who can relate what that exactly is to us, it doesn't really hit home as hard as you know, it can through a stranger, right. So in that sense, personal storytelling, I think carries immense weight. And that's really, you know, since time immemorial, around the world is how people shared lessons how history was relayed from generation to generation, and how important sort of morals were passed down, right? How mistakes were repeated how, you know, people stayed safe and so on by, you know, relaying these personal allegories from person to person.

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Philip Loring 04:44

And so that's what you were trying to do with your book then.

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Waub Rice 04:48

So I think when it comes to move across the snow specifically, there was a lot of that behind it. You know, from I guess my own lived experience growing up in a First Nations to understanding the end of the world for Indigenous people. which many Indigenous nations around the world

...have already survived, right? And that those ideas and concepts and allegories came to me through the people around me. And that really was the foundation underneath the story that I created. And I guess sort of a more modern context. But what's there is, you know, the result of generations of sharing relatable experiences, you know, and, you know, to get specific about the genesis of moon of the crested snow, you know, it came from a blackout happening. In August of 2003, there was a major power outage that impacted a big part of the eastern part of North America. And, you know, I witnessed that through my first nation, you know, I was living in Toronto at the time, but I was home visiting that particular week. And what I saw was an entirely different response. And, you know, the chaos that one would presume, would unfold in a city, right? In my community, you know, my brothers and I, who I was with, we sort of made a plan, we decided what we would do and who we go to, and how we would help others. And it was kind of exciting to think, you know, what kids, we were, we totally went there, you know, we thought that blackout was was the end, we were prepared for, you know, the upheaval of the world, right. But we prepared in a way that was inspired and influenced by being raised in a communal setting like that, you know, and I thought, you know, a lot of the dystopian slash post apocalyptic fiction, I'd read up until that point in my life, you know, it was more or less about one or two people just trying to survive and not about communities coming together. And that's sort of what I wanted to explore. With the crisis, no, was just showing how a community with the lived experience of Apocalypse already you can it and that is in the process of picking up the pieces can rely upon that lived experience to carry on and go for it?

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Philip Loring 06:58

Well, again, thank you for, you know, sharing story like this, I think of it as a gift, and particularly get a gift that I'm grateful for myself.

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Waub Rice 07:06

Oh, my gosh, thank you.

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Philip Loring 07:07

One of the things that really strikes me about the book that in reflecting on it for this conversation is that I remember reading the book and use very slowly, but incrementally and constantly ramp up the tension, like it's, it's unrelenting. Every time you turn the page, it feels like there's another thing that just ticks that tension dial up a little bit more. And by the first half, you know, it was consuming and and it occurs to me now, you know, I'm thinking a lot about climate change. And you know, we have large scale global things happening, conversations about how not to solve the problem. But the urgency and anxiety and tension for people is building around climate change and feels sort of like it's ratcheting up in the same way. With a novel with fiction you can you can work through it. You know, you can see how people work through it not, you know, kind of kind of as a cautionary tale, but also kind of as a thought experiment, or, you know, if you get my meaning. What do you want readers? What do you hope readers take from the experiences that they have the chance to see of the characters in your story?

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Waub Rice 08:09

Well, I

W

Waub Rice 08:09

want them to take, you know, a spectrum of ideas and experiences away from men from, you know, the more extreme side, I want them to understand that the infrastructures that we're relying upon are very fragile, you know, they won't last forever, we could easily lose electricity, telecommunications, and so on in a heartbeat. I guess on the more positive extreme side, what I want people to remember is, prior to all these infrastructures, these modern luxuries that we become very familiar with the land sustains us around the world, every single culture that and civilization that has existed on this planet was born out of a, you know, intense and reciprocal relationship with the land, you know, and what the community and Moon with the crested snow comes to realise is the answer has been there all along. It's the traditional knowledges and exercises that help them survive once everything falls away. And I think that has it was highlighted early on in the pandemic. I think a lot of people have forgotten about this, unfortunately, by now, but early on, you know, there were some supply chain issues with groceries and so on. And people you know, panic bought up the aisles at the grocery stores. And I think a lot of people especially in urban centres started realising just how reliant we are upon food coming into our communities from elsewhere, you know, on trucks and trains and so on. But in a place especially here where I am in Sudbury in northern Ontario, we're surrounded by you know, very generous lands you know, a very generous environment that can feed us and care for us and heal us if we need it.

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Philip Loring 09:56

It's worth noting that Waubgeshig is not overstating things here. Our global systems of supply and trade are extremely complicated and extremely fragile. In the first months of the pandemic, we saw trade stoppages that cascaded through our food systems. Toilet paper may have been what topped the news, but there were so many other effects as well. truckloads of unsold potatoes went into landfills, dairy was dumped down the drain. And we're still seeing ripples of this on the shelves in food prices. And even in the shipping deadlock currently being experienced off the US west coast. But an interesting parallel with Bob's book is that while global systems faltered during the pandemic, all around the world, we also saw people turning instead to their neighbours and communities. Take for example, small scale community based fisheries, direct marketing, use of social media, people feeding their neighbourhoods, we saw this all happen all around the world when the seafood supply chain was disrupted. And today, many folks are trying to learn from what they did, right. So they don't just have to go back to the fragile system that we knew before. So as Rob said, building on our values and collective experiences is a critical way that we can prepare for an uncertain future. Now back to the interview. And so sort of following up on that last question, there's an Indigenous-settler tension that's also very present in the story. And is there something in particular that you want settler readers to take from this? The story from his voyage into what what really is a, it's not only very realistic, but but very possible future? I mean, you said, you know, 2003, the lights went out? Yeah, well, this is it, you know, and I feel like we all sort of have this sort of insinuation that maybe we're really that close to everything falling apart. Is there something that you hope settler readers take from this story?

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Waub Rice 11:41

Yeah, for sure. It's those two things I mentioned. But also, it's to realise that settler colonialism is ongoing. It is not over we are not in post colonial worlds, there are impacts of simulation, displacements, genocide, ultimately, that continue on, and with *Moon of the Crusted Snow*, particularly with the character Justin Scott, you know, I meant for him to be an allegory for that ongoing settler colonialism, you know, you have this already displaced people in a community far away from the traditional homelands. And when everything collapses, you have them being at risk of being colonised and displaced once again, you know, a settler with exploitation in his objectives, comes north to sort of impose his own rule and his will upon this community, you know, but but it's not just that it's not just that extreme example of potential chaos, it's just understanding that, you know, Indigenous children are still apprehended into the child welfare system, to alarming rates, life expectancy is way lower for Indigenous people, like in my home community, there aren't any men in their 80s anymore. And that's a result of being displaced of, you know, having the food sources taken away, being disconnected from the land and, you know, the forbidding of culture and so on. And also the the removal of children from the community and the severance of those intergenerational bonds, you know, those all those things combined have just impacted quality of life for Indigenous people everywhere. And it's gonna take a really long time for people to heal from that it's going to take many, many more generations. And we're really just only beginning collectively at that point of healing right now.

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Philip Loring 13:28

And I saw footage just today on social media that mounted police just sort of walking with authority on to unceded territory that had been blockaded and and it made me think of this, this interview in that character that that that as an aside, I, one of the things that struck me when I was reading the book is that that character, Justin Scott, he could have come across as a caricature, but he didn't. Like he was embarrassingly real to me, when I read that story. And, and, you know, the premise of this show, the second transition, you know, I think there's really interesting parallels with your book and the acts in your book, the story arc in your book, you know, that the idea that I'm sort of pursuing or playing with with this show is that there's this first transition where we're, you know, that involves all the strife and the challenges and the uncertainties and the course correction, reconnection through all of that with who we are and our neighbourhoods and our families and the natural world. That's the stuff of the majority of *Moana*, the crest itself, and then it ends and no spoilers, I'm not going to spoil leaders, but it ends with people literally and figuratively, looking ahead. So to what's next. So sort of standing in the in the vocabulary that I'm trying to develop standing at the threshold of the second transition. And so can you tell me a little bit about your thoughts on on the changes that we face as communities as cultures, thinking about things like climate, biodiversity, wildfire, whatever it may be? What do you think we need to come to terms with in terms of radical and an extensive change that what happens in your book is radical and extensive. What do you think's out in front of us?

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Waub Rice 15:08

Well, unfortunately, I think it's going to take, you know, major events to really influence people to make that transition in a meaningful way. We're going to have to, regardless of what our personal intentions or hopes are, you know, we are going to have to eventually come together

as a global community to reverse the changing climate. Because the evidence is unmistakable, it's indisputable, right. Here in northern Ontario, we're seeing fires burn from the spring rate to the fall, you know, just levelling, massive swaths of forest rate across the region, you know, and we see the smoke blowing into our cities. And people think, oh, that's, you know, it smells bad, that's unfortunate. But, you know, I don't think people are seeing how that could upset their day to day life just yet. But, you know, it's a handful of things to come, I believe. What I think back to you, though, and this is what really informed Moon of the Crested Snow, from an economic perspective was the underlying hope, despite everything, you know, so what our nation went through, and what Indigenous people more broadly went through was in Apocalypse, you know, that is indisputable, you know, there's genocide imposed upon our people, you know, in the end, though, people still held on to those ideas and those identities that were being beaten out of them. And examples of that are, you know, children whispering to each other in their language behind the nuns back at residential school hoping that one day they'd be able to speak their language together, again, with each other. Outside of residential schools, you know, you had people in communities, holding forbidden ceremonies in the basements of their homes in the middle of the night or in lodge in the bush. And then in the middle of the night, you know, it was illegal to be an Indian, it was illegal to hold ceremony as Indigenous people as outlined by the federal government. But people still did those things. Regardless, you know, they didn't give up they had hoped that one day they would be able to make that transition into this modern realm. So many nations everywhere survived colonialism survived upheaval, and push forward to create something new. And sometimes it sounds naive to be so hopeful, but I can't help that and I don't apologise for that at the same time, either. You know, like, I wrote a book about the end of the world with the underlying theme of hope and renewal, you know, and I think that's really what's going to inspire my work or influence my work for the rest of my life.

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Philip Loring 17:54

Well, I appreciate it. And you know, you gave us a book that forces us to contend with the past that forces us in so do into contend with the future and, you know, I'd be I'd be remiss, and I know, I'm asking as much for myself as for the show, if I didn't ask you about the sequel. Can you tell us anything about it?

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Waub Rice 18:13

Yeah, I'd be happy to. Well, I am deep into it now. My editor and I are doing some heavy lifting with the revisions. We are hoping it will be published next fall. Basically, the story picks up about a decade after the end of moon of the crested snow. And you'll remember if you've read moon of the crested snow this community originally lives on the north shore of Lake Huron slash Georgian Bay and was displaced to far Northern Ontario, which happened to a lot of communities in Canada, after Canada was settled. So after a decade in the bush, they decide that they want to go south a to see what's left of the world and to see if in fact the world has ended, and, B: to try to reconnect with their homelands on the north shore of Georgian Bay. They've spent all this time up there living with the lands benefiting from it, but they realise you know, they aren't upholding their responsibility responsibilities to the land as Anishinaabek, by staying in one place because traditionally Anishinaabek travelled around their landscape to you know, follow the food source, you know, according to season and so on to allow the land to

replenish where needed to write. So without giving too much away about the first book, you will see some familiar characters go out on this quest group of about six of them and it just follows them on their journey to this out.

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Philip Loring 19:43

I can't wait to see it and and thanks when it comes out, congratulations. I know it's a it's a lot of work and after the writing is also a lot of work. Yeah. So I have one final question for you. It's something that I ask in one way or another, one form or another every guest on the show, and that is what is the most radical change you would like to see come to be in your lifetime?

W

Waub Rice 20:05

Well, the biggest change I want to see from Anishinaabe or even a more broader Indigenous perspective is their replenishing of language, the total revitalization of Indigenous languages of children being raised speaking their language fluently. And that is not my experience, you know, I was raised with a little bit of my language, but I am nowhere near a fluent speaker, 42 years old now, and it's been sort of a journey throughout my entire adulthood to try to learn properly. But since I became a father, I have two little boys, now, it takes on a greater weight, and I do want to see them grow up with more opportunities than I had to speak our language, what that's going to take, I think, is a widespread social acceptance of the responsibility of Canada to restore these languages, because Canada is responsible for taking these languages away, right. And it's gonna cost a lot of money, you know, to establish immersion programmes in basically every community, you know, not just on reserve communities, but in urban centres as well, where Indigenous people also inhabit and thrive. You know, we hear this term reconciliation get thrown around all the time. But to me, and this is just my own personal opinion, it doesn't mean anything unless languages are restored along with it. So that's, I think that's one, one big change I want to see, also just want to see people take the land around the more seriously and I guess, by extension, take climate change more seriously. And it's not until that the food starts to dwindle, that I think people are going to really understand the importance of that, you know, and we talked earlier about the moments that are really going to catalyse things, it's going to be that I think unfortunately,

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Philip Loring 21:56

You know, the only thought that I'm left lingering with is, is I keep wondering and hoping maybe there's ways that we can get there without having to be forced by, major, you know, by pandemics and by food shortages. And because it always seems to come back to you know, the the gravity of the status quo is such that, you know, it's sort of lulled to sleep in a warm bath of water and it takes a you have to have ice dumped on it before you do anything about it. I don't know, I don't know what it takes to not have to wait for crisis to create change, but but I want to keep that door cracked open.

W

Waub Rice 22:31

Yeah, I agree with you, you know, and it's about staying hopeful, you know, and, but like, the thing is like most people on this continent especially have it really good like life is really good

thing is, like most people on this continent, especially, have it really good, like life is really good for people here. And they're very complacent. And that risk is maybe farther away than it needs to be for them to take things a little more seriously. And I guess we're placated. And I include myself in that, you know, on a daily basis, you know, I placate myself with what entertains me, or what distracts me from the serious issues. And maybe that's a coping mechanism. Maybe that's a trauma response. Who knows? But yeah, I would I agree with you. I would like to think hopefully it's not a major crisis that inspires and evokes these changes. But you know, we'll see.

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Philip Loring 23:21

Yeah, we'll see. Waub, thank you so much, again, for joining me. This was a really fantastic conversation. And I appreciate your time.

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Waub Rice 23:32

Well, Phillip, thank you very much for having me. I really appreciate the time you spent with my story. And asking me these questions. It's a really important conversation and I'm just honoured to be a part of it.

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Philip Loring 23:43

That Waubgeshig Rice is the author of *Moon of the Crusted Snow*, which is available wherever books are sold, and you should really, you should really check it out. It's fantastic. Thanks so much. You guys. Thank you. This episode of the second transition podcast was produced on the traditional lands and territories of the Washoe people in what is now known as Northeastern California. Funding for this podcast comes in part from the euro Food Institute, from the University of Guelph and from voice Ed radio. My guest today was with geezer grace, author of *moon in the crusted snow*. Thanks for joining us.