Episode 333: Charles Robinson That Sounds Fun Podcast with Annie F. Downs

[00:00:00] <intro music>

Annie: Hi friends! Welcome to another episode of That Sounds Fun. I'm your host Annie F. Downs. I'm really happy to be here with you today. Happy Indigenous Peoples' Day. We've got a great show in store. Oh my gracious, y'all!

But before we begin, I want to tell you about one of our partners that I love, stamps.com. If you run a small business or a household or both, you know that there is nothing more valuable than your time. I think we can all agree that using our time well is at the top of our priority list. So stop wasting it on trips to the post office.

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Intro: Today on the show to celebrate Indigenous Peoples' Day, I got to talk with my friend Charles Robinson. Charles and his wife Siouxsan, along with their seven kids share Native American cultural presentations with the focus on unity through

diversity. They dance at pow wows, participate in sacred ceremonies and promote traditional Native American values in our contemporary world.

They founded a nonprofit called The Red Road to build awareness and empowerment for Native communities and to provide education about Native American culture. I was fascinated by Charles and his story.

We're already making plans to have him back on the show with his wife to answer your question. So as you're listening, if questions come to mind, jot them down, and then you will be able to send those to us through the link in the show notes. I'll share it on Instagram and all the places, but listen with an ear of if you have more questions, we're going to get them answered. I cannot wait for you to get to know Charles.

And friends, if you get your Mini BFFs in the car, I just want to give you a heads up that we do talk about some of the more tragic abuses that our Native American friends have faced, including sexual abuse. So you may just want to proceed with caution. So here it is. My conversation with my friend Charles Robinson.

[00:03:26] <music>

Annie: Charles, thanks so much for being on That Sounds Fun today.

Charles: Thank you. Glad to be here.

Annie: We're so grateful. I think this is going to be incredibly fun for our friends. Today is Indigenous Peoples' Day, formerly known as Columbus Day.

Charles: Right.

Annie: Right. What does that mean to you - that switching, really that labeling? I don't hear people call it Columbus Day at all anymore really.

Charles: Other than, you know, the stores that sell refrigerators and stuff that's kind of the big, you know, tagline when they're having their sales, it's honoring. It's honoring, especially when people understand that Christopher Columbus never stepped foot on what we know as United States. He never had one foot on what we know today as US soil. So to honor a guy that way.

And then also with regards to the way he treated indigenous peoples in the islands where he did land, and a lot of the damage that was done there, to take that away,

and to replace it with something that's more honoring to our indigenous people. I love it.

Annie: Will you give us a little biography of yourself, kind of tell people who you are?

Charles: Yeah. So I grew up in Texas in Oklahoma. From the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. My dad is Choctaw, my mom's white, which is great growing up, right? Because I could play cowboys and Indians all by myself. And so here I am growing up as this mixed blood kid, identifying with my Choctaw heritage but not really knowing what that meant because I grew up in suburbia.

Annie: Okay.

Charles: Then went to college, still trying to figure out what all that meant to be a native guy in today's world. So back then I couldn't go online. We read Encyclopedia Britannica. That's how I found out about all these other tribes.

Annie: Wow.

Charles: And so yeah, just began to pursue that and to ask myself and ask God, What does it look like for me to be a native guy with traditional values in a contemporary world?

Annie: Did you grow up a Christian?

Charles: No.

Annie: Okay.

Charles: I came to know Jesus when I was in high school through the Young Life ministry.

Annie: Really? Oh, we love Young Life around here.

Charles: They're great.

Annie: I love it. Okay, so at the same time, you're really kind of discovering these two things, faith life and your Native American heritage?

Charles: That's right.

Annie: Wow. Okay, so how did you meet Siouxsan?

Charles: So I had started The Red Road and I was up in Vancouver, British Columbia, and driving through and went as long as you're native gathering. Kind of like a pow wow but it was at the Indian friendships in urban Vancouver, BC. And I saw her. And as soon as I saw her, God placed in my heart and said, "That's your wife. That's who you will spend the rest of life with." I was 37 at the time, never been married. I see her, I was like, "Okay, there she is." God didn't show her the same thing as quickly. But He actually did through some dreams over the next few nights.

Annie: Wow.

Charles: And four days later we openly talked about it and four months later, we were married.

Annie: Oh, you are lying. From your mouth to God's ears. I'm not married yet. I love that timeline.

Charles: I had written it off. I thought, "Okay, God, you have for me to be single." And we've been married 17 years now.

Annie: And y'all have a lot of kids.

Charles: We have seven kids right now.

Annie: And she is Lakota and Blackfoot?

Charles: That's great.

Annie: Okay. You and I talked about this before, but I want to say in front of all of our friends listening. I'm going to ask the questions that come to my mind. They are all uneducated because it's what I don't know. But forgive me if I sound as uneducated as I feel. When I think about the movies I've seen and what I know about Native American tribes, they don't intermarry. But now that's fine?

Charles: Yeah, it's fine now. During this simulation process, especially after the reservation system in the 1700s, 1800s when tribes began to be in closer proximity to each other-

Annie: Oh sure. Because reservations are near to each other.

Charles: They are now.

Annie: Right.

Charles: And like in Oklahoma, 25 or so tribes were removed and placed into what is now Oklahoma. So you're around people... The tribes that formerly you may not have necessarily got along with that well, but now your next door neighbors. It's actually very common now to marry outside of your tribe.

Annie: Because probably the higher goal is marrying within Native American versus within your tribe?

Charles: Right. Yeah.

Annie: Okay. So when you're thinking about your kids getting married, do you hope they marry within your people?

Charles: A conversation we had just last week.

Annie: Ah.

Charles: I've got five girls and two boys. So we were talking about that and my wife when she and I have actually discussed it quite a bit. And it may come across sounding bad and I hope it doesn't. I want them to marry somebody who's going to be good to them-

Annie: Sure.

Charles: ...and treat them with respect and with dignity and with love and to honor them, the guys and the girls. But I want that. If I had my choice top of the list, they would be native also. But it's not a requirement. But that's just kind of my own little-

Annie: Yeah, of course. So let's do some vocabulary conversation. When we talk about this people group, we do not say Indian, we say Native American or indigenous people group or Choctaw. Or what's the kindest thing to do?

Charles: If you know the people's tribe, the person's tribe, it's most respectful to refer to them in Choctaw, Dakota or Cheyenne or Blackfoot or whatever it might be. Accepted today really is indigenous or first people.

Annie: First people.

Charles: You hear that a lot now. In Canada, we say First Nations. "Indigenous" is good. The term "Indian" is not... to some people, it's very offensive. Others it's a non-issue. And understanding that myself personally, I just know they don't mean to be offensive. And so I'm not going to receive it as offensive. I'd rather use it as an opportunity to educate. But I think Native American, especially United States is pretty accepted, or indigenous.

Annie: Does it feel respectful?

Charles: Yeah, yeah.

Annie: Okay, okay. When you talk about God, you don't normally say "God."

Charles: Right.

Annie: Will you explain that?

Charles: Yeah. Because the word "God" to native people has a lot of negative connotations to it going back to the reservation system and "white man's God" and how Christianity was brought to our native people. So to remove one more obstacle from conversations I have with people, I don't use the word "God", I use the word "Creator."

Annie: Okay. And you capitalize it every time?

Charles: Yeah, yeah.

Annie: Why does that feel better and ring truer for our native friends?

Charles: Because that's who the Creator is. That's who He is. That's what He does. He creates. He made us all, all of the creation. All of the everything at the very least has His DNA on it, right?

Annie: Yeah.

Charles: So He created these things. It's less paternalistic and white to say "our Creator" as opposed to "God."

Annie: Yeah, because from what I know, from the reading I've done, very little knowledge I have, very little, Charles, very little, our Native American friends have always had a relationship with Creator.

Charles: Yeah.

Annie: And so where has Jesus stepped in throughout history with our Native American friends?

Charles: The whole concept of Jesus arriving in 1492 is so completely just bogus. So our native people, they're all these stories throughout our different tribes' and stories, legends, stuff that people tell that all parallel biblical stories.

Annie: Wow.

Charles: And there are lots of them. And I couldn't tell you how else I could. It's probably been I think six or seven different tribes I've been to throughout the US and Canada, where somebody in the tribe would show me this rock formation up on a mountain and say that rock formation resembles a large boat that our people were saved on.

Annie: Oh my God!

Charles: But they would not say it was Noah's Ark. But it's a story that's been passed down throughout history. And so this is throughout. So we know in, I think it's Acts 17, I think when God talks about from one man God made every nation of men and the time and places where they're going to live. So He says He did this.

Annie: Yeah.

Charles: But we also know that we were not going to get the written word until mostly in North America in the 1700s, 1800s. Right?

Annie: Right.

Charles: But do we think that God went all those thousands of years without communicating with our native people? Of course not.

Annie: Of course not.

Charles: Also Romans 1:19 and 20 says that what may be known about God is plain to man because God has made it plain to him. That since the creation of the world, his eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made so that men are without excuse.

Annie: Yes.

Charles: So God has clearly said, "I reveal Myself to you through My creation." And so He's always been here. We've always had a relationship with Him. He just didn't come wearing these robes and looking white with-

Annie: Middle eastern. Right. Exactly.

Charles: Right.

Annie: Exactly. So tell me what Native American or even you personally know about God that I don't know.

Charles: Well, I don't know what you don't know. But I'll say this is that God reveals Himself through creation. And to our native people, it's very common to look and see part of creation with this in animals or land or trees or something, and say, "God spoke to me through these things." Right? In our euro-American culture, here we're going to say, this sounds kind of weird, this kind of sounds a little New Agey.

But if you look at scripture, throughout Scripture, God says, you know, watch the birds of the air, the flowers in the field, you know, a plant spoke, a donkey spoke. You hear all these examples in the Bible, but we try and say that here in North America, we're going like, "Shhh, don't say that. That sounds too weird." But to our native people, it's very common. And for people to understand that or to see eagles flying and see that as a sign from God for this or for that. And so I think to me and to many of our native people, we're much more open to the fact that God can speak to us outside of a book with a bunch of pages in it. Right?

Annie: Yes.

Charles: That God is everywhere.

Annie: When you say it like that, a plant spoke and animal spoke, I mean, I know both those stories, I've never put together like, Oh yeah, that is just nature saying. We had a man on named Dr. Matthew Sleeth, who has a book called the *Reforesting Faith*. And the whole thing is about every main character in the Bible has a tree attached. The first page, the first page of Psalms, the first page of the New Testament, the last page all have trees.

And it has been an incredible... as a white girl who did not... I mean, I played outside when I was a kid, but we weren't raised to think of nature necessarily speaking to us of God the way our Native American friends were just... you're just always looking to Him there.

Charles: Always. Understanding that He's always present. Right?

Annie: Yeah. Yeah.

Charles: And that He always desires to communicate with us one way or another. I wrote a book—and it's not a plug for the book—because I sold 5,000 copies and never reprinted.

Annie: Oh, no. I was about to say, Can we get it?

Charles: It was called *The Silent Voice of Creation*. And it's a 31 day devotional on how God speaks to man through His creation. It kind of speak to the same thing.

Annie: Reprint that thing. I need that.

Charles: But it's a simple daily read on what different ways that we can observe or recognize God in our lives that day outside of, you know, a 45-minute sermon on Sunday mornings or...

Annie: Tell me about the Choctaw Nation.

Charles: So originally we were down in what is Mississippi area.

Annie: Okay.

Charles: The end of the Trail of Tears, 1830, we were moved into Oklahoma into the Choctaw. We carried a lot of our culture and our beliefs with us into Oklahoma, but a lot were left behind back in Mississippi area. One of the primary beliefs of the Choctaw people was of a single Creator lived up in the heavens.

Annie: Wow.

Charles: But when the European missionaries came and saw us praying to the sun or praying to the moon, they thought we were polytheistic. We were worshipping the sun of the moon. But what they didn't know was that we viewed the sun as a hole in the

sky through which you pray to God. And that time that hole in the sky was the moon.

Annie: Oh my gracious!

Charles: Right? So it's like standing in somebody's yard and trying to shout through open window to get their attention up on the second, third floor. So you've got to understand culture, understand what people are doing. So if I were to walk into a church on a Sunday morning, I never been in church before, if I walk in there and I see somebody at the front of the rooms saying, "This is the body of Jesus or this is the blood of Jesus drank this, and I remember Him," I would think you're a bunch of cannibals.

Annie: Right, right.

Charles: I don't want any part of it.

Annie: Right.

Charles: Unless you understand the ceremony, you understand what it's about. And it's the same with our Choctaw people and all of our tribal people. That people would take the time to understand what it is we're doing what we believe. And when people come into our communities, come in willing to learn, not just to come in and teach and to save us all.

Annie: Right. Which probably is still a problem today.

Charles: Very much.

Annie: Right. Do you see white people still kind of doing the white savior thing to our native tribes in the US and in Canada?

Charles: Always.

Annie: Really?

Charles: So I've got a friend on a reservation up in South Dakota where we do some work on this particular reservation. He said, every summer, he says it's the same thing. Kids get out of school, we start seeing these big white church buses roll into our communities. And they'll come and they'll have like a VBS. Multiple throughout the week.

They'll come, they'll feed our kids hot dogs and hamburgers and chips, and they'll play games, and they'll probably paint a building or clean up a park. And then in the week, they have this big altar call and kids go and get saved. And then they take pictures with the kids, go back to wherever they came from, put those on newsletters. What they don't know is the day that group leaves, another group comes in, it's the exact same thing.

Annie: The same thing happens again.

Charles: He says, "My kids are getting saved eight, nine times a summer."

Annie: Right.

Charles: And they're eating hot dogs and hamburgers all summer long because all these youth groups coming in and doing this stuff.

Annie: So what's the better way for us to treat Native Americans as our neighbors? What's the better way?

Charles: Be a part of the community. One of the challenges was the VBS summer youth group trips, one of the things that people could do better would be to stay in touch with them throughout the year.

Annie: Oh, sure. Build a relationship year-round with them.

Charles: Instead they're gone and a new group comes in, new youth pastor the next year, whatever it is. There's no continuity. There's no, you know, consistency there.

The other thing is to find organizations that are already working within native communities that come alongside them. How can we serve you? How can we support the work you're doing? What do you need? Rather than coming and saying, "Hey, let me give you these things. Let me do this and this for you." Right?

Annie: Right.

Charles: When it may not be what is needed at all.

[00:19:35] **<music>**

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And now back to our conversation with Charles Robinson.

[00:21:21] **<music>**

Annie: You and I both live here in Nashville. There is a Native American community here. You told me there's pow wows down the street.

Charles: There is. It's a... not really a native community here. On the pow wows, we go to out west. They're normally run by various tribes. So this one here is what we might call a pan-Indian type pow wow, where all these different tribal people come together. A lot of non-natives will come out of these pow wows which is great. We welcome it. We love it.

Annie: Yeah, that's why I'm coming in October. I'll come and see it.

Charles: It's great.

Charles: But it's not a tight-knit native community here in Middle Tennessee. There's just not that large in a population. And people live in with closest proximity to really grow a strong community like that.

Annie: So how did you and Siouxsan end up here?

Charles: I had been living here.

Annie: Oh, okay.

Charles: When I was traveling, we met. And after we married, she moved here.

Annie: Why were you here? Are you doing music?

Charles: Oh, no. Well, yes and no. I was in music management.

Annie: Oh, okay. Oh my gosh! So before you were doing Red Road, you were a manager. Well, I was a help. I worked for Glen Campbell's management company. So working with Glen

Annie: What a cool swing.

Charles: ...and Bryan White and some other country singers.

Annie: Oh, Bryan White. You know I know who Bryan White is. His country has my heart. Him and Shania. That duo!

Charles: Oh, that's right.

Annie: That thing could still make me cry.

Charles: Oh, it's great.

Annie: It's so good. Are you friends with his brother?

Charles: Yeah.

Annie: Yeah, me too. I love them. Okay, so that's how you ended up here. Do you miss living close to a more Native American community?

Charles: It's not as challenging for me as it is for my wife, because Siouxsan grew up on a reservation. So she was around natives all the time. And so when she moved here, it was more of a challenge because she didn't have access to, you know, probably more than anything else is the humor.

Annie: Really?

Charles: The native humor, the reservation humor. She didn't have that around here.

Annie: Can you explain that to me? Can you explain what the humor is?

Charles: A lot of time it's self-deprecating. It's very random. It's very regional. And so you make a joke about a particular community or place and nobody in here have any idea what she's talking about. But out there, you're talking like, you know, Moses Lake or little Chicago, these different little communities around the reservation. And everybody laughs because everybody knows about this. She didn't have that here. So she spent a lot of time on the phone with family back on the reservation.

Annie: How did y'all find a church community here that felt like home?

Charles: Well, the first church we went to here had mostly white people in it and she didn't feel comfortable there at all. So we searched around and then happened upon the church called Strong Tower Bible Church-

Annie: I love Strong Tower.

Charles: ...and love the diversity there. And so we've been there for around 17 years, 16 years. And we also go to the Church of the City, which is in Franklin. We have friends and stuff there. It's right down the road. So we kind of try and spend time with both church families.

Annie: Strong Tower is right across from Radnor.

Charles: Yeah, that's right.

Annie: That's my cue.

Charles: That's right. Park in the parking lot and walk.

Annie: That's right. When it's too much, I park in that parking lot. That's really funny. Okay, let's talk a little bit about what's happening today on reservations. Everyone listening, my guess is we all have these ideas: gambling, drinking, low education. pow wows. Those are things that come to mind. But you go to celebrations there and other than that, it is a terrible environment. That's so strong, but you know what I mean.

Charles: Right, right. So with the exception of pow wows, the gambling, the addictions, those could also be described with most communities throughout the United States.

Annie: That's exactly right. We just get away with hiding it.

Charles: Right. Right. So the gambling is less of an issue for multiple of reasons. Some of the tribes have casinos. Not all do. Some of them that do are not making much money on them, because they're not in metropolitan areas. The addiction rates are high, the suicide rates are high. Those are all birthed through the cost of effective residential schools.

Annie: Yes. Oh my gosh, that story that came out a few months ago of finding all those bodies of residential school that were buried. Children, right-

Charles: That's right.

Annie: ...that had just disappeared.

Charles: Yeah.

Annie: Will you explain what residential schools are? I'm sorry, I don't totally know.

Charles: Okay. So back in the late 1800s, the government began to develop school system or schools and forcing the Native children go to these schools.

Annie: Were they on the reservation?

Charles: Somewhere, somewhere far from the reservation.

Annie: Oh, right. And they would live there.

Charles: And they'd load them up. My dad went to boarding school. Both my wife's parents went to boarding schools. All the relatives, you know, out west they all went to these schools. And there was a lot of bad things that happened with these schools with regards to not allowing to speak the language, cutting your hair.

They didn't understand the value of long hair in our culture. So we might cut our hair for a time of grieving for a year to represent to the community that we're in that state of... And here they come in and they cut all the kids' hair because they're trying to make this good, little dark skin white kids essentially.

The model of the Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania was to kill the Indian and save the man. Right? Get rid of our culture, all these things that are bad and not Christian. Let's get rid of all those things. And so that will become assimilated, go to the schools, end up moving into the towns, all this kind of stuff. Very little oversight. Most of these were funded by the government but run by various church denominations.

Annie: Wow.

Charles: Sexual abuse was horrendous. The diets… what they fed the kids was terrible. My mother-in-law tells a story when she was a little kid that they spoke Blackfoot, they spoke the language to be punished. Said there's a small girl who had been there for a month, month and a half, something like that, she may have been six or seven years old, and would not speak English. Well, she didn't know how to speak English, right?

So they stood her up in front of all the student body in the cafeteria, held her tongue out to the sewing needle, pierced her tongue with a sewing needle, and said, "This is what happens if you speak your language anymore."

Annie: Oh my gosh.

Charles: So this kind of stuff took place and all in the name of Christianity.

Annie: Right.

Charles: Right? And so you got these kids that have grown up in the schools being sexually abused or physically abused, then they-

Annie: I mean, it happened hundreds of years ago, but this is also 30 years ago.

Charles: These started in the mid to late 1800s. And I think the last school closed in 1996.

Annie: Oh my gosh, when I was in high school.

Charles: Yeah.

Charles: So these kids grew up in this institution.

Annie: And then go back?

Charles: And then they go back. When they leave, they go back into communities, they get married, have children, their children go through it. So you got this cycle. And what we know about sexual predators today is so many of them were abused as children. So now you go back in history and you've got these kids going through these residential schools being sexually abused, physically abused. And they leave and they have children. And then you got this whole system going on for really 120 years.

So when we look, we realize that on a reservation today, probably at least 8 out of 10 people have been sexually abused.

Annie: Eight out of 10.

Charles: I said at least.

Annie: Wow.

Charles: Yeah, at some point in their life.

Annie: Oh gosh.

Charles: When you hear those, well now it makes sense because you understand what happened in these boarding schools.

Annie: Yes, the generational...

Charles: Yeah.

Annie: Oh.

Charles: And when these kids would leave the schools, so someone would run away or they'd be disciplined and they'd be whatever and die, well, they're just burying them. And so that which we heard about a few months back up in Kamloops, Canada are just the tip of the iceberg for what's out there. Because when these kids you're talking late 1800s, 1900s, all the way up to recent.

When these kids would leave, they disappear, the schools would call or send letters to their families saying, "Hey, your child ran away." But no, the child didn't run away, the child died somehow and you buried them to hide what happened. It was revealed at these boarding schools up in Canada. It used to happen in the United States also. I know many stories like that.

Annie: Yeah. Because I wonder if when we heard the stories, me and a lot of my non-native friends thought, "What? Oh my gracious!" And our native friend said, "Y'all don't even know."

Charles: Yeah, you don't even know.

Annie: Wow. Oh sorry.

Charles: Even like with murdered and missing Indigenous women.

Annie: I read that on theredroad.org website, y'alls nonprofit, about how many women are missing that no one knows.

Charles: Yeah. And I don't mean to make a lie of any other missing person.

Annie: Certainly.

Charles: You know, but what we've seen in recent months where somebody turns out missing and for whatever reason, certain... and this happens all... I mean, lots of people turn out missing. Some cases get national spotlight where most do not. But our native women and this has been happening for a long time, they just don't even take the time to investigate.

Annie: Yeah. So tell me what The Red Road does on reservations. I mean, when people go read theredroad.org, which I hope everyone does today, I mean, y'all list 15 things that you do. I mean, you're just touching every area. It's amazing.

Charles: The website is theredroad.org. The bottom line, what we try and do is bring hope to people. And to me, the greatest hope is in the person of Jesus but that we don't lead with that. Right? We go in and we walk with people through their addictions, through their suicides, through their abuse, whatever is going on in their lives. We walk with people and help connect people on reservations having these issues with other resources, hopefully, locally so that... So if there's a suicide at two in the morning, Siouxsan and I cannot be there, you know, 1,500 miles away, but we know somebody who can. And so we connect people and help provide resources for these.

Sometimes it's counseling, right? Siouxsan does a lot of that. She shares her story and her journey in life, and it really resonates with other native women especially. And so we spend a lot of time doing that. But then also it's providing firewood for elders, or propane to heat a home through the winter. Those kinds of things as well.

Annie: How did you start that? How did you go from managing Glen Campbell, being on his management team, and being on Bryan White's management team to where so much of your ministry and so much of what you're doing is helping across the country and to Canada?

Charles: For me, I just began to see some of the statistics talking about you know, alcoholism. That would be four or five times the national average. Sexual abuse rate is this, suicide is seven times the national average.

Annie: I did not know that about suicide.

Charles: We're hearing all these things.

Annie: That's unbelievable.

Charles: Yeah. So you're hearing all these things. But then when I found out only between 3% and 5% of our tribal people profess to know Jesus, I had to ask God, I said, "God, is there anything I can do about that? I don't know what it would be." And through some really neat just things God opened up the door for me to leave the company I was working with and began to pursue that. But I had no idea what it looked like because I didn't grow up on a reservation, right?

Annie: Right.

Charles: I was like, "Okay, I'm just going to go and show me God. If I'm going to the wrong place, let me run out of gas before I get there because I don't want to..."

Annie: Man, that's a good prayer for all of us. "If I'm going to the wrong place, let me run out of gas before I get there.'

Charles: And God has opened the door and started connecting me with people and opportunities. And what I found was that more important than anything I go in and preach on or teach on was just being present and just trying to learn and not going in with answers.

Annie: How big is our Native American population in the US and Canada? Do we know?

Charles: Yeah. I think right now, as far as those that are within the 573 federally recognized tribes, I think we're at about 3m and three and a half million right now.

Annie: You're doing an incredible job of me just like firing questions that we didn't go over. Thank you.

Charles: But the thing about that is that there are more Latinos in Los Angeles than there are natives throughout the United States.

Annie: Wow.

Charles: Although I will say this with regards to Latinos or people in Mexico, Central America, South America. So there's this line drawn in the sand and said, "This is United States. This is Mexico." And had that line been drawn 500 miles further south, all these people we call Mexicans would be Native Americans because they're tribal people. Most of them are not from Spain, although they speak Spanish, right? They're not from Spain, they're tribal people. They just happened to be in a land that was ruled by Spain, I guess.

Annie: Right. Is there a lot of similarities between the people of Mexico and the tribes that were in Texas, I guess?

Charles: Yeah, that's right.

Annie: Why my brain has never thought about that before, Charles? I'm embarrassed to tell you. I've never one time thought about that's one people group separated by a river.

Charles: Yeah.

Annie: Really. Wow.

[00:36:18] **<music>**

Sponsor: Hey friends! Just interrupting this conversation one more time to tell you about one of our incredible partners, Rothy's. What better way to welcome the fall season with new shoes. From their best-selling round and pointed toe flats to sneakers made for any adventure and loafers made for moments when comfort is a must, Rothy's has everything you need to start follow up on the right foot. You get it? Foot. I had to, you guys. I had to.

Nothing says fall like soft blush merino wool. And for the third year in a row, Rothy's is launching an exclusive autumn collection featuring washable merino wool styles. They're incredibly comfortable, cozy and just like all your other favorite Rothy's style, they are 100% machine washable.

And if you're headed out for a fall break trip or a weekend getaway, their spacious, washable bags are perfect for effortlessly carrying all your essentials. I get compliments every time I wear my Rothy's, which makes me want to wear them even more often. I love that they're made from recycled plastic water bottles. You know how much I love that. And I want to talk to whoever thought that up and tell them well done.

There's good news for our friends who are dudes as well. Rothy's shoes aren't just for women anymore. That's right. Rothy's now sells men's sneakers and men's driving loafers. We got to get Craig our prince around here at the office, we got to get him some driving loafers. The men's line feature is the same level of craftsmanship as Rothy's women's line. And they're durable, washable, and better for the planet. Plus they are rigorously tested for a perfect fit wash after wash.

In fact, Forbes calls Rothy's men's shoes "a travel must have." Okay! But who better to tell you about how comfortable Rothy's are than the real customers. Lisa L says, "These shoes are like walking on clouds." And Julie A. says "There's no break-in period, no blisters, just pure comfort." No wonder Rothy's best-selling shoe, The Point in black, has over 5,000 near-perfect reviews, y'all.

To help you welcome in the fall season in style, Rothy's is doing something special. That's right. They gave us the chance to share this super rare opportunity with our

And now back to finish our conversation with Charles.

[00:38:30] **<music>**

Annie: Tell me what you know, because you live so much, thankfully, in our white American world so that you are really a bridge for us, which I'm incredibly grateful for. What's different about the faith of white Americans and the faith of Native Americans? And what's similar?

Charles: White Americans are very limited as to I think keep God in a box. Native people don't. He lives outside of that box.

Annie: Yeah, yeah, I believe that's really true. When we think of all the nations that are represented in the US, right, like our black friends, our Latino friends, our Asian friends that are all... when you see other people groups struggling, what does that say to you? What is your experience when you see the racial injustice that happened around COVID in our Chinese friends, or the upheaval particularly around some of the murders last summer of our black friends? What's your experience of that versus my experience of that?

Charles: I try not to be too jaded. Let's say with the rogue cops that we're doing, to our native people, we've been enduring that for years. One of the joking is they got arrested for a DWI, Driving While Indian.

Annie: Oh wow.

Charles: You get pulled over, right?

Annie: Wow.

Charles: Those things happen. And while I'm extremely disappointed any time it happens, it makes me sad, really, really sad to see anybody mistreated. But to our native people, we've been enduring this kind of stuff for so long, the best I can do is talk with some of our friends and say, "Man, I'm sorry." I don't have any answers for you on that. But that's how it is. That's how it has been.

Annie: It's the being with, right?

Charles: Yeah.

Annie: I mean, that sounds like such a gift that you offer is the withness that is Christ. Christ is with us. And so you're offering that. One of the reasons I wanted you to be on here is I wanted to introduce you to our friends, but I also want to introduce them to The Red Road. Will talk about when we partner with The Red Road—like I'm going to make a donation today. I hope a lot of our friends do—what is that going toward? How are we helping our native friends by donating to The Red Road?

Charles: Helping with some of the stuff, again, as simple as firewood or propane in these reservations in South Dakota and Montana. There's resources for women to get help. Especially women. We walk with men too, but because Siouxsan resonates so well with the women-

Annie: And she's the president, right?

Charles: Right. Yeah. I mean, she breathes life into it. And to help her connect with women, and walk with women who have been and continue to be sexually abused and raped and all of these things. And help take care of some of these people or find resources for them to help get counseling, clothing, funerals.

Sadly, we end up helping with more funerals than anyone would think about. But God has given us an opportunity to be there for people in those settings. And so for that, I'm thankful. It's not easy, but I'm thankful for that opportunity.

Annie: How many different reservations do you all get to do work on?

Charles: The bulk of our work is on about seven different reservations. And we help on some others as far as some resources here and there. But as far as our actual physical presence is only about seven. We've tried to replicate what we do with other people and show people what we're doing. Because truth is at the end of the day, we don't care if anybody recognizes The Red Road as being a part of this or not. That's irrelevant. What is relevant is the work that's being done in the name of Jesus, not in the name of The Red Road.

Annie: Will you explain what The Red Road is? I loved reading about that—about why y'all named it that.

Charles: So the red road is a term that native people all recognize what it means to live a traditional or healthy red man's lifestyle, which is an addiction-free life where you respect yourself, respect others, you respect all creation, but you worship the Creator. That's what native people throughout the US and Canada was known... You say I'm on the red road, they know that you're living a healthy lifestyle.

Annie: Oh, wow. Okay.

Charles: Right. A traditional healthy lifestyle. But to us, because we follow the teachings of Jesus, The Red Road also represents that bloodstain road that led Jesus to the cross.

Annie: That fits in that same category to me of y'all having stories of the rocks, reminding of the boat, of going like, Oh, Jesus always knew that our Native American friends would connect with the idea of a red road. And so that became a language for y'all that says two very important things. Today, particularly, on Indigenous Peoples' Day. But I hope this will be true for a lot of days.

Our friends listening, when they think of you, when they think of Siouxsan, when they think of The Red Road, how can we pray for y'all?

Charles: Pray for more opportunities to walk with more people. You know, I figured if God can do more with 1/10 of our income than we can do with 9/10 of it, maybe He can do the same with our time and with our efforts in our attempt to reach out to Native communities. That we only have this much time but pray that God would multiply our efforts to make it this much. Right?

And then just for the endurance. As you walk with so many people, it gets so emotional to be able to be in a healthy place to be able to help people.

Annie: I would imagine that a lot of our friends who are in helping jobs, like nurses or counselors or teachers, often feel bad, like, "How does this new group of kids have the same problems? Or how is this happening again? How are we seeing these things in the hospital again?" There is a special call to endurance for people who-

Charles: Yeah. Amen to that.

Annie: That's incredible. I'm thinking and as we're talking, if residential schools only closed at 1996, that means what's happening now on the reservations education-wise is only 30 years old, 20 years old.

Charles: Yeah. I mean, there were the school systems in place in the early 1900s started traveling around schools and changing that some. But when you look at the base of it all with the residential schools, it's like buttoning up your shirt, right?

Annie: Mm-hmm.

Charles: When you get off on the first button and you keep going, and then it really doesn't line up after that, right?

Annie: Yeah.

Charles: And that's what happened with residential schools early on is our native people had... our culture was forcibly taken from us. And so then the rest of the time we're trying to make this fit when in a... I keep saying white, but you're all American system, when that's not how for thousands of years we learned and taught. So trying to get back on track within native communities with limited resources to do so is a challenge.

Annie: Yeah. That's my next question is when we're praying for the children of Native American reservations and Native American tribes, and we're praying for the women and the men, what are y'all praying for our Native American friends that we can partner with you in?

Charles: For return to traditional values and for people to grasp culture.

Annie: Okay.

Charles: Our experience has been that we could preach Jesus from the pulpit all day long, but as long as we're doing it from a Euro-American perspective is not being received. We talk about going back into sweat lodges. We talk about participating in tribal ceremonies. That resonates with people. And then when we do that, we're seeing lives changed.

And that accompanied with living a life... we don't even say we're Christians, right? So what do you believe that we follow the teachings of Jesus? Or what does that mean? Well, if somebody was hungry, Jesus fed them. If they were sick, He tried and help them get healthy again.

You know, you kind of walk through all these attributes of Jesus and things He did. And native people say, "I can get behind this Jesus guy. That Christianity thing I don't want to be part of. But I can do that."

Annie: I bet a lot of our friends feel that. Not really interested in the Christianity label but I love the teachings of Jesus.

Charles: Yeah.

Annie: Yeah. I've enjoyed on Instagram and on Tik Tok, there seems to be this resurgence of the generation behind me, the 20s braiding their hair again and talking about how every time they braid their hair they're praying. And so there does seem to be this reemergence of the culture publicly. And so listening to you talk about it makes me go, Okay, every time I see that I want to pray that they also return to the Creator and meet Jesus in that somehow.

Charles: For sure.

Annie: What do we not say that we need to say? Anything we left out?

Charles: Oh, gosh.

Annie: You've got to come back sometime.

Charles: Yeah. You know, it's about education. We've got to educate people. We got to walk people through that. The hard part is, is not to be offended when somebody innocently says something that's inaccurate.

Annie: You've been very kind to me about that. Thank you.

Charles: You've been very good. But I want people to continue to work on being open to being educated, being open to being wrong. I mean, how many times have I heard people say, "Well, I know so and so and He's Indian"? The word "Indian" is not offensive to him. Right? Or I've got a friend who... You know the proverbial "I've got an Indian friend." And people are so afraid to feel like they're losing something.

If we change this school mascot, I'm losing something, right? You're really not. You're really not. Just be open to the possibility that you may be wrong in how you've done things in the past. And that's for me too. That's for us. All of us. We've got to be open to that and be willing to learn.

Annie: I think I'd love for us to consider if you'd be willing is give our friends listening a chance to submit some questions and we can come back and do this again?

Charles: For sure.

Annie: Or we can hop on YouTube or something and keep educating people. Are there other resources we should...? Is there a book we should read? Besides yours. It's out of print. Come on. I'm going to be really pushy about getting that back in print.

Charles: There are some good resources, some movies that were done. If you want to learn about the residential schools-

Annie: Yeah, I do.

Charles: ...there's one that was done in 2012 called *We Were Children*. It's really hard to watch. But it's a documentary-style movie.

Annie: Netflix or somewhere?

Charles: Maybe.

Annie: Okay. We'll look it up, we'll find it.

Charles: And another one is called *The Education of Little Tree*. And that was a Hollywood-done one. *The Education of Little Tree* is good. It kind of touches on the boarding school thing. But it's more family-friendly watching. There's some good books out there. Richard Twiss, a friend of ours who passed away a few years back, a number of years back, had a book called *One Church, Many Tribes*. Another great resource to kind of let people walk into the whole Native American Christianity kind of circle and kind of understand some of the differences there.

Annie: There's a new Native American Bible, right?

Charles: Yeah.

Annie: Have you seen this?

Charles: Yeah.

Annie: Have you read it yet or looked at it?

Charles: No. Terry Wildman who organized that, we've known him for a long time. He used to do work on the Hopi Reservation and his wife, Darlene. Sweet people. I saw the

early translations of it and I think it's going to be great. It's in the vernacular that hopefully Native people will resonate with little more.

Annie: I want to get it because I want to have that point of view. I just would love to read it from that point of view. Thank you so much for doing this today.

Charles: Yeah.

Annie: What a gift! I can't tell you how much I appreciate you making time and teaching us what we don't know.

Charles: Thank you.

Annie: It's very generous of you.

Charles: Thank you.

Annie: You are incredibly generous. And I hope we are that in turn to The Red Road.

Charles: Thank you so much.

Annie: So the last question we always ask it's a real left turn for you, Charles. Get ready. Because the show is called That Sounds Fun, tell me what y'all do for fun. What sounds fun to you?

Charles: What I love is seeing people be happy. Whatever that is. You know, watching my youngest son play hockey. He loves it.

Annie: Hockey.

Charles: Watch my daughter... I've got my youngest daughter who's 12, I think, now plays soccer. And to see her out there running and kicking, that sounds like fun to me. Being with my family, being with Siouxsan doing stuff, that's what sounds like fun.

Annie: Do y'all go every summer out west?

Charles: Every summer.

Annie: Okay. And just go hop around from reservation to reservation?

Charles: I mean, it's all planned out where we're going but yeah, we go to South Dakota, Montana, Idaho, Arizona, New Mexico up into Canada. We hit different reservations every summer.

Annie: Any of our other friends like me who want to go see and be a part of... not be. I'm not going to dance or anything. But I want to be an active part of a pow wow while I'm there. How do we find those?

Charles: You actually go to powwows.com.

Annie: Oh, great.

Charles: They have a lot of them listed throughout the US and Canada.

Annie: Okay.

Charles: But regionally they're throughout the United States. In Canada, there are pow wows throughout.

Annie: And our native friends are fine with us coming?

Charles: Absolutely.

Annie: Okay. The stuff that's private that we're not welcome to isn't on powwows.com?

Charles: Right. Yeah. Pow wow is a very social, very celebratory type thing. And we really like it when you bring money and you spend it there.

Annie: Done. Done. Don't you worry. Me and my pals, we will load up and come.

Charles: You can get some great native foods and stuff like that and get some cool crafts and just be around. For the most part, they're all okay with taking pictures wearing their dance outfits and stuff. So come on out. It's a great time.

[00:53:36] <music>

Outro: Oh, you guys, don't you love him? I mean, okay so for starters, be sure to check out theredroad.org. Remember the best thing we can do today to celebrate Indigenous Peoples' Day is to give a little bit to theredroad.org and help them continue with the work they're doing. I'm making a donation today. I hope you'll join me.

And any questions you have for Charles and Siouxsan, you can put those in the link in the show notes. Make sure you're following Charles, tell him thanks for being on the show. Make sure you're following The Red Road on Instagram as well. Don't forget, any questions you have, drop them in here and we will have them back in a couple of weeks to keep having this conversation that was just so interesting.

If you need anything else from me, you know I'm embarrassingly easy to find. Annie F. Downs on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, all the places you may need me, that's how you can find me. And I think that's it for me today, friends. Go out or stay home and do something that sounds fun to you. I will do the same. And today, I'm about to Google when that pow wow is in Mount Juliet, Tennessee so that I do not miss it. That sounds fun to me.

Y'all have a great couple of days and we'll see you back here on Wednesday with the wonderful Sheila Walsh. See you guys then.

[00:54:51] <music>