

**Joy Hunt: An Interview by Madison Perez
Conducted on October 29, 2021**

Joy Hunt is an Indigenous Youth Activists who uses her license as a registered dietician to provide free services to her Lumbee Community. She focuses her activism on the health of the Lumbee community, Black and Indigenous solidarity and The Missing and Murdered Indigenous Peoples Movement.

Hunt: Hey!

Perez: Hi Joy, how are you?

Hunt: Good. How are you?

Perez: I'm good. Alright, so I've already started the recording. I just want to let you know that this interview will be going in the Duke Library Archives. I am doing a project on Indigenous Youth Activists. I think it's very important to have accounts from you guys. Because a lot of older generations don't really listen to you guys. They brush you under the rug. I think it's important that down the line, we have accounts from you guys. I will be asking follow up questions when you answer my question. So, if you can give me stories to illustrate any of the questions that I asked you, that way that people down the line can really understand what you're saying, that would be very helpful.

Hunt: Okay.

Perez: But I will go ahead and start it off with who has been the biggest inspiration for your activism?

Hunt: I'll definitely have to say it isn't one person, it has to be my community especially the Lumbee Tribe. That area of where my family lives is in the Lumberton, Pembroke area, and just seeing what they experienced and knowing that it's wrong. It's unnecessary. Knowing that hopefully I could be a difference, and knowing that my predecessors made it easier for me to exist in this world. I also want to be that change.

Perez: You said that some of your predecessors experienced things that were wrong. Can you illustrate some of those things?

Hunt: Yeah, my granny, my grandmother on my mother's side, lives in Lumberton. She has lived there her whole life. She's lived on the same street her entire life. She would tell me all these stories all the time, and one of the stories was that there is this really

popular restaurant that is in Lumberton. I think it's not there anymore. It's Village Tavern or Village Inn, and it's owned by new people. My granny loved that restaurant. She and her husband, my grandfather, used to go there a lot. But they would go there. And they always realized that they were always sat in a part of the restaurant that was not ideal. It wasn't necessarily always clean. They noticed one day they went, and it wasn't busy. I think there were maybe two tables, and they were sitting in the nice dining room area. So they asked to be sat in that area. They received a lot of hate from the owner, a lot of just, they experienced a lot of racism from the managers. They were really upset because they really enjoyed the restaurant, but they kept going anyway. I hated hearing that story. She explained to me, we kept going because we didn't want them to think that they won. That they ran us out. We knew that they didn't want us to exist in that restaurant, so we kept going. It just made me so angry because why? Why did we have to experience that especially on our own land in our own community? She told me stories like that all the time. There was another story where my mom, she has one sister, and they are very different colors. My mom is a lot lighter than her sister. Her sister has really kinky, curly hair. They are only two years apart. My granny was trying to get them into a daycare because they were both working. They did the pencil test. My mom got into the daycare, and my aunt didn't. It caused a lot of issues and especially with child care, and they had to figure out another option.

Perez: Wow, growing up in Lumberton, Pembroke area I know there is a big population of Native Americans there. Would you say that there were a lot of instances where you guys are discriminated against? Or were those just a few instances that were every once in a while?

Hunt: I did not grow up in the Lumberton area. My mom and the rest of her family did. She moved out of the area, and I always asked her why? We go back all the time. We are there like four times a month. Why? Why move? She just constantly told me about the Lumberton area, Robeson County, and Hoke County are the brokest counties In North Carolina. They don't put any emphasis on structure or education. She saw what happened. She saw the infrastructure. She saw everything that happened, especially with drugs and gang violence. She grew up in that. She's seen so many of her family just fall into some of those habits. She would say, I didn't want that for my kids. So I left. It was really hard to hear, especially since many of my cousins are in that area, and seeing that they've experienced those things that my mom did not want me to experience.

Perez: Okay, and would you say that the lack of funding in schools in Robeson County is due to the high Native American population? Or do you think that that is just how it is?

Hunt: I would say it's due to the high Native population, because we have done so much for ourselves, especially with UNCP (University of North Carolina at Pembroke). UNCP was started by the Indigenous population in North Carolina. They have started so many programs just to help ourselves, to help our communities, and to mend the circle. That is because the state doesn't put any emphasis on that area, because they know. It's racist, and especially with federal recognition. Trying to fight for that, and trying to get that with the Lumbee Tribe. It's a huge issue.

Perez: Okay, and what has the Lumbee Tribe been doing to try to fight for federal recognition?

Hunt: I know one of my cousin's Heather McMillan Nakai. I don't know if you've heard of her. She went to Dartmouth for law. She used to work in DC. That was what she was doing was trying to fight for recognition, and trying to just get us recognized. I don't know the specifics of it, because I don't understand how it works. I know that she has been pushing and pushing for years, along with many other people. I know that baby steps have been made, but I'm not quite sure what they are.

Perez: Okay, just to flip it a little bit, what was your first step in getting involved in activism?

Hunt: I grew up in a small town outside of Raleigh, and I went to college at UNCG (University of North Carolina at Greensboro). Greensboro, you know, has a good Native population. I wanted to be involved in it because going to UNCG, I was not used to it. Especially being around my cousins a lot, being around my family and having that culture and not being around my mom anymore or my sister. I just wanted to make sure that I was still a part of that community, I still felt safe. I got involved in that community. That's when I started to notice some things. I realized that I was sheltered from a lot of stuff when I was at home living with my mom. I don't want to see this. I don't want this to happen. I don't understand why a lot of this is going on. From the elders in the area, I learned a lot of stuff that was going on in the community, and how they were working to better it. Going to college at UNCG was my stepping stone. That first year, I started seeing the issues. I would go to the protests, go to the panel discussions, read the research, and figure out what was going on. Then it progressed from there.

Perez: Okay. Would you say that your mom sheltered you from all of it? Or did she just take you out of the mix, so you just didn't see it first hand?

Hunt: I think it was definitely a little bit of both. When things would happen. When we were in Lumberton. When we were there, she would, we would just leave. She would

say “nothing happened, don't worry about it.” I would not question it because I was really young at the time. She also did take me out of that environment.

Perez: Okay, and would you say you're thankful for that? How has that impacted you?

Hunt: I am thankful in a way because I did not have to endure a lot of the things that my family had to endure. I didn't have to go through those hardships. I also felt that because I was first generation removed, I was a little lost. They do have the triangle Native American Society, which we were a part of. Of course, things don't happen all the time in Raleigh like they do in Lumberton, and Pembroke. I wasn't constantly surrounded by that big family atmosphere like I would have been if we were in Lumberton. I did not have to experience some of that really bad racism. Especially, one of the things I was really grateful for that I did not realize till well into my college career that the Lumbee Tribe can be very anti-black at times. I was really glad I did not have to grow up in that environment.

Perez: Okay, can you give some instances of where the Lumbee Tribe has been anti-black?

Hunt: Whew, I think one of the more recent incidents was, I'm sure you heard about it when they decided to do a protest for George Floyd. The Lumbee Tribe showed up with guns. They are in Pembroke, it was a peaceful protest. It was for Black rights. It was just so evident what was going on. I was so disappointed in the tribe. I was so disappointed in the people that showed up. I just honestly couldn't believe what was happening. I was truly shocked. I knew there was anti-blackness, but I did not think something like that would happen. There have just been several instances of Black presenting Lumbee tribal members trying to get enrolled, and having a really hard time with the enrollment process. They will look at people who are half Black and half Lumbee and be like, “No, you're Black, you're not Indigenous, you're not Lumbee.” I see that all the time. It's really frustrating.

Perez: Why do you think that they have that divide? Why do you think that they view the Afro-Indigenous in that way?

Hunt: I have talked about this with a few different people. My personal opinion, from what I see is that it was easier to side with the white man. They got more benefits from being anti-black and from being racist in that way. It was just much easier to reap the benefits from the white community, and try to better fit in with the white community by being anti-black.

Perez: Do you feel that the Black Lives Matter Movement and the Indigenous Movement go hand-in-hand?

Hunt: I do, I really do. That's why I feel people who support Black Lives Matter and the Indigenous peoples movement, it's the same thing for different communities. If one is not helping the other, it's gonna fail. I was very big in the Black Lives Matter Movement, and trying to support that and everything, because I know, they support me. I know, we face the same issues as communities. If we can resolve one issue, we can resolve the other.

Perez: What are youth in the Lumbee Tribe doing to bridge that divide?

Hunt: I do work a lot, I went to an HBCU. I went to NCCU (North Carolina Central University) after I graduated from UNCG, which was purposeful. I did want to stay because UNCG is an MSI (Minority-Serving Institution). I did not want to go to a PWI (Predominantly White Institution). I went to an HBCU, to stay in that surrounding of people of color. That's where I met the founder of the Afro-Indigenous page, Black Indians NC. She was so nice, and I got to work with her. Aminah actually introduced us before we met. I got to work with her a lot. At Central, I was part of starting the Indigenous Peoples groups at Central. We are having a powwow coming up. I think that is a big thing, because there are a lot of Indigenous people who are Afro-Indigenous. They are much more accepted in their Blackness than they are in their indigeneity. I think it's important that we start this Indigenous Peoples group at North Carolina Central, because that gives them a chance to embrace both, it gives them a chance to be embraced by the Indigenous Peoples while also being Black and bridging that divide.

Perez: Before starting this program at NCCU, were there other resources available to Indigenous students there?

Hunt: Not really, there was the graduate Indigenous Peoples group, but it was specifically for law students, Indigenous law students. As we know, there are not a lot of Indigenous students in law. It was a very small group. They did host a powwow every year, which I've gone to a few times. Other than that there was nothing.

Perez: I know you said you were surrounded by family at UNCG, but other than being around a lot of Indigenous family members, were there student resources available to Indigenous students?

Hunt: It was Miss Nora Dial-Stanley. She was the person that I met. I knew her well before I went to college, but she lived in the Greensboro area, and she brought up

UNCG. I applied and I got in. She was the resource at UNCG for Indigenous students, which I was not crazy about. This was a free thing for her, and they were not paying her to act as a resource. They were not paying her to help the students on campus. She was doing it out of the goodwill of her heart. She knew these students were struggling, and that they wanted to connect to the community. It was her, it was just her.

Perez: Just having Miss Nora, and the lack of other resources, how did that experience affect your education?

Hunt: It was really hard. I'm sure you know we often feel invisible, like our issues just aren't addressed. Like people don't see us sometimes. I joined Alpha Pi Omega. I learned about Faith (Hedgepeth) at Chapel Hill. I knew about it, but I started really connecting to people she was close with. I started to see what the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women Movement was. I started to see how bad of an issue it was. It started to really affect me, and seeing my own family, people would get hurt. Then when the girl in Fairmont went missing. People were really trying to push for people to just post a picture, or for people with any information to come forward. Just seeing there were friends that I had they were like, "you know, okay, that's so sad" and they just wouldn't support the issue. I'm like, "please come on." This is a really big issue, it would really mean a lot. If you would just post her picture, if you would just spread awareness. All you have to do is post an Instagram story, and no one did. It really hurt. Stuff like that just kept happening. Then with Halloween coming up seeing people dress up as Native Princesses and trying to elaborate on why that's an issue. Why that is not okay. You wouldn't do Black face, don't do this. It's wrong. Trying to push for that awareness. I just felt so small. It was really frustrating. Especially if things would happen, like hate speech would happen on campus, and the school doesn't address it. They are like "Oh yeah, this happened. It sucks. Here's the number for the Counseling Center" We are like, "No, this is not what we want." Stuff like that happens quite a bit.

Perez: You talked about just posting a picture on social media could go a long way. I know that the Indigenous movement doesn't really get a lot of national media attention. How big do you think social media impacts that? That's really, where a lot of your platform is.

Hunt: Oh my gosh, social media is a huge, huge point for that. I remember, I'm not sure if you remember on Indigenous Peoples' Day when Instagram took down a bunch of stuff. I was trying to get people to notice what was going on. No one cared. Do you not see all these stories that just disappeared? All these posts that were just removed? They all had one thing in common. They were about Indigenous Peoples Day, and the suffering Indigenous peoples endure. Instagram removed them, because it's such an

easy way of spreading awareness and getting out information. Oh God, that was terrible. I remember some of my friends will post stuff and it just goes such a long way. If we only have 30 followers in common, and you have 1030 followers, that's 1000 people that just saw it that would have never seen it had I posted it. I think social media is definitely key in that type of movement. However, I kind of strayed from it as I got into graduate school. One I was just on social media less, and two I figured out my talents were best served elsewhere.

Perez: Where is elsewhere?

Hunt: I am a registered dietitian. I serve in the clinical field. However, I am trained in both community and food service. Once I graduated, I got registered, I got licensed, and I decided the best form of activism for me was providing my services for free. Counseling Indigenous women who are pregnant, planning to be pregnant, or with newborn babies. Giving them advice, meal tips, and suggestions for free because there's a lot of health disparities, especially in the Indigenous community. As well as when the hurricanes come through, making sure that part of our scope of practice is emergency diets, and emergency food preparedness. Planning out things that they can have that are still going to meet their nutritional needs that aren't super high in sugar, or super high in sodium. Making sure that that is dispersed properly, getting it to the right resources in the community, stuff like that.

Perez: Did you always know that you wanted to be a dietician? Or did that change with activism?

Hunt: It actually did change with activism, surprisingly. I knew that I wanted to do something in the healthcare field, specifically, because I knew there were so many disparities there. I loved food. I chose nutrition on a whim. I started working in the community. As I started doing things with Greensboro, and working especially with Aminah Ghaffar and Briayna Cuffie, I noticed that food is an integral part of every single community. The most personal thing about people is their food choices, their favorite flavors, their tastes, and their favorite foods. I noticed that food has such a big connection to health. There are so many facets of it. I'm a clinical dietitian, so I work with dialysis and making sure everything's good on that. I do that, because I love clinical dietetics. However, clinical community dietetics is huge when it comes to activism. Those food pantries make sure that people are making food choices that not only fit their culture, but meet their nutritional needs as someone who is a part of that community. I only know two other Lumbee dieticians and three total Indigenous dieticians. I just saw that need, especially from someone who is of the community that

isn't going to try to white wash their diet in order to make them healthy. That honestly really did change with activism.

Perez: Did you have any prior knowledge? I know that in the Indigenous culture, there are a bunch of different modalities that go along with that? Did you have previous knowledge of those before becoming a dietitian?

Hunt: I knew a little about horticulture because my granny grew up on a tobacco farm. A lot of my family still farms today. I knew about the land, and I knew about growing the food. I really wanted to know how that connected to the human body, how does it metabolize? How can we make this work even better for us than we already do. Realizing all of the things that we do instinctually because of my family. We make a lot of things for ourselves. We call one of them stump root. I don't know if it's my family thing. I don't know if it's the Lumbee thing, but I just remember, my great aunt would make it and put it in a brisk tea bottle and give it to my mom. Whenever I was sick, my mom would give it to me. It tasted terrible. I hated it. I had no idea what it was till she finally gave me the recipe like two years ago. We have been making medicine, while knowing nothing about Western medicine. I think that speaks volumes about what we could be doing for our communities.

Perez: I know you said you provide services to pregnant women in the tribe, and also with hurricanes, but do you offer your free services outside of your actual job? Is it something you do on the weekends?

Hunt: It's mainly through my community. They know that I'm a dietitian. If they see someone in need, they are like, "hey, reach out to her." It's not even a formal thing. It's really informal, people will reach out to me, they'll text me questions. I'll send them all kinds of resources. I'll send them pictures from the grocery store. I'll show them the better options. I'll specifically elaborate on their needs, on things they need to avoid, on things they need to make sure that they eat, on specific signs they need to watch out for, and things they need to ask their doctor about if they see stuff like that.

Perez: Does it ever get overwhelming trying to balance your job, and also providing free services to people?

Hunt: Not really just because if I made it more of a formal, I guess business, it would be. I don't really advertise it. It's more of word of mouth through the grapevine. It's really not an issue.

Perez: I'm going to flip it a little bit. What would you say are the biggest issues facing the Indigenous communities at this time?

Hunt: I definitely would say Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women is one of them. I see a lot of domestic violence, women in bad homes in bad patterns. I see a lot of risk factors in my own community. I've seen women go missing. Especially with that big breakthrough in Faith's case, literally just earlier this month or last month. Knowing that that took so long, they had so much evidence, but here we are. I was glad that they never stopped pushing, the girls at Chapel Hill. They always held a memorial. They always talked about it. They kept her name alive. That is a huge issue. I spoke about it one time at a conference where I talked about how scared I was to have kids. It was such a big issue that it has affected what I want in my family life. What I see for myself in the future, because who wants to bring a kid into that world? Who wants to run that risk of them getting murdered? Or them going missing? Especially at the rates that they do now. That is a huge issue. Another one is the health disparities that we experience, especially with type two diabetes, it can be prevented through diet. We face so many barriers for no reason like, especially with food deserts, Lumberton and Pembroke are full of food deserts. It can be resolved so easily. No one cares to address these issues because they don't. The knowledge between the link between food and long term health is not as valued as it should be in our communities. I think it's a huge issue because we learn from our elders, they pass that information down. My elders are the reason I know a lot of the information I know today. If we can have them for longer periods of time, if we can extend their lives, I think we could have so much more information. Especially with language dying, and just pieces of our culture going missing. I think those health disparities, and our relationship with food is another huge issue.

Perez: How has the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women's Movement affected the Lumbee Tribe?

Hunt: Faith was Haliwa, but the Lumbee Tribe is also huge here in North Carolina. When she went missing it was hard on a lot of people. Especially with her being in Chapel Hill, and with everything going on. The Lumbee Tribe, especially with that Lumbee girl going missing in Fairmont, it has pushed a lot of people, I would say to do great things. I know that was one of the big reasons my cousin Heather became a lawyer because she wanted to get into law. She saw these issues in lawmaking, policy and in the courtrooms that were going on. She wanted to make a big difference in that. I know it's affected Aminah a lot. She really pushes for the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women. She's a big reason that I became a part of that movement was because of meeting her and learning from her. Especially with the girl that went missing in Fairmont, the judge that sentenced her killer was Lumbee. She was a new Lumbee

judge at that. I think this was one of her first cases. I know that this was an issue that weighed heavily for her as well. It affects our communities negatively in the way that we hate that loss. We are at higher risk for losing our women, losing some of our two spirits¹, and our men. It has brought us together. The fact that we can come together to try to address this issue, the fact that people have done great things and achieve things that they probably wouldn't have had they not experienced these issues.

Perez: I remember Aminah had told me she feels that as much as law enforcement is an issue in the Black community, that it is the same issue with Indigenous communities. I remember reading the article about Faith's murder when they found her killer or found the suspected killer. The sheriff had said, or what is it? It's been nine years, right? It was nine...

Hunt: Yeah, it's been a while.

Perez: Yeah. I think the sheriff had said "we never stopped looking, we always fought" Do you feel that that was true?

Hunt: No, because there was so much evidence. She was sexually assaulted. There was evidence there. If I'm not mistaken, I think there was blood from another person. I'm like, "You had blood. You had semen. You had... there had to be hair." She obviously fought. You had so much evidence. It took nine years. It took this long. I read the article, when he said that, I was like, "That's a lie. That is a bold faced lie." Y'all said every year, you know, we're still looking, we're still pushing. That was just for face. It was just for face. It was just to satiate the Indigenous community in the area.

Perez: Have you seen any other issues of law enforcement not really using all the power that they have? Or being fair in the Lumbee Community?

Hunt: I'm not sure as much in the Lumbee community specifically, because I know in that area, there are so many members of the Lumbee community who joined law enforcement. They have been pushing for that. However, I have seen it negatively blowback on women specifically, because a lot of the law enforcement is men. There is a lot of misogyny going on. There are a lot of women in bad situations that can't get out because of law enforcement.

¹ Native American people who identify as LGBTQI+

Perez: With a lot of members in the Lumbee Tribe trying to go into law enforcement, do you think that that is the step to go? Do you think that they need to start infiltrating and working from within?

Hunt: I think it is, but I think law enforcement should not be as prioritized as it is. People glorify law enforcement in a way that I feel is inappropriate. They are just people. They are not better than the normal person in any way. I think a lot of members of the Lumbee community forget that. They let law enforcement get away with a lot of stuff that they shouldn't. I think while law enforcement should be infiltrated, I think we should also be focusing a lot of that energy and move it specifically into the courtroom.

Perez: What are some ways that you have seen law enforcement be glorified, that you don't agree with?

Hunt: Just in my own family. I have a family member who is a state trooper, they will talk about, oh, he's amazing. He risked his life for us every single day. They will talk about just how wonderful he is, how he is so great, because he is a state trooper. They are not saying the same thing about people working in health care. They are not saying the same thing about people who work in community services such as WIC, such as food pantries. He went to school for a few months, and he came out of state trooper. He's great, but the way that they put him on a pedestal makes me uncomfortable.

Perez: Going back to the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women's Movement, you said that you've started to get involved with it. What are some activities that you've been doing within it?

Hunt: I did a lot of the protests, and a lot of the marches with the movements. I was really big on social media posting it for a while, because if I can flood my newsfeed, I'm going to flood my newsfeed. If you're going to click on my story, especially since you can't preview it, you're gonna click on it, you're gonna see it, you can close it, but you still saw it. Going to conferences, and speaking about it. Making it aware, especially just in informal spaces is a big thing that I try to do. Just talk about "oh, yeah, like missing and murdered Indigenous women is such a bad thing." I will talk about the statistics, I'll talk about how it's personally affected me and a lot of people have no idea what it is. Like, I had no idea they didn't know. Mainly trying to bring it up in those informal situations in those informal settings just in a group of friends randomly at lunch one day. I will try to bring it up in the office, different things like that. Since I'm kind taking a step back from social media, a lot of it has been donating to groups that support Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women. Pushing through those articles that talk about it. Making sure to

share people who are speaking about it, people who are more knowledgeable than I am. Especially going to any kind of discussion where I can learn how I can be a better activist or how I can better support my own communities.

Perez: What are some of those different groups that you can donate to (indiscernible)?

Hunt: I forget the names because I have them saved on my Instagram, but there's a lot of different women Indigenous societies that I donate to that specifically address Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women. There is a lady, her name is Vivette, and I cannot remember her last name to save my life, but she's in the Greensboro area. She does a lot with the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women's Movement. I always make sure if she's having something I'm attending. I am telling everyone about it, if I can't go to make sure I'm spreading whatever she has going on. Especially Miss Nora, Miss Nora is also a big part of it. I'm working with her, and then Miss Indian North Carolina's have also addressed the issue, so pushing through their platform, and making sure that they are seen and heard as well.

Perez: What have your most important activities as an activist been?

Hunt: Definitely what I do now working with women who are pregnant, planning to become pregnant, or with newborns, and young children. Especially work with the food pantries in those communities. A lot of things that people don't realize is food pantries get a lot of canned foods high in sodium, a lot of foods high in starch, they don't get a lot of fresh foods, they don't have a lot of great options there. Making sure that especially in those communities, or in my communities, that there are better options, and that people know how to choose those better options for themselves and making sure that their culture is also involved in it. Especially with homecoming, Lumbee homecoming, collards are a huge thing. Just talking about the benefits of collards and making sure that I can tie in our own culture to eating healthy. A huge thing was working with my community. Going to the powwow, volunteering at the powwows, working with whatever's going on, whatever event opens that space at Central for Indigenous and Afro-Indigenous students, and making them feel safe.

Perez: That is great. What steps can young people take to support the Indigenous movement? In our class, we talk about activism without action. So many people talk about activism, and they talk about how they are allies. They don't really take action to support the movements, what could you offer?

Hunt: I think this can go two ways. Both ways can be right. One thing is people who do step out there, they do put themselves out there, they make it known that they are doing

things like going to the protests, and they go to the marches. They do a lot on social media, which is great. It's a key part of the movement. I did have a discussion with a friend one time, she came to me because she is a big activist, but she's a lot younger than I am. She was about to go to college. She was like, "I am stressed. I'm overwhelmed. I don't know what's going on. I don't know why I feel this way." I think a big issue in our communities is definitely mental health, depression, bipolar disorder, a lot of those things. With our communities, I've seen it so many times where they are like, "depression isn't real, just don't be sad, you have nothing to be sad about" that sort of thing. I emphasized to her that one of the best things she can do as an activist is to take care of herself. If she needs to take a step back, no one is going to be upset. If she needs to take care of herself, no one is going to be upset. Everyone knows, we all know, we love her. The best thing she can do is support herself because we lose too many Indigenous youth as it is. I was like, "No one wants to lose you and you deserve to be alone if you want to. You deserve to take a step back from being an activist. From being on that platform. From constantly trying to figure out how to support this, how to push this, what to do, and where to go." That was what I emphasized to her. I think another big issue of being an activist is trying to figure out who is, I don't want to say valid, but I have definitely worked with some people and it turns out they were anti-black. It turns out they were like homophobic, and I didn't find out till after the fact. Now I can't work with you because you're anti-black. It's hypocritical. You're defeating the purpose. Your activism is surface level. You are doing it more for show, trying to figure that out, and trying to navigate those waters. Which I still am. There are just so many people in the community who want to stand for one thing and don't stand for the other.

Perez: Why do you think that there are so many mental health issues facing Indigenous communities?

Hunt: Well, definitely, with the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women that affects a lot of people. Of course, losing a family member, having a family member hurt in any way, is going to take a toll on mental health. Especially with the infrastructure in Robeson and Hoke County. Not having that support system with law enforcement. I've seen them turn a blind eye to women in bad situations, that's going to take a big toll, especially with the violence in our communities. The drug problem in our communities. This is all such a big issue. I have seen some of my cousins, they start so young, when it comes to drugs in general. You are so impressionable. At a young age, you don't really know what's going on. By the time you started, you have gotten involved in it. You are at an age where you do understand what is going on. You are already caught up in it, and it is so hard to get out. It is a vicious cycle. It can just lead to a number of mental health issues. Then with those members of the communities maybe not being in the best situations. I've seen that take a toll on our elders, because it's their kids, their

grandkids, their great grandkids, their loved ones. It's the people that they see in church, it's the people that they teach, and they see the negative consequences and it's not good.

Perez: Were there any mental health resources available?

Hunt: There are a few I know IllumiNative has reached out multiple times. On Instagram saying we need you here today. Oh my gosh, Rez dogs (Reservation Dogs) on Hulu address that. I was shocked. I thought it was an amazing way that they brought it up because no one really saw it coming. Did you watch rez dogs?

Perez: I did not.

Hunt: Oh Okay, but they did address mental health. I was impressed. I was very glad that they did because it is such an issue. I follow their account on Instagram. They constantly post "tomorrow needs you." I think that is a huge thing. I think the biggest thing, the biggest resource I wish we had was each other. There is still that stigma going around about you know, just be happy. You have nothing to be sad about, and people not really understanding what mental health is.

Perez: Do you feel like a lot of that stems from the elders?

Hunt: Yeah, I do. I love the elders, but I've had this conversation many times. It's just going to have to, there's nothing we can do there. It's going to have to go with them, unfortunately. Of course, I've tried kind of tentatively addressing it with them. It doesn't go well. I think a main issue because I've had this conversation many times is that they have or have had mental health issues. They dealt with it themselves, they also feel like we should and they feel that's a sign of strength. Trying to explain that you should be able to turn to your community and you should be able to have that resource is really difficult.

Perez: Are there any healing modalities that can be used to help some of the people in your communities?

Hunt: I think so, a lot of my work with food I think is extremely healing not just physically and nutritionally. Food brings people together. That's one of the things I love most about it. My family, it's a huge family. Oh my god. We have a Christmas party every year. Of course, we did not have it the past year because of COVID which really hurt. I hated it. The whole family comes out. There's like 150 of us there and we just eat. On Christmas Eve we get together and everyone is enjoying that food, no one is worried about anything else. It's just that sense of community that food brings. I think especially

because it ties in older generations with younger generations, and it's one thing that we can all bond over and do together is good food. I think that it is very healing for both generations to just kind of exist together to enjoy those memories with each other and be in that space. There is spiritual healing, which I'm not as versed on, but there are so many different things we can do. Then one of the big things I'm trying to learn more about and get into is healing our relationship with the land. Making sure that we don't lose a lot of our practices, especially with horticulture. While food is healing, we should be able to understand our own culture and how it relates to us. Especially with how we can support ourselves in our own communities without outside interference.

Perez: What does healing the relationship with the land look like to you?

Hunt: I'm not sure. I have been studying a lot on it recently. It's mainly going to be not tearing down because you know, the Lumbee are the people of the swamp, not tearing down those places, not tearing down those sites. Then understanding that we can grow medicine. We can grow things that are going to heal us. Also, not forgetting our practices. Our Indigenous practices of horticulture, the three sisters planting those things together. Understanding that we had a lot of history, and that we have a lot of history in the land. This is our land. We lived here. There are a lot of things in the ground that we could utilize, especially when it comes to just feeding ourselves. Even our infrastructure, in terms of the hurricane, (Interstate) 95 was absolutely flooded. I think that would not have been as big of an issue if the land had not been cleared out as much as it is. There's a lot of things that I'm still learning. There are so many facets of our relationship with the land that I would like to learn more about.

Perez: I'm going to bring us into our last question. What do you see as some of the most promising pathways forward for the Indigenous movement?

Hunt: Definitely mental health because if I can't take care of myself, how am I going to take care of my community? Focusing on that I always tell people, you can be an activist by focusing on your mental health by making sure you are okay. I think that is one thing that is going to be key, especially in the future. Homophobia is more embraced than racism, obviously. We know addressing anti-blackness is going to be key, but homophobia is definitely going to have to be the next issue. Homophobia is the cause of a lot of mental health issues. I've seen a lot of people come out as two spirit. I've seen a lot of people identify with the LGBT+ community and people raise hell. It does not go well. With the anti-blackness, Brooke Simpson, the singer. She is a Haliwa Saponi. She has appeared in America's Got Talent, American Idol, stuff like that. She used to be Brooke Mills. She grew up in Hollister (North Carolina). I remember because she went to college for music, and she went to Florida. Everyone was so happy for her.

She was really talented. She married a Black man and people pretty much exiled her from the community until she started appearing on TV and she got famous. I was shocked. That is when I really started because I was really young. Brooke is much older than I am. That was when I really started to realize what was going on. When they didn't associate with her. She would come to powwows and she felt left out. It was so bad. It was so evident, and then all of a sudden she gets on TV and people are like "oh come sing at the powwow. Come make an appearance." They made a whole video about Hollister and where she grew up. We are going to have to address that anti-blackness as a future. I think people are doing well now, especially with the Afro-Indigenous movement here in North Carolina. I was super excited to work with Black Indians NC and bringing that Indigenous group to an HBCU so the people have that safe place. Addressing those issues is definitely going to have to be at the forefront. Those are not the only issues, but those are our biggest issues.

Perez: Thank you for meeting with me today. It was super insightful. I really liked learning about how you have taken your career as a dietitian and put it back into the community, and how that intertwines with healing within your community.

Hunt: Yes, thank you. I was really glad that Aminah connected us,

Perez: Of course, thank you. I hope you have a great rest of your day. I will keep in touch with you on this interview and then the transcript. You have all rights to it if you want something taken out of the recording or if you want something taken out of the transcript that's up to you.

Hunt: Okay.

Perez: All right. Well, have a good rest of your day.

Hunt: You do the same. Thank you.

Perez: Bye bye.

Hunt: Bye bye.