

The Garrison Institute Presents: Inner Works Podcast Transcript

Norma Wong: Kuleana and Collective Action (Episode 26)

[Please note: Although the transcript is largely accurate, in some cases it may be incomplete or inaccurate due to inaudible passages or transcription software errors.]

[00:00:00] **Norma Wong:** You know, we're engaging in telling the story of what the future would be, and storytelling is something that is, it's an ancient enterprise that modern people are also drawn to. How do we know that? Well, you know, you go to the movies, you read books, you are attracted to the, uh, the bands that are essentially storytellers, right?

[00:00:36] And so we know that to be true. Being with people, your friends, or with chosen people, and you could be just begin to, to tell that story. What, what do you think may be happening in that place where your hard work has paid off?

[00:01:04] **Gretchen Steidle:** Welcome to the Garrison Institute presents Inner Works. I'm Gretchen Keith-Steidl, Director of the Garrison Institute's Spirituality and Social Change program, and founder of Circles for Conscious Change. In this series, we explore the impact possible when contemplative practice, spirituality, and inner work are integrated as essential elements of social change programs.

[00:01:29] We'll hear personal stories of transformation, explore innovative

[00:01:33] **Norma Wong:** models shifting systems around the world, and learn how the inner work actually works

[00:01:41] **Gretchen Steidle:** My guest today is Norma Kaweloku Bong Roshi, who is a native Hawaiian and Haka lifelong resident of Hawaii. She's an eighty-sixth-generation Zen master and abbot of Anko-in, an independent branch temple of Daihonzan Chozenji.

[00:02:00] She served in politics for over 30 years, including serving on the Hawaii State Legislature and for the governor of Hawaii. She has been instrumental in negotiating land returns, revenue, and cleanup of the homelands of native Hawaiians. She's currently part of the Collective Acceleration community of practice, guiding the direct application of indigenous and Zen ways, values, and practices for the transformational change needed for these times.

[00:02:28] Norma has just published a new book, Who We Are Becoming Matters: The Courage, Wisdom, and Aloha We Need in a Time-Place of Collapse. She also has a new podcast, The Horizon Story, available on all streaming platforms. Today, we'll explore Norma's wisdom on what we need to develop in ourselves as human beings and with each other in our mutual responsibility as we face this current moment

[00:03:16] Welcome, Norma

[00:03:17] **Norma Wong:** Aloha, Gretchen. So glad to be here

[00:03:20] **Gretchen Steidle:** Would you mind just inviting our listeners into a practice that helps us more fully arrive for our conversation today?

[00:03:30] **Norma Wong:** Oh, absolutely. Absolutely

[00:03:32] **Gretchen Steidle:** Thank you

[00:03:33] **Norma Wong:** So if you are sitting, you want to make sure that you are in your posture, your most proud stance, even in a sitting, and to put both legs on the ground, not in that way in which you might cross your legs, but to put them both on.

[00:03:55] Feel the ground under your feet. If you're standing, to be in your most proud stance, to have your eyes on the horizon. Oh, yes, we're asking if you would open your eyes. We're so used to being able to come into ourselves if we're closing our eyes, but if we do that, how may we see the world around us? So to take that breath and to make sure that the exhale is much longer

[00:04:36] Just take it in again and exhale much longer If we put one of our hands on our belly, you know, in that position where your thumb is right where your belly button is and your fingers are wrapping around that place, that as an adult, you might grimace that it's round, but you would never grimace if you were a baby.

[00:05:12] And have that place come up and down as you breathe, not your chest, not that middle portion, your diaphragm, but down here in the deep depth of your belly. Take that breath in And let it go, and as it does, you grow taller, not sink in

[00:05:41] Thank you for being with us today

[00:05:45] **Gretchen Steidle:** Thank you so much, Norma. Well, I wanna welcome you with a question that I came upon in one of the study guides for your books, which is, how are you feeling about being a human right now?

[00:06:02] **Norma Wong:** Ah, yes. You know, it's, uh, I'm feeling, uh, tingly as a human, and I know that that tingling is about both anxiety and excitement.

[00:06:19] **Gretchen Steidle:** Mm-hmm.

[00:06:20] **Norma Wong:** At least that's how it registers as it courses through me, and that tells me that I'm alive.

[00:06:30] **Gretchen Steidle:** So I understand you grew up in Hawaii, and you've been a lifelong resident of Hawaii, and I'm wondering if you could tell us a little bit about what it was like to grow up as such, the, the values, the ways of being that really shaped who you are today from your childhood.

[00:06:53] **Norma Wong:** Well, I'm fortunate to live just a few blocks away from where I was born, so in that same valley, uh, called Kalihi Valley. It is still, as it was then, an eclectic working-class community where all kinds of things are built upon the land but not in too orderly a fashion.

[00:07:22] **Gretchen Steidle:** Mm-hmm.

[00:07:23] **Norma Wong:** So you could have a very expensive home that sits right next to a goat. That there could be, um, chickens present, not only in sound, but in sight, and that people consider s- themselves to be part of the place.

[00:07:47] And so therefore, even if you don't know each other's name, you will still recognize people, and you will look out after each other.

[00:07:59] **Gretchen Steidle:** Mm.

[00:07:59] **Norma Wong:** And I feel very fortunate to still live in a place that is similar to the place that I lived, oh, in terms of its character and its culture and its way of being many, many, many years ago.

[00:08:18] So Hawaii is a place of many cultures, and it is also a place in which we're really aware of the necessity to have an understanding about each other, even if it is the most minimal understandings. We don't, uh, we're not nosy about each other's business, right? But we do have that notion of being in a place of limited geography, surrounded by an ocean, at least five hours away from any other human, as the plane will fly, means that we have a different kind of responsibility to each other.

[00:09:17] If there is an emergency of human making or nature's making, we will be the people we need to count on. And because of that, right, I know that my ideas, how I live, uh, what I think about, what I think is possible, built upon the premise of where I live.

[00:09:42] **Gretchen Steidle:** And that mutual responsibility to each other.

[00:09:46] **Norma Wong:** That mutual responsibility, but also that way in which, you know, if we have difficulties, there's not much place we can run away from, right?

[00:09:59] And so therefore, we have to figure out ways, uh, to not only work them out, but also to live with people for whom we have disputes. So I'm not painting it as a paradise in any way, but as a place where the usefulness of long relationships matter.

[00:10:23] **Gretchen Steidle:** Mm-hmm. Beautiful. We are gonna come back to those themes, especially as they might relate to all of us if we could see Earth as that small island of deep, long relationship.

[00:10:37] But tell me also a little bit, if you will, about your inner and spiritual journey and your core practice that guides you and has been guiding you in the world.

[00:10:51] **Norma Wong:** So I accidentally became a Zen practitioner in my early 20s. The fortune of that is that, uh, as introduced to me by the father of a classmate of mine, uh, who brought me to the place that is my home temple now, is that on a time basis, it paralleled my entry into political life.

[00:11:19] **Gretchen Steidle:** Hmm.

[00:11:20] **Norma Wong:** And so therefore, I have never had a problem aligning the two. I've never had, you know, thought of my spiritual life as being separate and unlike my civic life, that the ways in which groundedness works is that it would not be a grounded only when I am practicing, right? That that groundedness while I'm practicing was about w- the way in which I need it to be all the time.

[00:11:56] And that came so early in my development that I know that that has served me very well to this very day.

[00:12:28] **Gretchen Steidle:** So you just came out with a new book called Who We Are Becoming Matters: The Courage, Wisdom, and Aloha We Need in a Time Place of Collapse. And within this book and your last, which is also speaking to this time place of collapse called When No Thing Works: A Zen and Indigenous Perspective on Resilience, Shared Purpose, and Leadership in the Time Place of Collapse, you speak of something called kuleana, sacred mutual responsibility or mutual stewardship that you were just describing with respect to what you grew up with.

[00:13:07] And I believe I understand this concept of mutual responsibility comes from this awareness of our interdependence. Could you tell us a little bit more about that? And if you'd like to read a passage from the book or one of your poems that helps to speak to this, I'd certainly welcome that too.

[00:13:28] **Norma Wong:** Yes. So kuleana, right?

[00:13:32] Um, living in the place of Hawaii, certainly the native Hawaiian culture helps to inform not only the indigenous peoples of this place, but also peoples who call Hawaii home, right? And so you would hear the word kuleana not only from a native Hawaiian, but, you know, many of the lifelong residents would talk about this too That notion that we would have mutual responsibility and therefore mutual stewardship duties to each other and to the land, right?

[00:14:17] So kuleana cannot be separated from the place that you live or the place that you feel you have responsibility over, even if you don't live there anymore, right? So it's in lots of ways would say, although I feel the strongest kuleana to the people and the place called Hawaii, that Hawaii being a part of the world means that we're impacted by things that happen in other places and also things that happen in other times, times that existed before I was born, right?

[00:15:00] And so we cannot say, well, I'm only going to have kuleana over this, right? So you have to extend that notion. And that is a not necessarily a natural thing, meaning that, you know,

you don't get up every morning with that notion on a natural basis. It is something that you have to extend your awareness and consciousness towards because we must, right?

[00:15:34] Because we must.

[00:15:39] You know, the crew of the Artemis, when they returned to Earth, they had talked about how they felt strongly the notion of their crew being in a ship and the Earth and the universe as a whole as being the entirety of the place that they belonged to. And that whole notion of who is the crew right now of Mother Earth, the ship called Mother Earth, is a real question.

[00:16:16] It's not a metaphysical question that is theoretically before us. The extent of all of the polycrisis that we're engaged in right now mean that we do have to extend ourselves beyond what it is we normally think about and extend our feelings, really. Not the feelings, the emotional feelings, but our senses, what we see, what we hear, what we feel.

[00:16:56] You know, the acridness in the wind because something happened close by that you cannot see, but that has released pollutants into the air that if we did not pay attention to would harm everything between the place where it was spilled and where you're standing, no matter how close or how far that might be.

[00:17:27] And so this notion of kuleana as not being a small thing, but a big thing, but one that you should hold with the gratitude that you can, right? Oh, yes, we can do that because it's our kuleana.

[00:17:51] **Gretchen Steidle:** It feels like it's, as, as so many things, our capacity to do that on sort of an overarching global scale emanates from either how we were raised or the place in which we have felt and seen modeled and embodied that kind of connection and mutual responsibility. But for those of us who were... have been disconnected from our indigeneity or who have been very much raised in this more materialistic Western dominant paradigm, how can we find our way back?

[00:18:31] What are some of the practices or capacities that we need to develop to find our way back into understanding how to live that way again, to, to feel and embody that sense of connection and responsibility for each other?

[00:18:46] **Norma Wong:** Well, interestingly, I would say we are both very far away from our indigeneity, and we're also very close to it, and let me try to describe that.

[00:18:59] Certainly, if you are not indigenous today, it means that your indigeneity was interrupted too long ago and, in many cases, too far away, right? In other words, your people migrated far away from the place in which they were indigenous to, right? And that, that's just occurred over the history. And you- your indigeneity would have been interrupted so long ago that you could not say that you have cultural indigeneity, for example, right?

[00:19:37] Even if your values, practices may be trying to move back in that direction, okay? Um, if you're indigenous today, there are very, very few indigenous people in the world who cannot say that their indigeneity is on a daily basis threatened or at risk or at the edge of possibility of forgottenness, right?

[00:20:06] Right. So there's, there's all of that part. But it's also very close to us, and here's how that is. Every newborn baby instantly feels a connection to other humans around them and indeed to all life around them, whether human or not, instantly. It's not something that they learn. It's not something that has to be explained to them.

[00:20:38] And if that connection isn't reciprocated, then they don't have to go through an analysis to understand that that is an unnatural thing. The connectivity, the relationship of that is built into us. And then a way that I think about it is that we no longer live, or most people no longer live, in the conditions and circumstances and cultures that would have us in a continuous learning about that connectivity, a continuous cultivation of it, a continuous strengthening of it, a continuous practice of it.

[00:21:28] So if all of that were in operation, we would be living a particular way. So what that means is that the yearning and the possibility of it are natural things that keep reoccurring in us, in humankind, with each birth of each child. And if it is about the conditions, if it is about the practice, if it's about the continuous learning edge, if it's about the cultivation and the strengthening, well, then we can do that.

[00:22:09] We can do that, which is not about, like, returning to who it is that we were. It's about reawakening who we have always been but have forgotten or have set aside, either intentionally or because it was interrupted, taken away, dammed off by all kinds of things, mostly traumatic, right?

[00:22:37] **Gretchen Steidle:** That's true.

[00:22:39] **Norma Wong:** And so in lots of ways, right, that the real hope and possibility for humankind is to consciously recultivate that within us and to not do it as individuals.

[00:23:00] No indigenous peoples lived apart from their clan or their village or their peoples. Most of the names of indigenous peoples mean the people. That's what it means. So it didn't mean me-

[00:23:18] **Gretchen Steidle:** Mm-hmm ...

[00:23:19] **Norma Wong:** or I. So that notion of this is remembering that it is a collective endeavor that we're embarking upon. It is most easily accessed when you are with other people who are also looking in that direction of potential thriving, who are interrupting the habits that take us away from that, who practice and fail and reset, and just keep on repeating that cycle, right?

[00:23:59] And that that would be the way in which we both inch forward and leap forward.

[00:24:06] **Gretchen Steidle:** Can you give us an example, any story of what this might look like in the way people are engaging with each other and, and the natural environment from this orientation, just to help make it more concrete?

[00:24:23] **Norma Wong:** Well, you're familiar with, uh, the Japanese have actually made this practice quite popular, uh, which is forest bathing.

[00:24:34] **Gretchen Steidle:** Mm-hmm.

[00:24:35] **Norma Wong:** And in the m- modern notion of this, right, there are these, uh, lifestyle fads that people come upon, right? That are really built on really ancient, ancient types of practices, things that have always been done, which is if you walk in nature, and you're only walking in nature, you're not listening to a podcast, you know, so sorry, Gretchen, right?

[00:25:07] **Gretchen Steidle:** Save this for when you're driving in traffic.

[00:25:10] **Norma Wong:** Right. You know, so you're not, uh, you know, you're not, um, in your, uh, deep thoughts trying to, uh, resolve some problem that you had with a jerk- ... right? Uh, you know, uh, you're not, uh, stumbling about, um, you know, with your problems, but you are actually just walking in nature.

[00:25:37] If you are consciously doing that and just paying attention with all of your senses open, hearing and seeing, feeling the wind on your cheek tasting the flavor of the fragrance, right? If you're doing all of these things that you actually feel differently. Uh, biometrically, your blood pressure will drop, right?

[00:26:11] Your breathing will come down lower in your body. Uh, even your posture will shift. All of these biometrics will occur. But also you'd say there's a part of you that opens up, that becomes less guarded. That even though your awareness is out, it's not an awareness that is making you suspicious or like that, right?

[00:26:38] You can see more things and therefore you're less likely to just stumble over your own feet But it is in relationship to the Earth, it's not apart from the Earth. Right? Okay. No

[00:26:58] Can you do this in an urban environment? Most certainly There is no place where it is impossible to sit down and have a meal with someone. Whenever you do that, when you have this really simple act of sharing food, particularly so if you're not just ordering from a restaurant, by the way.

[00:27:31] **Gretchen Steidle:** Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

[00:27:32] **Norma Wong:** If someone you know has made that food, or if you have made that food, even if it's the simplest dish, right?

[00:27:43] That whole thing about preparing food for yourself and for other people, it's why people have joy when they are bringing food to other people. Bringing food to other people

should not be an act of charity. You are sharing life as you would hope people would share life with you. It is an act of reciprocity, right?

[00:28:10] But there's also love associated with it. My teacher used to say, "Wouldn't it be wonderful if all of the, you know, those ladies in the cafeteria that had those hair nets on-" ... right, and those white aprons, that if when they scoop the rice or the potato and they put it on a child's tray, that they had that sense of delivering the love of what they prepared.

[00:28:44] And if they delivered that, the intention of that, the energy of that at that moment, then what you would eat would be more than just food, right? It would be more than that. That's why I actually believe that those two things, connection with nature and the relationship you have with food and the sharing of food, are really basic to our return to our humanity.

[00:29:19] That it would be prepared by others, that you would eat it at your desk without thinking about it as you did some work, that you would be somehow satisfied but not remember what it is that you ate, that you would think of good food only as being the most expensive, most highly spiced, most outrageously mounted type of thing, right?

[00:29:50] That you wouldn't get pleasure because you have made the perfect bowl of oatmeal, that simple cup of tea And the beauty of practice with food is that as humans, we actually cannot live long without it. So therefore, it's something that we would do many, many times in a single day. Okay, many times in a single day.

[00:30:21] Nature, if unable to be in a forest near you, could be in a plant. It could be simply finding the patch of sky and looking up into it, not taking it for granted That there are these simple things of conscious connectivity and also caring for. We used to have a very sought-after teacher and class in automobile repair, right?

[00:30:57] And everybody wanted to get in this class, and there was a waiting list for it. This was at a high school level, public high school level. And he would give them a cup with some dirt in it and a handful of seeds, and he says, "Okay, when you grow the plant that comes out of these seeds, come back to me, and we'll talk about what your place will be on the waiting list."

[00:31:27] **Gretchen Steidle:** Wow.

[00:31:28] **Norma Wong:** Okay? If you think about what you are is just about fixing things, but not about how you would care for it, cultivate it, coach life out of it, look after it, that you would be always attentive to it. He says, "Come back when something is growing in your cup."

[00:31:53] **Gretchen Steidle:** What I mean, this is such a powerful metaphor for all of us change agents and activists and service providers who are on the front lines.

[00:32:08] We're used to dealing with, you know, having to prove our impact within a 12-month calendar cycle and needing... Th-th-these are urgent times, and how do we help? What would you say to folks who might feel like, "I, I'm just trying to survive. I don't have, I don't have time for

that. The action is necessary." How do we translate this deeper process into how it might guide the shifts that we need for our planet and humanity looking forward?

[00:32:47] **Norma Wong:** Yeah. So, you know, if it's, if it's just about doing this, then what we have determined actually is that, well, if machines do it for us, then that's gonna be sufficient. In other words, the doing this without the care and the wisdom and the energy that comes with that doing. With the, uh, human possibility that comes with that doing.

[00:33:20] With, by the way, if you are strung out and too tired, uh, filled with a literal bile, in other words, you can feel acidity in your mouth, and if you happen to taste your sweat, that it would be bitter. That's what you're transmitting along with your doingness.

[00:33:39] **Gretchen Steidle:** Mm-hmm.

[00:33:40] **Norma Wong:** That's what you're transmitting. That might not be conscious to you, but it builds up over time.

[00:33:47] You know that as a person who's on the receiving side of any of that. Yeah. If you are in a healthcare facility of some kind as a patient, and that busy person who's really tired and has had a lot of responsibility and is underpaid and all of those kinds of things, but if they nonetheless take even a moment where they are just with you and they've taken, like, one single breath with you and the barest of a natural sigh and a smile, yeah, that's not like something that they painted on their face.

[00:34:39] Even if they are sharing grief with you, not false promises with you, right? That humanity matters, and it'll matter in a way that will ease you on your way, whether it is to health or to death, it eases you on your way. You as a person who is in that moment where you are just there, nowhere else, in your delivery of that, that the energy of that delivery returns to you, right?

[00:35:20] You will feel greater possibility. You will feel the impact of the impact that you've made, okay? And you'll have an understanding that all the busyness and doingness, while needing to be done, cannot be done without you. You're not just a machine moving things along, right? There's a human part of you that unless it is there and available, even if just for a moment, then the most important aspect of healing does not occur.

[00:36:01] **Gretchen Steidle:** Mm-hmm. So as much as we need this action in the world, it is essential that the quality with which we come into it, the relationships that we foster, the mindset and the values that we embody in doing whatever that is that we are doing is, is the medicine itself. That is essential?

[00:36:34] **Norma Wong:** It is. It is the medicine itself, but also it's that the pauses, the many pauses that we take to recultivate ourselves on an ongoing basis as a practice. Increases our capacity in all

[00:36:55] kinds of ways, our physical capacity, our mental capacity, our spiritual capacity. It literally makes it possible for us to make better decisions, right? Have better executive function. To not take so long because we're so worn out to do the things that we believe we need to do, right? You know, if we f- keep filling up our plate all the time, and we do not clear the decks on an, just a regular basis, just a regular basis, that plate, that deck will be filled again, right?

[00:37:40] **Gretchen Steidle:** That's for sure.

[00:37:41] **Norma Wong:** But if we do not clear the deck, then there's never anything that is important because everything is important. Never a thing that's a priority, 'cause all things are priorities. Never a thing that gets finished. So we say that some of that busyness is about the urgency of the time, but some of that busyness is about our habit pattern-

[00:38:06] **Gretchen Steidle:** Hmm

[00:38:07] **Norma Wong:** that makes us actually literally less efficient.

[00:38:12] **Gretchen Steidle:** Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

[00:38:13] **Norma Wong:** Less able, less capable, right? And certainly having less energy.

[00:38:35] **Gretchen Steidle:** So I want to ask you a little bit about your work in the social change sphere coming from this orientation. Um, you've been in politics. You have done a lot of advocacy and activist work for Hawaiian peoples and the return and the care of their lands. You're part of an organization called Collective Acceleration, which is a, a community.

[00:39:03] And there's somewhere I read that you had said you'd, you'd faced the cul-de-sac of systems change. And I'm, I'm curious, having been involved in these many spheres of social change and systems change, what did you mean by that, and how are you approaching change now through collective acceleration?

[00:39:29] **Norma Wong:** Okay.

[00:39:31] Yeah, so, you know, c-cul-de-sac, right, is that you go down a street, it's a street, right? You go down the street, and then you realize actually the street doesn't go through. And you could, uh, just turn around and go back, right? Or you can get caught in it. But in any case, it doesn't go through. So what do I mean by that as it relates to systems change?

[00:39:58] So to say systems change is a powerful strategy for shifting the conditions of peoples and to just get stuff done in the world at scale. And so it's, it really is a powerful strategy and a powerful tool for that. But what if systems are in a state of collapse and failure because we're in a time that has so many crises occurring at the same moment that by definition, systems that were built in of themselves for different times, different conditions, right, and grew all of the armor of that time, of the conditions, all of the capability for that times and conditions, literally cannot keep up.

[00:41:04] A system is just a structure And if the structure is falling, no matter any amount of trying to board it up, hold it up, replace parts, will mean that it will necessarily be able to do the job of the next condition, of the next society, of the next possibility, let alone get us through a moment when everything is falling apart.

[00:41:39] **Gretchen Steidle:** Hmm. All

[00:41:40] **Norma Wong:** right, so Like if you advocate for something and because of the conditions of the moment as well as the tight binary that people find themselves in, right? It's like different worldviews are in such a fight right now with each other that is almost equally matched in intensity. There may be more money on one side, more power on the other side, more seats on one side, all those kinds of things could be the case.

[00:42:16] But in intensity, it's almost equally matched. What that means, it's just gonna go like back and forth, back and forth, back and forth along a tight corridor, and that is attached to a system or multiple systems. So now you're advocating into that.

[00:42:35] **Gretchen Steidle:** Mm.

[00:42:35] **Norma Wong:** Okay? Without anything having any breathing room to implement anything of consequence or have enough respite from the many fights to be able to have a way in which it would be able to deliver into its promise, irrespective of where you sit ideologically.

[00:42:57] **Gretchen Steidle:** Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

[00:42:58] **Norma Wong:** And in the meantime, people have needs. There's not enough food. Shelter is too expensive. They cannot live where they live, and they're not allowed to migrate. So it's like you have to deal with the system, but simply changing the system or putting all of your eggs into that basket will mean, okay, that there'll just be more and more and more and more fallout out of that state of systems as people are in a cage match about who has power over the system, what can you do and what should you not do, whether it will take six months or 36 months to implement the rules before you implement that which the rules would allow you to do, that the next group of people in the next six months after that will believe that have no worthiness at all and will stop implementing.

[00:44:08] Not only a cul-de-sac, but a trap

[00:44:14] **Gretchen Steidle:** So then what do we need to do as human beings to cultivate in ourselves to be able to shepherd in what is next?

[00:44:25] **Norma Wong:** Well, there is the ancient thing called community that as far as I can tell, there's no... There's a bunch of reasons why it's more difficult today, but they are just reasons. It just means that there are a number of challenges, right, that we would have to overcome.

[00:44:49] But if we understand how important it is, and that that would be not only the place of possibility, but also the place of hope for us, why wouldn't we, why wouldn't we do that?

[00:45:08] **Gretchen Steidle:** Right. Why wouldn't we?

[00:45:10] **Norma Wong:** Why wouldn't we, right? What would give us the incentive to put our devices down and actually have a conversation with people, to, um, have a meal with someone, to band together with friends in support of strangers, and then therefore, make friends with strangers What would it look like is very simple.

[00:45:45] But there's something about modernity that sort of keeps us isolated, and Western culture is part of modernity's malaise, right? So the notion of individualism could be so strong that we literally don't think about our collective possibility. We merely think about whether we as individuals are succeeding or unable to succeed.

[00:46:18] We don't naturally move towards the family, including the chosen family. I have no biological children, but I have descendants nonetheless. And that notion of having descendants nonetheless, even though they are not from my body literally, means that what I think about as far as where my kuleana extends to is a broader and more possible net that extends out, but cannot be done unless I am in relationship with other people to do that.

[00:47:03] Too big a task So do you catch fish, Gretchen?

[00:47:10] **Gretchen Steidle:** Well, I try.

[00:47:12] **Norma Wong:** Okay.

[00:47:14] **Gretchen Steidle:** I'm not always that successful.

[00:47:16] **Norma Wong:** Do you use a pole or do you use a net?

[00:47:19] **Gretchen Steidle:** I, I like fly fishing.

[00:47:21] **Norma Wong:** Fly fishing? Okay. Mm-hmm. All right. Okay. So you do fly fishing. Yeah. Do you catch the kind of fish that travel by themselves or they travel together?

[00:47:32] **Gretchen Steidle:** Hmm.

[00:47:34] I'm not, I'm not sure I'm sure about that.

[00:47:37] **Norma Wong:** Oh, okay. All right. When you, uh, when you fly fish, how do you know where it is that you should place your hook into... Do you go into rivers? Is that, and streams, is that where you do your fly fishing?

[00:47:53] **Gretchen Steidle:** Well, that's where I have tried, and- Okay ... yes, it's usually in the, there are, you know, s- spaces where you have a sense of where fish would be waiting.

[00:48:03] **Norma Wong:** Okay. So they'd- Mm-hmm ... be waiting, right? Okay. Now, they may be waiting, and so you might place your bait that is hooked into the water, and you might actually just wait for a fish to come to it. That's one kind of fishing. The other kind of fishing is that you put it out ahead of where you know the fish are moving towards.

[00:48:27] **Gretchen Steidle:** Mm.

[00:48:28] **Norma Wong:** Okay?

[00:48:29] **Gretchen Steidle:** Mm-hmm.

[00:48:30] **Norma Wong:** And then usefully, it's not just one fish, because if it's one fish, the possibility of you getting that one fish in that stream, right, isn't as great as if you are where many fish are, right? So you try to be where many fish are, right, so. And th- that notion, right, essentially, of you being engaged in that kind of possibility, um, my grandfather, my maternal grandfather would fish with a pole, but he'd also fish with a net.

[00:49:09] And there, there's a net that would only be able to pick up one fish There's a kind of net that they would throw that would actually pick up many fish at the same time, but you'd have to throw it ahead of where the school is moving towards. Okay?

[00:49:29] **Gretchen Steidle:** Mm-hmm.

[00:49:30] **Norma Wong:** And then there's a kind of net that he might be engaged with other people that would require many people to be in association with that net, and they would go out into the water, right, with respect to that net, and they would move the fish towards that net.

[00:49:49] But it would take many people to do. Each one would have its own purpose, and if it was going to be-- if you had to feed many people with the fish that you caught, then it would require more than you to do it, and then the way that you did it would be different, and you would have to be in relationship to many people to be engaged in a collective enterprise, right?

[00:50:16] **Gretchen Steidle:** Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

[00:50:17] **Norma Wong:** So we're indeed at a moment where it can't just be a solitary fisherman standing on the shore with a single line trying to catch a single fish. Uh, we're, we're, we're not that. And we could easily see the futility of that if we thought of our daily life as being about an individual existence-

[00:50:43] **Gretchen Steidle:** Mm-hmm

[00:50:44] **Norma Wong:** rather than about it being the village of the people.

[00:50:52] **Gretchen Steidle:** Is this what collective acceleration is working towards?

[00:50:58] **Norma Wong:** Yes. It's working towards... At its essence, it's a learning community, right? And what we're learning together is who do we need to become and what do we need to

do if we are to be peoples who have an aspiration that our future would be about interdependent thriving rather than us fighting to a draw where only our people will survive.

[00:51:31] And we know that that is not something that you could possibly do by being a single fisherman standing on the side of the shore, right? And so there's paradox because there's the individual pivot and transformation that individual people would need to do if we were to take this on. The paradox is only you can do it, only you can make that pivot, but you don't have to do that pivot alone.

[00:52:07] **Gretchen Steidle:** Mm-hmm.

[00:52:08] **Norma Wong:** Right?

[00:52:08] **Gretchen Steidle:** Mm-hmm.

[00:52:09] **Norma Wong:** Okay? And so being comfortable about that paradox is the first step.

[00:52:18] **Gretchen Steidle:** So for those for whom this really resonates, but they have yet to get comfortable, they have yet to take a first step, are there any practices or examples or communities that they can join to lean in a little, a little further?

[00:52:42] **Norma Wong:** Well, you know, the Clerks Federation is a learning community, but we are porous, meaning people can certainly come on in and like that. But you could also just be in relationship to, like, the learning that's coming out of it.

[00:52:59] **Gretchen Steidle:** Mm-hmm.

[00:52:59] **Norma Wong:** And so if you went to thehorizonstory.com, you know, there are some resources that would be available to you in that regard, including something that people could do on their own in groups, again, not as individuals, right?

[00:53:18] But, you know, we're engaging in telling the story of what the future would be, and storytelling is something that is like a-- It's an ancient enterprise that modern people are also drawn to. How do we know that? Well, you know, you go to the movies, you read books, you are attracted to the, uh, the bands that are essentially storytellers, right?

[00:53:51] And so we know that to be true, right? So there are examples of The Horizon Story on that particular website, but you could also be engaged, right, in being with people, your friends, or with chosen people, and you could be just begin to, to tell that story, right? What, what do you think may be happening in that place where your hard work has paid off?

[00:54:23] No use asking the story about what would happen if we did nothing.

[00:54:27] **Gretchen Steidle:** Mm. Mm-hmm.

[00:54:28] **Norma Wong:** Okay? That's just an extension and a sadder, darker story of what's happening right now. So if your work paid off, what would indeed that work, that world look like? And what part of the description of that world could you be doing right now?

[00:54:47] So there's a town in Maine where 10 people ask themselves that question, and we're going through a tight spot 'cause, you know, there was that month-long government shutdown. You remember that?

[00:55:00] **Gretchen Steidle:** Mm-hmm.

[00:55:01] **Norma Wong:** And there was also, like, a way in which people were losing their benefits for SNAP and in terms of getting, uh, support for food.

[00:55:11] And so they said, "Well, you know, in our Horizon story, people didn't sit in their own homes having their food just by themselves. They met in community and had food together. Why don't we just do that?" And it started with 10 people, and as it proceeded day after day, week after week- Over the course of about a month, 5,300 meals were served.

[00:55:44] **Gretchen Steidle:** Wow.

[00:55:46] **Norma Wong:** And they would have over 100 people show up as volunteers to cook together, and you could not tell who needed the food and who needed the company.

[00:55:59] **Gretchen Steidle:** Amazing.

[00:56:01] **Norma Wong:** Simple things

[00:56:05] **Gretchen Steidle:** That sounds like we have to start by interrupting the patterns that get in the way of our ability to feel our relationship to each other and the earth beyond... Well, starting with our own community, but also beyond this particular place that we are in. And this, this question of imagining if our work is successful, what would our world look like?

[00:56:34] What would be my role in handling that much larger net? And what can I do from that orientation now in feeling and embodying my sense of, of mutual stewardship or responsibility for that future?

[00:56:52] **Norma Wong:** Yes

[00:56:54] **Gretchen Steidle:** Beautiful. Norma, thank you for these invitations. Is there anything else you want to invite or challenge us to, to think about as, as we close our time together?

[00:57:08] **Norma Wong:** Well, I would say, um, the work is, uh, there's a lot of work to do in the world, and if we're frustrated in the tight knot of where we are, look up, look out, and you will undoubtedly see another place where your work is needed and other people that you would want to work with. And so, which is to say, let's not get stuck.

[00:57:41] This is a time where it's important to keep moving and keep trying things out, and if they don't work, try out something else. Right? And, you know, don't take yourself so seriously. The work is very serious, but don't take yourself so seriously. Yeah, so thank you, Gretchen.

[00:58:07] **Gretchen Steidle:** Thank you so much. Let us not be stuck, and let us feel this deep relationship and long relationship with each other and the earth.

[00:58:16] Thank you so much for your wisdom and your time and your experience, and I wish you well.

[00:58:21] **Norma Wong:** I wish you well, too. Take good care. Aloha.

[00:58:29] **Gretchen Steidle:** Thank you to our guest, Norma Wong

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