

Podcast: *On Being III*

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Guest: Dr. Moneca Sinclair

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Transcript

Moneca Sinclair [MS]: I learned art by doing. I have never been formally trained in art. I used to watch my Nôhkomos—my grandma on my dad's side—doing art, because she was what I called an environmentalist, ecologist, functional junkist, 'cause she created function out of what everyone else would see as junk, right?

[Music: Ascending, bright, twinkly, uplifting, electronic]

Coco Nielsen [CN]: This is *On Being III*, a show about creativity, disability and identity. I'm your host, Coco Nielsen.

[Music rises then fades]

Today I'm excited to share a conversation I had with Dr. Moneca Sinclair. Moneca is a Nehinan artist and researcher from Opaskwayak Cree Nation in Northern Manitoba. But for over three decades she's lived in Winnipeg where we met many years ago. During our conversation we talked about how she's used storytelling throughout her career as a health researcher, about the important role that both counselling and creativity have played in her healing journey, and about her practice of reclaiming and recycling trash into art for everyone to enjoy. Here's that conversation.

CN: Hello Moneca Sinclair. Thank you so much for sitting down with us today on *On Being III*. I'm so excited to have you as a guest.

MS: Thank you Coco. I'm excited to be a guest.

CN: Awesome. Can you start by introducing yourself?

MS: Tansi, netasin, kiwitinutimuskway. Hello, my name is Northwind Woman. And my colonial name is Moneca Sinclair. And I'm from Northern Manitoba, but have lived in the city of Winnipeg for over three decades. And I am Cree—in English it's Cree, but in Cree it's Nehinan. And I'm a researcher/artist.

CN: Thank you so much. And that's why we've invited you on the program today, because you are a researcher and artist and I'm really excited to hear what you have to say on all these

topics that we'll be discussing. To start, I was hoping you could talk to us a little bit about your doctoral research. I know that you conducted interviews with Indigenous folks living with type two diabetes; could you tell us a bit more about that project and what you found in your research.

MS: So my research was urban Aboriginal people and their stories of diabetes. And because I am Indigenous, I wanted to do a dissertation that used the way that we do research. And I wanted to do research that was very arts-based. So, you know, in talking to people and thinking about it, I decided that I could do a podcast. And I interviewed nine people. And it's like, you and I, we're having a conversation...and so that's what the podcast was. It was me having conversations with nine people who had type two diabetes and asking questions like, *What does it feel for them to have diabetes? When did they know they had it?* Those kinds of things. And then through the storytelling, I found out a lot of information. The biggest thing was that a lot of Indigenous people have this idea that it's invariable, inevitable that they're going to get diabetes, and there's no question about it. And so people, instead of asking, like, do you have diabetes? And so they say, do you have diabetes yet. And so people have this mindset that they're going to get diabetes. And the other thing was people didn't actually want to talk about their diabetes, because they felt some shame about having it because it's very, like, *It's your fault, you have it, because you're not looking after yourself. It's your fault.* And that's the message that they were getting from Western medicine. And so when I talked to the folks, it was an opportunity for them to just talk about diabetes and how they felt about it, and it was a space where they could just talk about their grief about it and talk about what their hopes were about it and how they felt about having it. And so I interviewed nine people and of the nine people, there's only three still surviving—so six people have already passed away from complications of type two diabetes. And I've attended all their funerals. It's...it just makes me sad to know that people that I interviewed and developed a relationship with, that they've gone and they just...their diabetes wasn't manageable for them. They took medication and...yeah, they just couldn't figure out how to manage it. And yeah, it's a very sad situation, knowing that me, as a researcher, I have no control over how people react or do things with what they have. And I was interested in that topic because I have a background in nutrition. And when I used to go to communities, people would talk about nutrition, but then invariably, the conversations all switched to diabetes. And so I ended up taking a diabetes educator course. And I learned about diabetes and the more I learned about diabetes, the more I realized that diabetes doesn't have any perspective by and for Indigenous people. And so when I teach diabetes, I tend to break everything down for people and say how things are working in the body. And I do a lot of hands-on learning and try to make the language very basic. And so that's how I was teaching diabetes. And then, from that interest in teaching diabetes, I decided, *well, how can I do things differently?* And so when I did my doctoral research, I thought, well, if I could have people listen to the stories that might send some hope to people to be able to start talking about diabetes. And maybe, you know, one day there could be like “diabetes anonymous” kind of thing, where people could sit in a circle and just talk about their diabetes. Because it is...it's a silent disease that people have. And really, there's no place for them to talk about it.

CN: Mm hmm. It sounds like your approach to research is perhaps quite different than the systems that you work in, because I know you work in kind of Western health research institutions. How do you find that tension between your worldview and your approach, for example, your approach with storytelling, versus this sort of drive toward this more quantitative Western colonial approach to research or even to health. How does that play out in the work that you've done both in your doctoral research, and in the research you've done since?

MS: Well, in thinking about education in general, the moment I entered mainstream education, I always felt I didn't belong. Because I have a specific way of thinking about the world. And it never fit. And so all through elementary to high school, I never really felt like I belonged. And it wasn't until my mid 20s, after much coaxing and prodding, and kicking my butt...people kept saying, *Oh, you need to apply for university, you need to apply for university. You have such a good mind and blah, blah.* And so I'd be like, *Well, I really didn't enjoy high school, I didn't enjoy elementary school, I never felt like I fit in, I just felt I didn't belong.* Because I'd go to school, and I never saw myself there. And I didn't learn about our history. And the books didn't fit who I was as Indigenous person. And so I said, *Okay, well, I'll apply for university.* And I applied, and lo and behold, I got in. And it was the same thing that I felt in high school where I felt like I didn't belong. And it was the same feeling I had when I was in university. But the difference was, in university, I had a place where I could talk to people about this feeling I had. And the Indigenous students centre at the institution I went to, they had really great people there. And I would sit and chat with them about how I was feeling. And I didn't know that what I was feeling was like a clash of cultures, and it was racism and sexism happening. And now I had names attached to the feelings that I had. And so it was easier to figure out how to work with that. And eventually, I did start going for counselling at the university because I just felt like, I wanted to finish. But I also felt like this institution isn't welcoming to me, but I have to still figure out ways to navigate that. And so had a really good counsellor and so they would help me figure out ways to deal with students and professors that asked me what I call "crazy questions." In my undergrad, I was learning how to deal with this oppression—I guess is what it is—oppression feeling that I felt. And then in my master's I was in a community health science program. And again, I was the only Indigenous person. I was the only Indigenous person for four years in my faculty, and I was the only Indigenous person in my master's program. So when I was there, I hung around at the Aboriginal Student Center at the other campus because that's where I felt safe. But I still went to classes doing my Masters, which was in another section of the town that I lived in. And so, you know, that place where I learned to feel comfortable in my undergrad, was the place I felt comfortable doing my masters. And so I worked after my masters for about five years in a health program. And then as I kept working, and I worked as a nutrition educator, and I worked in diabetes, one of my employers said to me that I wasn't gonna get anywhere in the company because I didn't have a PhD. So I thought, *Well, I probably could get one.* So I went and got one and then in the Ph. D program, there was 10 Indigenous students that were doing their Ph. D program. And that was like something...*Wow, I am not the only one.* And so we would get together and talk about how we felt and what it was like to be in these institutions. And in my Ph. D program, that's the first time I witnessed an elder coming into our classroom and doing a teaching. And so that was like another, like, mind-blown moment. So I think like, each one helped me develop...my high school years into my undergrad into my master's into my PhD—but

each one gave me some tool that would help me further my own self development. And then those feelings that I had about not belonging, when I did my PhD, it gave me the courage to use my voice in better ways. Because in my master's program, I really didn't say too much about what was going on. I just tried to do my job and try to help community members. But then, when I did my Ph. D program, I was in situations where you're dealing with a lot of admin people, and you're learning about grants and how they work. And it's just atrocious how so many projects get funded to study Indigenous people. And I remember thinking, *There has to be research out there that's by and for Indigenous people*. But it took a long time to find. And I think it's only in the last 10 or 15 years that I, as a researcher, I'm starting to see research that's done by and for and with Indigenous people. And that was my experience, being in situations where I felt like I didn't belong. And I felt like my knowledge wasn't celebrated, or wasn't acknowledged. And I remember in my undergrad, a lot of the things I wrote about were about what I heard elders talk about. And so I would submit those as papers. And they'd all come back to me. And they'd say, *Well, where did you get this information from? There's no references*. And I'd say, *Well, it's from my elders; it's from people in my community*. They'd say, *Oh, well, you need to rewrite this with better research*. And so in my undergrad years, I didn't know what research was. So I tried to figure out where do I find this information. And because of that undergrad degree, I learned to do archival research. And I would look at old documents and spend hours in there reading things. And so that forced me to learn how to do that kind of research. And so everything, to me, has a purpose and a reason. And it's not until I look back at it, that I realize, *Oh, that's why I had to go through that. Because it helped me do this. And it helped me do that*. I hope I answered your question.

CN: Mm hmm. You definitely did. Looking back now on your journey in education, in kind of the Western education model, and thinking about the drive you must have had to finish those projects. Who did you have in mind? Who kind of guides your research? And what questions do you ask yourself when you embark upon a new research journey?

MS: Well, when I think about my vision, and my own personal goal, it actually started when I was about 15. I used to ask questions such as, *Why am I on this earth? What's my purpose? What am I supposed to be doing?* You know, all those questions you ask when you're young. And I remember one time sitting in the bush and praying and thinking...because I had lots of chaos happening around me and I wondered, like, *Why am I here? What purposes am I here for? What am I supposed to be doing?* And I wanted to know, *Who am I? Where do I belong?* And then from that question, and from the prayer, I got whisked away to this conference called Morley Economical Conference in Morley, Alberta. And at the time, when I went, I was 15. I drove a van with six Indigenous men, that my mom gave me permission to go to. Because I was the only one with a driver's license, and they needed a driver, and you got paid to do it. So I think I made quite a bit of money doing that. I just saw it as a job, right. And so off I went driving to Alberta, when I was 15, with six men. And while I was there, I learned about our ways; I learned listening to elders. Probably about 60 or more elders came together, and they wanted to do teachings. And I remember thinking, *Well, I'm going to drive there, and then do my homework*. But when I got there, all the men went to listen to the elders that they knew. And a bunch of women picked me up. And they're just like, *Okay, you're coming with us*. So I ended up

listening to a lot of women's teachings. And some of the questions I asked were starting to make sense to me. And in those teachings, they were saying that we've gone through, or we've gone through, because we have to be proud of being Indigenous people. And we have to do work to help people. And at that moment, I thought, *Yeah, that's my purpose, my purpose is to be the best person possible to be able to help people.* And so that's been my purpose for everything that I do is to work in the best possible way with what I have. And to always grow. And I just remember being so fascinated by these women, and just how strong they were, and how caring and gentle and loving they were. And it's something I didn't experience in my own home, because my parents are from residential schools. And because of that, I didn't get the nurturing I needed. And I understand now that they gave me what they could. And I'm grateful for that. They gave me this life, and they gave me purpose. And so when I was listening to these ladies in Morley, it sort of solidified my thinking about what my purpose was in this world. And so I made a conscious decision to try and be a better person. And I think, like, that's why I went to university. And that's why I went for counselling at university. Because I needed it; I needed to be able to cope, because I come from a lot of trauma. And I didn't want that trauma to define me as a person. And I didn't want that trauma to take away from what I believed was my purpose. And so that's been my idea when I work in health—the purpose is to help people and to be kind and gentle and caring in ways that allow them to become the best person that they can become. And I only give what I can, because I can only give what I have. And so yeah, so that's been my thinking, throughout everything that I've done, is to give what I can, because my life is very short here. And I want to have some reason for being. And it's not just about me, but it's about everybody, everyone I come into contact with. And sometimes that journey leads me to people that aren't on the same path as me, but still give me lessons. Yeah.

CN: Mm hmm. Can you talk a bit about your own healing journey and how you came to creativity and art making as part of that healing process?

MS: Well I learned art by doing. I have never been formally trained in art. I used to watch my Nôhkomos—my grandma on my dad's side—doing art. Because she was the environmentalist, ecologist, functional junkist. Because she created function out of what everyone else would see as junk, right? And I used to watch her as a little girl and see her, like, she'd take a jar and she'd paint or she'd stuff it with beans and rice and other things and then she'd give them out as gifts. So she never threw any of these kinds of jars away. And she used them as cups. She never bought cups or glasses. She would just use jars. And I remember she used to fill it with tea and drink it. And I never seen her throw away anything like chip bags or candy wrappers; she would save them in this box. And then probably about November, October, she'd take them out, she'd cleaned them and she'd cut them. And then she'd string them along and she'd make garland. And so that was the Christmas decorations. And then probably by the time she left this earth, everyone in that community had a garland made from her. So she was always doing that and it wasn't until I think I was about 14 or 15, and I remember asking *How come you're always making things, you know?* And she goes, *Well, you know, Earth, the mother, we need to help her.* She never said Mother Earth, she'd say, *Earth, the mother, we need to help her.* And I remember thinking *Oh*, and she goes, *Everyone's throwing this garbage away, she goes, and her belly is getting too full.* She goes, *One day, it's gonna get so full, it's going to cause a lot of*

problems. And she talked like that, eh. And I started thinking about that. And I thought *I could do this too*. And so I started making things and remembering things that she did. And she was so happy that, you know, I made things and I'd show her. And I remember I wanted to learn how to bead. And I remember watching her and I bought some beaded things, and I took them apart. So I could see how it was actually done. So I just learned to bead from watching her and then taking things apart and redoing them. And then I discovered journal writing. In high school, I started learning how to write journals from a class I took. But I realized that I could write my own ideas and thoughts in there. So I used to do that. And at that point, I didn't know that's what reflection was, right? I just thought it was just me writing things. Because I'd have these ideas in my head and I used to write. I never showed anyone and I would write backwards or mirror imaging just because I didn't want anyone to read my stuff. You know, and I had nosey brothers and sisters. And so I used to make up secret words and codes and stuff like that. And that was because I had all these deep thoughts in my head that I wanted answers to, but I was scared to even talk to people about it. And so it wasn't [until], like I said, when I went to Morley that I saw a whole new world. And it helped me solidify my own purpose in life. But I also knew I had to work on myself to get to how I wanted to reach that goal of being a purposeful person. Because when I was younger, right from grade school to high school, I was very quiet. I was very shy. I never talked to people, I kept to myself, I probably had no friends in high school. No—I had no friends in high school! And so I was very studious; I worked hard; I worked after school. You know, I was basically alone. And I was writing in this journal and making up code words. And when I finished high school I travelled. And that was very alone, too. But when I travelled, it opened up my eyes even further, to see how other Indigenous people were treated as compared to Canada. And so I realized that, *OK, one of the things is I have to learn is to have really good pride in who I was as an Indigenous woman*. Because previous to this, I was still...like, it's an idea you have, but the actual action behind it isn't fitting with the idea. So when I was younger, like, I learned that I needed to be proud to be Indigenous, but I didn't know how to do that, what that actually meant. And it wasn't until I travelled that I realized, *Oh, that's what this means* and started to do more reflection and thinking. And came back to Canada and I worked in odd jobs. And when I started university, that's actually where I learned about the history of my people and how residential school was with us and how we lost so many people through diseases. And so it was a real awakening. And because of that internal trauma I had, that's why I started going to counselling because I made the decision to go to university, but I wanted to finish, knowing I knew who I was. But at university, I felt like when I went to university, people wanted me to come to university, but I had to put my culture at the door. But I didn't want to do that. Because I already worked hard to get to, like, what I call baby steps, into recognizing I'm Indigenous, I need to be proud of that. And how do I begin to talk about me as an Indigenous woman, when I feel scared all the time? When I feel inadequate? And when I feel like nobody's listening to me? So that's why I started going for counselling. And I know the creator's looking after me, because I know lots of students that talk about counselling and how they've never felt like they had a good counsellor. But I know that the counsellor I got in university was so helpful. For some reason, we clicked and I was able to talk to that person about, like, how I was feeling and then...I think it was almost three or four months into counselling, that she sat down and she said to me, *You know, Moneca, you've gone through a lot*. And she goes, *Do you know what you've gone through is called trauma?* I was like, *No, I don't know*. And then so she explained to me

what that was, and she gave me some books to read. And so I read them and I started to realize, *Oh, oh, oh!* And so that was like my awakening into understanding, like, how history has influenced who I am and how the present day situation I lived in, was causing me to keep quiet, wasn't causing me to find my voice. And she said, *Once we can pull these layers apart, things may or may not get better for you. But you will be in the same position.* Because I suffered from depression quite a bit when I was in university. Just getting up and going to classes was hard some days. And because I didn't know how to make friends, I didn't have friends. I just studied all the time. And then it wasn't until about maybe third year university, I started actually talking to people. And the counsellor helped me with that. Like she said, *You know, it's a skill to meet people and to get out of your comfort zone.* And I started doing things to get out of my comfort zone. I joined some groups, I joined a walking group, I did Dungeons and Dragons. So I tried different things just to get myself out of that shell that I created. That was my protective shell, right? And so I was like, *Okay, well, if I'm gonna be the best person possible, then I have to get out of this.* And so that's what helped me start to...like the healing journey, I guess, began in writing first, and then being able to talk about it. And then learning about the history of my family and then learning to...In my master's program, I started going to conferences that dealt with the whole issue of residential schools. And through that, I learned about, like the stories my mom went through, because I met women that went to the same residential school as my mom, and they shared some stories about what they went through. And it was really cute because some of the women would go *Probably your mom went through this too.* And I said, *Probably.* I'm really grateful for those women because they helped me understand my mom's story. Because my mom never talked about her experience, right. So yeah, so that's my healing journey through just writing, thinking, creating. I did a lot of poetry writing, a lot of stories, and I did a lot of drawings. And I did that for me, right. I never was public about any of those things. And so I had a lot of boxes of things that I collected over the years. And when my son and I moved back to Winnipeg, from Toronto, we moved into this apartment building and we had a bunch of stuff that I had in storage. And when we moved to the apartment building, all my journals and books and drawings and everything I had, were in about five or six boxes. And when we moved, the boxes that had all my stories and all my personal stuff, those got stolen. Of course someone probably thought, you know, *There's some great stuff in here.* And so it never made its way into the internet, or some site or anything. So it tells me that they probably just looked at it and threw it away. So I'm hoping! But I think about that...and I think, like, when that happened, I remember feeling really devastated. And I remember thinking, *Oh, all my stories, and all my poetry is gone.* And it took me a long time to get back into doing art in that way. Then I started remembering my grandmother, and I remembered her just doing art, like, the way she did. So then I just started doing it the way she did it. My son's 24 now, and it wasn't until he was 14/15, that I let that go. I just said, *Well, the creator felt I was ready for me to let go of those stories and to move into another path.* And so I did a little ceremony for it; I had a fire and I just talked to all those documents that were gone. And I just said, you know, *You helped me through a lot of stuff, but I was having a hard time letting you go.* And so when I did that ceremony, it just, like, lifted me; it helped me peel another onion layer. And so—more healing, right? I realised that, yeah, those stories, and everything did help me, but it was time to move on and move into another direction. And now I can talk about those stories without, like, this feeling of *I'm gonna break down.* Because before I could even talk about those things—I'd start crying, and so...And I realized

that I have to be able to talk about these things in good ways. Because our—my people—Indigenous people, are still suffering. And I've went through all of this stuff, so I could help them because that's been my goal. That's been my vision; that's been my purpose. And upon reflection, I realize those prayers I had when I was 15, are coming to fruition now. And I am now able to talk about the story of my family, and talk about the story of my art and how they all come together, you know, and how everything I've gone through has been a healing journey. And when I do my art, it has a purpose, and I have a different way of doing it now. And so that's my healing journey in a nutshell, in 50 years of living.

CN: Just 50! Your art has a healing quality in that it is vibrant, and it's interactive. And you do, you know, somewhat large-scale public installations, and also you just live such an artful life. I mean, your house is filled with art. Sometimes you're in the stages of collecting all the yellow things, or all the red things or all the blue things. And it's so beautiful to live that creative life. Art isn't something we compartmentalize, where it's only when we have time. But I think that you weave art into your every day. For folks who have never seen your art. Can you talk about it? What does it look like? What materials do you use? And what grounds your art? Why do you make the art that you make?

MS: So I make the art I make because, like I said, I remember watching my Nôhkomos making things, and she was doing things because she wanted to be environmentally-friendly, right? And so I have that same idea that I want to work with the earth and do as much as I can so that my children and my grandchildren will be able to live here and other people's kids can live here. And so that's the idea behind it. The kind of art I do is what people call repurposed art or environmental art. I take found objects—anything from bottle caps to branches on trees and old dead leaves and anything, really—and I make it into something that's beautiful. For example, I will take bottle caps, and I'll string them, and I'll make a picture—like a curtain, and it might have a heart on it. And I made one with a wave. Or I'll take bottle caps, and I'll string them together, and I'll make flowers. Or I take a toilet paper roll, and I make flowers or garland. Or paint them and make them into monsters or creatures. Squish them up and make them into a face. Fold them up and make them into a case. So it's like things that people would normally throw away in the landfill—I'm trying to grab it before it gets there and make it into something that people can enjoy the beauty of it all and...I take old bicycle wheels that probably people would have thrown in the garbage. And I take the spokes out or keep the spokes in and I make windmills out of them using two litre bottles. I'll paint them and then I'll attach them onto the outside of the wheel so they spin...use repurposed or recycled yarn, and I'll weave a design into the spokes and in the wheel itself. And I have those in front of my yard. They're a long pedestal of some sort, and then I stick them in the ground. And so in the winter, in the summer—I keep them all year round. And I like keeping them there because they're colourful, and it's just kind of a reminder to people that you can make art out of pretty well anything. And I make it like that because I want people to touch it. I want people to interact with it. And sometimes I work from home, and I'll be sitting on my porch. And usually, like, in the summertime or springtime...We have a high school close to us. And a lot of the teenagers come by our house. And a few times you can see the teenage boys want to touch the wheels. And then one time, these four of them were there with two other young women and they're playing with the wheel. And the young women are like, *Don't touch*

that. Don't touch it. You're in someone's yard. And they didn't know what was sitting in the veranda because our veranda is covered by trees, so they can't see me. And so I just got up and I said Hi. And they're like, She's here, oh my god! And I said, Oh, don't worry about it. I said No, no, I said, No, you enjoy yourself. I said, That's why it's there, it's for you to have fun with. I said, So you know, if something breaks, don't worry about it, I said, I can fix it. Because they're pieces that if they break, I can fix it and add to it. I don't want people to feel bad about things, right? And I don't want them not to enjoy themselves. To me it's very fascinating and very lovely and very wonderful, when you see these young men trying to be all tough, and you know, and then they see this windmill and they just want to touch it. And so it just gives me great joy to see that. And so now a lot of the kids know that they can touch it, and they will...they'll play with it. And that's why I want to do that: I want to make art interactive, I want to make art where people that touch it. Because so often, art is not accessible to people. And there's these little boys, they're probably two or three years old. And this happened two summers ago, and during the pandemic, and you know, lots of people were walking and just going around the neighbourhood. So I used to be at home and working outside quite a bit. And there was this little boy, I could hear him with his dad. He goes, Let's stop here, Dad, let's stop here! And his dad says Okay, and I could hear them crossing the road and coming to my place and and I just sort of peeked through the bush and, and he goes I just love these lollipops. And so, I, you know, stuck my head out and I said Hi, and the guy said Hi. And he goes My son always wants to come by here. He just loves your art. It's so beautiful. I said, Oh, thank you. And I said, You know if he wants to touch it, he can. And he goes, I want to, I want to! So he took him out of his stroller. And then he was touching the thing and he was putting his cheek against it and was just so sweet. And so yeah, that's what I've always wanted to do. I wanted to create art that people feel okay about touching. And I know as an artist, it's going to break at some point but that's okay. You know, nothing lasts forever and I can fix it. Yeah, so that's the art I do. And again, it's about purpose, right? It's about the goal of allowing people to be the best that they can be and feeling comfortable. Because it's feeding their curiosity. And I don't want to be the artist that stops people from touching the art and interacting with it. Because you know, people are curious. And it doesn't matter how old you are or how young you are, you just have this thing you want to just like, sometimes cuddle something, and touch it and look closely at it. So yeah.

CN: It's an important part of art is to pique that curiosity and invite people in. The last question I had for you is: where do you turn to for hope, Moneca?

MS: Well, for me, I do everything with the idea for the next people behind me, and the next people ahead of me. And my hope is that how I am as a person is good enough for myself. And my hope is within me. And it comes from that higher source, that higher power, the Creator, who lets me know, when I'm on the right path, through signs and dreams and visions. And I remember...I was married, and I made the decision to leave my husband, which meant financial insecurity, because I wasn't working. That's when I was doing my PhD. And so my son and I stayed in a shelter for a couple months until I could get a job and figure things out. And I remember thinking, *I should have just stayed with him and things wouldn't be so bad.* But I also was thinking, *Things are bad and I don't want to raise my son in that environment.* So the moment I said, *No, I'm glad to make this decision. And yeah things are tough right now. But they*

won't be always tough. Somehow things will work out. And so I have this strong faith that things will work out. And so I remember the moment I said that, and every day, for the next three years, I would receive a dime on the ground. And so I used to pick it up and I had this little change purse I kept, so I'd always keep those dimes. I didn't know what they were. And I just found it curious and...why am I seeing...there's like 1000s of people in Toronto, but I'm seeing a dime on the ground. So I thought, *Well, I better pick it up,* because it was so shiny, right? And so I picked it up and it happened again, and it kept happening. And I was just like *What the heck?* And then I moved to Winnipeg, and then the dime thing stopped. My son at that point was 12. And I went to this healing conference with my cousin. And one of the speakers said, *When we're at our lowest, sometimes we feel like no one is there listening to us. How you know, that the higher power is listening, is that money will be given to in your path, but it's not going to be big money, it's just going to be little reminders.* And she goes, *And the biggest one is if you receive a dime.* I was like *Holy fuck, I received dimes for three years, every day!* I just looked at my cousin and she looked at me because she knew that story, right? And we were both just like, *Oh, my God!* And so we went and we talked to the speaker about what happened. And she goes, *Well, there you go. And here you are, right, because things worked out.* And I said, *Yeah,* and she goes, *That's you, that's your own inner hope, telling you that things are going to be right. And you listened to it. And you kept going, despite all the things that you were going through.* And I thought, *Yeah.* That's inner hope. That's the thing that keeps me going is that hope and strong faith. It's an invisible force, right? You can't see it, you can't touch it, you can't feel it. But you just have to have faith that it's there and, and that things will work out. And it's only upon reflection that we realize that we go through things, because it's bringing us to a point where they want to bring us and I just thought, *Oh yeah,* because I was going back to when I was young when I set those prayers in motion. When I asked for that help. So here I am, 55 years later, getting my prayers answered. And along the way have asked for more prayers. And the more prayers I ask, the more things will happen. Yeah, it's just my unwavering faith that someone is looking out for me and that I have decisions I have to make every day but they're always going to be good decisions. Doesn't matter what decision I make because it's going to get me to the point of where I need to be. Maybe they had the trajectory, I was gonna go from A-B-C, but somewhere along the line, I went A-B, oh, I took a detour, went to D! But it's gonna get me to the same point, which is ultimately, death. You know, eventually we're all going to die and leave this earth, but we might as well enjoy the ride while we can. Make the mistakes, make the wrong decisions, feel the fear and do it anyway. You know, we live in a world that's created really a lot of fear-based...like, we're afraid to go out; we're afraid to travel; we're afraid to meet new people; we're afraid and afraid and afraid. And sometimes I just say, *Oh, eff that, I'm just going to do it.* You know, that's the point where I'm in my life. It's just like, yeah, I don't really think there's any bad decisions we can make in life. And everything has a purpose. And I'm good with that.

CN: Mm hmm. You mentioned prayers. And I know we've talked about this before—could you talk a little bit about the role that prayer plays in your everyday life?

MS: Oh, it plays a big role in my life. When I wake up in the morning, first thing I say is *Good morning Creator. Thank you for giving me another earth day on this earth life and for giving me*

breath. I start my day with gratitude. And then I go to the bathroom and I look in the mirror and I just look at myself and I say, *Okay, today is going to be another beautiful day. Today is going to be a day of learning. Today is going to be a day of reflection. Today is going to be a beautiful day—you beautiful person.* And then when I find things, I give thanks for that. I say *Thank you for having this—say—rock in my path. Thank you for that creator.* And I carry tobacco with me. And I'll just put tobacco back on the earth. Because when you receive something, you have to give something back. And if I don't have tobacco, I'll just take some of my hair and I'll put it down. Yeah, so it's just always saying my prayers, like...and they're mostly of gratitude and thanking and...Like, even this water, I say *Thank you water for nurturing me* and...Because it's a life force, right? So anything that I get that I wasn't expecting, I give thanks for it right away now, and...And it's a practice I've been doing for probably over 20 years now, once I became conscious of it. And because I'm doing that, I think a lot of these things happen. Like I never, in my wildest dreams, thought that I would be displaying my art, you know. And I never thought in my wildest dreams that people would actually give me money for my art, and would be interested in knowing how I do my art right? This shy, quiet little girl is here and I'm ready to do the best I can with people. And that's all through the whole notion of prayer and just being thankful and having so much gratitude. Like I'm grateful to be on this show. Like someone wants to take the time out to come and talk to me? Wow, that's awesome!

[Music: Ascending, bright, twinkly, uplifting, electronic]

CN: Our guest today was Moneca Sinclair. You can find her on instagram at [@moneca_sinclair](#). Go take a look at her beautiful sculptural works, drawings, installations, collages, beading, and much more.

On Being III is researched, recorded and produced on the traditional, unceded and treaty lands of Indigenous peoples across what is now contemporary Canada where each of us on the show is grateful to live and work. Please visit our website to learn more about our relationships with the lands and the peoples who live on them.

This show is produced by me, Coco Nielsen, alongside Emily Blyth, and executive produced by Emilia Nielsen.

Prince Shima creates all of the music you hear on the show. You can find him on bandcamp [@PrinceShima](#).

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If you liked this episode, check out more at [EmiliaNielsen.com](#) or wherever you listen to podcasts. And if you'd like to get in touch with us, please write to OnBeingIIIPodcast@gmail.com. We'd love to hear from you.

Until next time, let's create, converse, and crip the system together!

[Music rises in crescendo then fades out]

[End of transcript]