

Sidedoor Season 6 Ep. 3 Reservation Math Navigating Love in Native America Final Transcription

Lizzie Peabody: A note, in this episode, we talk about the colonial roots of a phenomenon that affects native and Indigenous nations. We're sharing this story from the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian, with the help of experts from different Native American communities.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: This is Sidedoor, a podcast from the Smithsonian with support from PRX. I'm Lizzie Peabody.

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Lizzie Peabody: Tailyr Irvine started hunting with her dad when she was just four or five years old. And when she shot her first deer, she took a bite of the liver.

Lizzie Peabody: And what does it taste like?

Tailyr Irvine: Metallic. What a bloody nose kind of tastes like in the back of your throat, and you're just like, "Oh." And it's not a huge bite, it's just a little nibble. (Laughs).

Lizzie Peabody: And it's a symbolic thing.

Tailyr Irvine: It's important in our culture, it's what we've done and what we always do.

Lizzie Peabody: The woods and prairies where Tailyr grew up hunting are in Montana on the Flathead Indian reservation, Indigenous homelands of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes. So, you say C-S-K-T for short?

Tailyr Irvine: Yeah, because it's a mouthful. (Laughs).

Lizzie Peabody: Tailyr is a member of C.S.K.T., and hunting was a big part of her family life growing up.

Tailyr Irvine: Me, my whole family, we'd go out hunting together. And I think it's less of... like, when I think of hunting, I don't think of the actual like, shooting an animal part. It's more of the car rides and hanging out. And growing up, we always had freezers full of meat, and it wasn't like hunting is this extra-curricular activity. It's just part of our family dynamic.

Lizzie Peabody: Tailyr's father and grandfather, Sila, in the Salish language, made their living in the woods. That's where Tailyr and her brother learned the tribe's creation stories as they gathered medicinal roots and berries.

Tailyr Irvine: Growing up that way with just your dad and your Sila in the woods, there were just moments that really stick with you. And that become important, I think, especially my brother. I think it really made him... I think it really shaped who he is a person.

[MUSIC]

Michael Irvine: Those childhood memories have sculpted me to be who I am today. Without those memories, I don't think I would be the same person.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: This is Tailyr's brother, Michael. He sat down with Tailyr in their childhood home for an interview.

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Michael Irvine: Being out in the woods and hunting and learning all these different things, gives you a respect, I guess. Respecting the animals, respecting the area that you're hunting in. Just being able to ground yourself out there. When you're stressed out, you can go... You have a place to go do that. It's a safe place, basically.

[MUSIC]

[BABY SOUNDS]

Lizzie Peabody: Michael is a father now. His daughter Nizhóní is just over a year old.

Michael Irvine: She's getting a little loud.

[MUSIC]

[BABY SOUNDS]

Tailyr Irvine: She's getting rowdy now. Oh, she's walking so good. Come here Nizhóní!

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: Michael would love for his daughter to grow up knowing the woods the way he does, to have that safe space where she can go ground herself or to hunt, but she won't be able to. For her, it's against the law.

Michael Irvine: Legally, she won't be able to do that because she isn't a tribal member. She'll be a child of an enrolled member, that isn't enough to be a tribal member themselves. They're just not native enough.

Lizzie Peabody: Not native enough according to her blood quantum. And blood quantum is a complicated idea, but here it means Nizhóní doesn't have enough Salish and Kootenai ancestry to be able to enroll as a tribal citizen. And that means that even though she was born on the same reservation as her dad, and she'll grow up in the same house where he did, she won't be allowed to hunt or gather on tribal lands.

Tailyr Irvine: Yeah, and there's something really powerful about standing in the same place as your ancestor and knowing that they've done the exact same thing that you're doing right now. And it's... It's really special. But again, you have to have access to that land.

Lizzie Peabody: Not having access to tribal land is one of many ways blood quantum can impact the lives of young Native Americans. And Tailyr is documenting this impact through photography. Her photo essay, "Reservation Mathematics: Navigating Love in Native America," is part of a series of photo exhibitions currently online at the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian. Through her work, Tailyr's goal is to show what is otherwise invisible, blood quantum.

Tailyr Irvine: Its like, how do you photograph blood quantum? How do you photograph something that doesn't exist? How do you make that visual?

Cécile Ganteaume: The very notion of blood quantum is a very difficult idea today for non-Native Americans to grasp.

Lizzie Peabody: Cécile Ganteaume is Curator of the exhibition.

Cécile Ganteaume: But this subject of Tailyr's is one that has a long, and frankly, racist history. It's a not so pretty part of the quote American experience. And it was for that reason that we thought we should be presenting this story to the American public.

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Lizzie Peabody: Through her photography, Tailyr shows how our colonial history continues to assert itself in the most private decisions of family life, including her own family.

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Cécile Ganteaume: We wanted to present this story because of the impact that blood quantum is having on the personal lives of Native Americans. It's disrupting their personal lives in a way that no other Americans' personal lives are interfered with.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: This time on Sidedoor, blood quantum: where it came from, how it endures and why it threatens the future of many Native communities today? How a mathematical expression touches the very core of something unquantifiable: identity, after the break.

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Lizzie Peabody: Even if you're not a member of the Native Community, you're probably still familiar with the concept of blood quantum. You may have used the phrase full-blooded without even thinking about it.

Tailyr Irvine: The only other things in America that use blood quantum are pedigrees with horses and dogs. And so, you have horses, dogs, and then you have Native American, where a full breed is considered a good thing, which is such a bizarre concept.

Lizzie Peabody: To get oriented in the world of blood quantum, a quick math lesson. Blood quantum is about fractions. Let's say a quote unquote full-blooded tribal member has a child with a non-native person. Their child would have a blood quantum of one-half tribal blood. If that

person had a kid with a non-native person, their child would have a blood quantum of one quarter. But here's the thing, this notion of quantifying tribal ancestry has nothing to do with Native American culture.

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Tailyr Irvine: Because historically, tribes have always intermarried, and when someone left one tribe to marry into another, they became part of that tribe and their kid is part of that tribe.

Lizzie Peabody: So, blood quantum, it was not a thing in pre-colonial America?

David Wilkins: No. I mean, for native people, genealogy mattered intensely, but that wasn't the way your identity was defined necessarily.

Lizzie Peabody: This is David Wilkins. He's a Political Scientist at the University of Richmond, and a member of the Lumbee Nation. He says historically, tribal identity wasn't just about lineage.

David Wilkins: It was all about kinship, is the way it's best understood. And the word kinship is an all-encompassing term that embraces not only your immediate blood kin, but the people that you are married or connected to, your friends.

Lizzie Peabody: Even sometimes, your enemies.

David Wilkins: People would be captured in spats. They became indoctrinated in the values of that community and their allegiance became to that community. And that determined their identity.

Lizzie Peabody: David says this notion of blood quantum arrived in America with the Europeans.

David Wilkins: The European heads of state were very keen on heredity. Right? Having the right kind of blood before they could ascend to the throne. And they brought that with them when they came to the Americas. Virginia was actually the first colony to introduce blood quantum for African-Americans and for native peoples in the state.

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Lizzie Peabody: But blood quantum didn't apply to African-Americans and Native Americans in the same way.

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David Wilkins: And that's where it gets interesting. The planters and the elites wanted more slaves. Right? And so, they adopted the one drop rule. Right? Anybody with one drop could be determined to be African-American. How one determined that one drop is anybody's guess, but that was the designation that they used, because you needed more slaves to keep the plantation system alive, and so on.

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Lizzie Peabody: Right. One drop of black blood made you black. Native peoples on the other hand could only get less native. The child of a native and a non-native person was called a half-breed. And this was by design.

[MUSIC]

David Wilkins: So, the fewer Indians we have, the better. The more blacks we have, the better.

Lizzie Peabody: Hmm.

David Wilkins: And so, radical divergence and the way the blood was used.

Lizzie Peabody: So, to put it bluntly, the system was structured to create more black people and fewer Indigenous people because that's what benefited white people.

[MUSIC]

David Wilkins: Precisely, precisely. Yeah.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: Blood quantum, as government policy, evolved gradually, but the project of eliminating Native Americans began pretty much from the moment Europeans arrived in North America. It started with genocide, wars, deliberate spread of disease and driving tribes off their native lands onto reservations. But in the late 1800s, as the bloody removal period drew to a close, the project of elimination continued on paper through assimilationist policies meant to absorb Native Americans into mainstream culture. That's where the Dawes Act comes in.

David Wilkins: See, the Dawes Act is a critical law, designed to be the ultimate weapon to assimilate Indigenous peoples.

Lizzie Peabody: In 1887, Congress passed the Dawes Act, which took reservation lands communally held by tribes, and broke them into smaller pieces of private land, or allotments, to distribute among individual Native Americans, which meant the government needed a list of Native Americans. So, they sent agents out to reservations, basically to do a roll call.

David Wilkins: When you look at the roles, the so-called Dawes Roles, you see the agents sometimes listing that such and such was four fourths, or one half or 1/32. So, it begins to pop up.

Lizzie Peabody: Four fourths for full-blooded, one half for half-blooded and so on. Not all names had blood quantum fractions associated with them on the Dawes Rolls, but this was the start of something that would become more and more common in the coming years. Because throughout this assimilation period, as reservation lands were carved up and doled out, the federal government assured recipients that their property would be protected. But little by little, the goalpost for that protection began to move. And in 1917, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs is like, "Actually, we're only going to protect your land if you have more than one half Native American blood." If you had less than one half native blood...

David Wilkins: You were on your own, you no longer had any federal protection. Your lands were deluged by land speculators and state officials, all wanting to gain title to your allotment.

Lizzie Peabody: You lost your federal protections.

David Wilkins: Exactly.

Lizzie Peabody: So, one half blood quantum becomes this official benchmark.

David Wilkins: Any Indian who was determined to have more than one half Indian blood will still be considered an incompetent Indian.

Lizzie Peabody: Did you say incompetent?

David Wilkins: Yeah, incompetent.

Lizzie Peabody: Legally incompetent, and therefore deserving of protection by the government. It was racist and paternalistic and bad. To determine who was competent and who was not, the commissioner sent competency commissions, trooping out to size people up.

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David Wilkins: Those competency commissions were critical. And it was completely up to the competency commission to decide who they thought had more than one half or less than one half Indian blood.

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Lizzie Peabody: And if you're wondering how they did it, well...

David Wilkins: By looking at you. Right? (Laughs).

Lizzie Peabody: (Gaps).

David Wilkins: It was just ludicrous. White people in the federal government thought that they knew what an Indian was supposed to look like. Right? They were supposed to have long, black, straight hair. And they were supposed to have cheek bones and high arch noses, all these physical features that were assumed to be representative of Indigenous people. Although they're not, that was the assumption at the time.

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Lizzie Peabody: Through the early 1900s, blood quantum became a cost saving tool for the federal government, because by setting this arbitrary fraction, the government empowered itself to decide exactly how many Native Americans lived in the country.

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David Wilkins: I found congressional testimony where the Congressman would be talking to the BIA officials...

Lizzie Peabody: Bureau of Indian Affairs.

David Wilkins: Saying how much money will we save by reducing the number of Indians that we provide educational services and benefits to. And so, they were talking about that, so we know that it was a cost benefit measure.

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Lizzie Peabody: By 1934, federal assimilation policies had brought havoc to Native communities. 90 million acres of native lands had been taken, and David Wilkins says there probably wouldn't be any left today if not for a man named John Collier.

David Wilkins: John Collier really deserves credit for having saved what was left of the Indian land estate. Right? We were down to 4% of our lands by 1934.

Lizzie Peabody: As the new Commissioner of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, John Collier turned the tide of federal Indian relations with a sweeping piece of legislation called the Indian Reorganization Act, or IRA for short. It was a huge deal. The IRA acknowledged tribal right to self-governance, and encouraged tribes to create their own constitutions, which meant for the first time, many tribes were now putting their own tribal citizenship requirements in writing.

Desi Rodriguez-Lonebear: Blood quantum became institutionalized at the tribal level through these Indian Reorganization Act tribal constitutions.

Lizzie Peabody: This is Desi Rodriguez-Lonebear. She's a social demographer and Assistant Professor of Sociology and American Indian Studies at UCLA, and a citizen of the Northern Cheyenne Nation and Chicana.

Lizzie Peabody: Desi says the Indian Reorganization Act was the critical moment when many tribes formally adopted blood quantum as their own benchmark for tribal citizenship. While there was no requirement that tribes adopt blood quantum in their own governing documents, the federal government clearly defined Native American as, "Persons of one half or more Indian blood." So, without following that lead, tribes had reason to be fearful.

David Wilkins: Fearful of federal agencies who might say, "Hey, you're moving away from the criteria that we think matter. If you do that, we're going to cut you off. We're going to terminate federal services to you."

Lizzie Peabody: There's this looming specter of the loss of government money.

David Wilkins: Yeah, exactly.

Desi Rodriguez-Lonebear: That was really how blood quantum came to be really structured into the fabric of tribal government.

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Lizzie Peabody: In order to protect themselves, tribes took up the very same tool that had been weaponized against them by the federal government, and they made it their own.

[MUSIC]

Desi Rodriguez-Lonebear: So, this notion of blood quantum, it was used to racialize us into a category that the federal government could use. Use for its purposes. And so now, the retention of it is at the hands of tribal nations. And tribal nations have that right to determine whether to retain it or not, despite all of the problems that come with it.

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Lizzie Peabody: Coming up after a quick break, the problems that come with blood quantum, and how photographer, Tailyr Irvine, exposes them to the light.

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Lizzie Peabody: We're back. And we're talking about blood quantum, the subject of Tailyr Irvine's photo essay displayed at the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian. We just learned about the roots of blood quantum, how it became the federal government's tool to define who was Native American, and how fear of losing government resources led many Native nations to make blood quantum part of their own constitutions in the 1930s. But almost a century later, blood quantum has not gone away. In fact, when we spoke on the phone, you said that blood quantum is the most contentious subject in Indian country.

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Desi Rodriguez-Lonebear: Blood quantum is absolutely the most contentious topic in Indian country because it directly impacts all aspects of our life.

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Lizzie Peabody: Social demographer, Desi Rodriguez-Lonebear recently completed a study of how federally recognized tribes in the continental U.S. determine tribal citizenship.

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Desi Rodriguez-Lonebear: 58% of the tribes in my study use some sort of blood quantum rule, so that's more than half.

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Lizzie Peabody: But the minimum blood quantum requirement varies among tribes.

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Desi Rodriguez-Lonebear: There are tribes that use 5/8 blood quantum, which is on the strict end. There are tribes that are down to 1/32 blood quantum.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: But not all tribes use blood quantum in the same way. Some tribes count all native blood toward their blood quantum requirement, while others count only their tribal blood. So, there's a lot of diversity in how blood quantum is used, but overall...

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Desi Rodriguez-Lonebear: We're still seeing the fact that blood quantum remains the primary means of identifying who belongs to a tribal nation.

Lizzie Peabody: But why would so many native nations carry forth this colonial way of deciding who belongs? Tribes have the power to change the rules, so why don't they?

Ruth Swaney: It might've been suggested that the federal government has forced this upon us, it was their idea. I'm going to say, well, we bought into it pretty well, (laughs), because we've been unable to shake it off and do anything different for quite a while.

Lizzie Peabody: This is Ruth Swaney. She's the Tribal Budget Director for the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes. And C.S.K.T. is among the majority of tribes that still have a blood quantum requirement. Ruth says, like many others, C.S.K.T. adopted blood quantum shortly after the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934.

Ruth Swaney: Once our tribe organized itself, they began to be able to make decisions about their own resources. So, by 1935, the Kerr Dam was built on the Flathead River, so the tribe was already coming into resources that they could make available to distribute to the members. And the leaders felt that as leaders they need to provide for their people as they'd always traditionally done. Well, the question is, who should receive these funds?

Lizzie Peabody: Now, tribal citizenship was also about who got paid.

Ruth Swaney: The council members wanted to make a per capita payment. And this was in 1941. And we'd like to pay out \$25. Now, \$25 in 1941 is the same as almost \$400 today. That coincidentally is how much our tribe pays three times a year, and it's per capita.

Lizzie Peabody: Today, C.S.K.T.'s constitution requires one quarter Salish and Kootenai blood to enroll as a tribal citizen. And that citizenship carries certain rights, the right to hunt on tribal lands, for example, but also economic benefits like the per capita payment, job opportunities and access to academic scholarships. Ruth says it's these economic factors that make changing the blood quantum requirement especially difficult, because it means sharing tribal resources that already feel scarce.

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Lizzie Peabody: But on the other hand, blood quantum poses an existential threat to the future of C.S.K.T. A demographic study back in the '90s reported that if the blood quantum requirement doesn't change, in a few generations, the tribal population will begin to shrink. But even after that study, nothing happened.

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Ruth Swaney: The council at that time, just kind of accepted the report and did nothing. And you know, when you're looking at 1995 and the guy's telling you, "Well, a hundred years from now," you just... well, I don't care. (Laughs).

Lizzie Peabody: It must be hard in the same way that action toward climate change is hard. It's hard to take action now in ways that cost us in order to...

Ruth Swaney: Right.

Lizzie Peabody: ...take care of an issue that feels like it's off in the distance somewhere.

Ruth Swaney: I like that analogy because that is exactly why we need to discuss our enrollment issue. What sort of a future are we making for our children and their children?

Lizzie Peabody: Tailyr Irvine is already living this future. And the question, what about our children? This is the question that sparked her documentary photo project. The idea for the project began when she was away at college.

Tailyr Irvine: So, when you live on a reservation, you don't really feel like a minority because you're surrounded by your people. And your family and your friends are all Native. But when I left for college, it was a culture shock. (Laughs). The more I was around non-Natives, the more I realized how bizarre blood quantum was because other college kids could just date whoever.

Lizzie Peabody: Hmm.

Tailyr Irvine: And yeah, I think dating within your culture isn't... That pressure isn't just for Natives. I think all cultures feel that. I think the only thing is that like, the pressure of, if you don't do this, you're tribe will die out.

Lizzie Peabody: So, does blood quantum effect who you choose to date?

Tailyr Irvine: It used to.

Lizzie Peabody: Hmm.

Tailyr Irvine: My first like, adult relationship, it was with another man from my tribe, and we dated for four years. And no, we weren't related, we weren't cousins. (Laughs).

Lizzie Peabody: (Laughs).

Tailyr Irvine: And he was enrolled, so that's the only two check marks you have basically. (Laughs).

Lizzie Peabody: Not a cousin and enrolled.

Tailyr Irvine: (Laughs). Yeah.

Lizzie Peabody: Tailyr's blood quantum is 7/16 Salish and Kootenai, meaning her partner would need to be enrolled for their child to enroll.

Tailyr Irvine: And it kind of reached a point where I felt like I could either decide to stay here and date an enrolled member and have an enrolled child and do that for my tribe. Or I could go out into the world, which is what I really wanted to do.

Lizzie Peabody: Tailyr says blood quantum is a big part of the reason she's decided not to have kids, but her brother Michael has made a different choice. That's because in high school he met Leah, and he was smitten.

[MUSIC]

Michael Irvine: Her hair was really, really long.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: Here he is telling Tailyr about when they first met.

[MUSIC]

Michael Irvine: I'm talking like longer than anybody else in the school. Well past her lower back.

[MUSIC]

Leah Nelson: I cut it. (Laughs).

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: That's Leah.

Leah Nelson: I think the first time I saw him, he was walking down the hallway. You were giving just everybody high-fives.

[MUSIC]

Tailyr Irvine: Something you would do often. (Laughs).

Leah Nelson: Yeah.

Michael Irvine: Every day. (Laughs).

Tailyr Irvine: (Laughs).

Leah Nelson: (Laughs).

Michael Irvine: I might've been known as the high-five guy.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: Their relationship began in that quintessentially high school way. You know, talking on the phone.

[MUSIC]

Michael Irvine: For like hours about absolutely nothing.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: Their first Christmas together, Michael got Leah a giant Teddy bear. And on Christmas day, he got in his truck to drive it over to her house.

[MUSIC]

Michael Irvine: And my truck wouldn't start. And I was like, "Well, I can't give her a present on any other day, but Christmas." So, I grabbed some gloves, I grabbed my boots, I got all bundled up and I walked across town. And it was like a four-foot bear. So, most of the way I ended up kinda like hugging it down the road, (laughs), arms around the bear, like carrying it down the road.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: This bear was large enough to draw the attention of passersby, including Leah's sister-in-law who was driving by in her van. Back at the house...

[MUSIC]

Leah Nelson: She was like, "There was some guy carrying like this huge stuffed animal down the road. And we just drove past him." I was like, "Huh."

[MUSIC]

Michael Irvine: I do not tell her I was on my way over.

Leah Nelson: I didn't think anything of it. (Laughs). I was like super surprised. (Laughs).

Tailyr Irvine: What'd you get him?

[MUSIC]

Leah Nelson: I gave him a kiss. (Laughs).

Tailyr Irvine: (Laughs).

Michael Irvine: Worth it. It was the first kiss.

Tailyr Irvine: (Laughs).

Leah Nelson: (Laughs).

Tailyr Irvine: Really?

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: Michael says at this point he was already in love.

[MUSIC]

Michael Irvine: I mean, you got to love somebody to walk in single digit weather across town. (Laughs).

[MUSIC]

Tailyr Irvine: He loved her then.

[MUSIC]

Michael Irvine: I've always loved her.

[MUSIC]

Tailyr Irvine: Did you guys ever talk about blood quantum as something you ever thought about when you started dating?

Leah Nelson: I just never really thought about it. Didn't seem like a big problem to me until I wanted to have a kid. (Laughs). And then just realizing how big it would be for her to not be able to legally do a lot of stuff here in the tribe.

Lizzie Peabody: Leah is Native too. She's a citizen of the Navajo Nation, and her Navajo blood quantum is $\frac{3}{4}$, but her Navajo blood doesn't count towards C.S.K.T.'s blood quantum requirement. And that means that their daughter, Nizhóní's blood quantum falls $\frac{3}{128}$ short of the $\frac{1}{4}$ minimum. $\frac{3}{128}$. The number is calculated based on the records of the tribal enrollment office. Tailyr's photo essay shows a picture of Michael and Leah looking at the blood quantum numbers of Nizhóní's Salish and Kootenai relatives dating back to the original rolls of the allotment period, over a hundred years ago. Today, as a non-member, Nizhóní will have to live differently from enrolled members of her family. There are some places on the reservation where she isn't legally allowed to go. She can't gather traditional medicines in the forest, and she can't hunt on tribal lands. And that matters to Michael.

Michael Irvine: I just feel like the relationship she's going to have with the woods is going to differ from mine because she won't be able to have the experiences that I've had out there.

Tailyr Irvine: And it's not just about hanging out with family, there's a lot of passing on traditions. It's the first bite of a liver. (Laughs).

Michael Irvine: (Laughs). Yeah, just her getting to know her roots.

Lizzie Peabody: It's possible that C.S.K.T.'s tribal council might change the blood quantum requirement in the coming years, but Ruth says while the question comes up almost every year, she doubts she'll see a change in her lifetime.

Ruth Swaney: So, every odd year is our election year, and invariably at least one candidate, or incumbent, will maintain that this year they will get things moving on changing enrollment. But they never commit to what they will change or how, and it immediately invites controversy, because there's always going to be the set of folks in our tribe that will say, "I don't want anything to change. It should stay just how it is."

Lizzie Peabody: The Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes are not alone. Desi Rodriguez-Lonebear says blood quantum is a pressing issue for native nations across the country.

Desi Rodriguez-Lonebear: At the individual level, the family level, the tribal level and the nationwide level. I mean, it impacts how we can identify as an individual, as part of a bigger family or extended family. The very real implication is that if we don't have a child with somebody who has the right blood, that child's future will be in limbo with respect to their identity. And identity is so important for Indigenous Peoples.

Lizzie Peabody: And so emotional.

Desi Rodriguez-Lonebear: Oh, it's so emotional.

Lizzie Peabody: That's just the thing that really gets me. It comes down to math, but anytime you combine math with something that's so emotional, it just seems like such an impossible equation.

Desi Rodriguez-Lonebear: Oh yeah. And people talk about math and statistics and numbers as though they're objective. They're not objective. Absolutely not. Math and statistics and numbers emerge out of a context, a social and political context that is shaped by power.

[MUSIC]

Tailyr Irvine: We work really hard to protect what we have and we've fought for it for the last 100 years to keep what we have safe. It's just very complicated when you're part of a marginalized group. And when you've been colonized, it's really hard to erase the hand print that it leaves on the community,

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: That hand print looks different in every community and every family. For the Irvines, it means that even though Nizhóní will grow up in the culture of her father's tribe, she's not an enrolled tribal member. And Michael's already thinking about how to explain that to her.

[MUSIC]

Michael Irvine: So, being told that you're something, and then being excluded from it, I mean, that's really confusing. (Laughs). So, being told that you're Native, but you can't go do Native things. How do you explain that to a child?

[MUSIC]

Tailyr Irvine: She's a really small fraction, sure, and won't be able to participate in the culture, even though she'll be raised here by a father who is part of this tribe. And she will be part of this tribe, just not legally.

[MUSIC]

Michael Irvine: Yeah, because of some made up numbers.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: You've been listening to Sidedoor, a podcast from the Smithsonian, with support from PRX.

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Lizzie Peabody: You can find Tailyr Irvine's photo essay, "Reservation Mathematics: Navigating Love in Native America" on the website of the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian. It's part of a series of photo exhibitions called, "Developing stories, Native Photographers In the Field." The exhibition showcases the work of young Native American photographers representing thought provoking portraits of what it means to be Native in the United States today.

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Cécile Ganteaume: These photographers are implanting, if you will, new images of Native Americans, images of Native Americans that show them living their lives today.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: We'll include a direct link to the exhibition in our show notes, and our newsletter. Subscribe at si.edu/sidedoor. There are a lot of people we'd like to thank for their help and support in creating this episode.

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Lizzie Peabody: Thanks to journalist, Jenni Monet for her guidance and incredible expertise. Her weekly newsletter, "Indigenously: Decolonizing Your Newsfeed" is informative and insightful, and we'll include a link in our newsletter. Newsletters galore!

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: Thanks also to Matika Wilbur and Adrienne Keene, whose podcast, "All My Relations" is a great source of more information about blood quantum, as well as a whole host of other topics. Their work informed our research, and we'll include a link to their podcast in the newsletter as well.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: Thanks to Professor David Wilkins and tech support aficionado, Shelly Wilkins, Professor Desi Rodriguez-Lonebear, Ellie Bundy, Ruth Swaney, Leah Nelson, Michael Irvine, and of course, Tailyr Irvine. Thanks also to Cécile Ganteaume and Becky Haberacker of NMAI.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: Our podcast team is Justin O'Neill, Nathalie Boyd, Ann Conanan, Caitlin Shaffer, Tami O'Neill, Jess Sadeq, Lara Koch and Sharon Bryant. Episode artwork is by Dave Leonard. Extra support comes from Jason and Genevieve at PRX. Our show is mixed by Tarek Fouda. Our theme song and episode music are by Breakmaster Cylinder.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: If you want to sponsor our show, please email sponsorship@prx.org.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: I'm your host, Lizzie Peabody. Thanks for listening.

[MUSIC]