

## **Melungeon Voices Podcast Season Five Transcript, Episode Three: Chief Deanna Wood-Priddy**

**Frederick Murphy:** This is Frederick Murphy, honored to be part of season one of the Melungeon Voices Podcast, wishing the Melungeon Heritage Association a happy fifth anniversary season on Melungeon Voices.

**Lis Malone:** This is the Melungeon Voices Podcast, presented by the Melungeon Heritage Association. My name is Lis Malone, and it is my weekly pleasure to introduce the president of the Melungeon Heritage Association, Heather Andolina. Heather, episode three.

How are you feeling so far? Good.

**Heather Andolina:** I think it's going very well.

**Lis:** Once again, these seasons are moving at a very fast clip, already three, not quite through midway points, but getting pretty darn close. So, isn't it a little strange to now go from multiple guests down to one this week?

**Heather:** I know. It does feel weird.

**Lis:** However, a very powerful solo voice for this week, I must say. So, before we talk about this week's guest, I know that you have some very interesting updates to give to everybody about some of the prior guests that we've had on the podcast.

**Heather:** Yes, I do, Lis. Last week, we spoke with the organizers of the upcoming exhibit, Generations, an Indigenous Exhibit. And we wanted to share updates on how several of our former podcast guests will be taking part in showcasing some of their important work at the Cain Center for the Arts.

Frederick Murphy from Season 1, along with Kimberly Knight from Season 2, will be showing their fascinating documentary, Duality, a collection of Afro-Indigenous perspectives. Beverly Scarlett from Season 1, will be sharing her presentation on ribbon skirts as part of the exhibit offerings. Latonya Beatty from Season 2 of Melungeon Voices will be captivating attendees with a performance. And Ramona Moore Big Eagle, our guest from Season 3, will be performing and sharing the art of Indigenous storytelling.

**Lis:** Thank you, Heather. And that is a fascinating lineup of exhibits that are going to be a part of the upcoming presentation of Generations, an Indigenous exhibit at the Cain Center for the Arts. If you missed last week's episode, please be sure to tune in so you can learn all about the offerings of the exhibit and this amazing partnership between the MHA and three very important players in the community that we spoke with as well as the Cain Center.

This is so exciting to actually have former podcast guests also a part of this exhibit. It's going to be incredible. It just shows you how the Melungeon Voices podcast has the finger on the pulse of all things multi-ethnic, Melungeon and mixed ancestry. Bravo.

**Heather:** So true, Lis.

**Lis:** And so now let's get into this week's episode. And I'm going to turn this over to you. Heather, tell us all about our guest for episode three.

**Heather:** All right. Thank you, Lis. Chief Deanna Wood-Priddy is the mother of two beautiful daughters and has been married 12 years to her childhood sweetheart.

She is an author, singer, songwriter, minister, chief, mother and wife, and Banana Dee to her grandchildren. She is the author of the book *Unraveled and made Whole Again*, and is working on making her book into a movie. Chief Deanna is a regional chief of the Tsalagiya Ngvadi Texas Cherokee Tribal Nation.

In today's discussion, Chief Deanna Wood-Priddy will be sharing her discovery of her Melungeon heritage, what inspired her to write a book about her life story, and how she became a chief of a tribal nation.

**Lis:** And thank you so much, Heather, and let's all listen in.

**Heather:** Hello, Chief Deanna, and welcome to the Melungeon Voices Podcast.

**Chief Deanna Wood-Priddy:** Hello, thank you for having me. I'm glad to be here.

**Heather:** I'm going to start off, as I always do, with the question, when was the first time you heard the term Melungeon or learned of the Melungeon people?

**Chief Deanna:** Wow, I'm going to say probably around 2004, 2005. When I was doing a real intense family genealogy, it's probably the first time I heard it.

**Heather:** Really?

**Chief Deanna:** Yes, yes. One reason is because my father had what I've heard of as the Melungeon bump on the back of his head, because I would cut his hair and asked him about it. He said the doctor had said it was hereditary, nothing to worry about, but he did not know what it was.

And so, after his passing in 95 later, like I said, 2004, 2005 is when I learned what the Melungeon people were. And I, you know, and then that came up. So, I was like, wow.

So, yeah.

**Heather:** That is so cool. Yes, that's very well known in the Melungeon community. Would you share with us the story of your personal family ancestry?

**Chief Deanna:** Wow. Well, through my research, I have learned with little hints from my grandmother about native, which none of my family knew there was any kind of native, you know, or didn't admit it, maybe. But I learned, like I said, in 2004, I really started researching and I found Chief Pushmataha of the Choctaw Nation.

He is my eighth great grandfather on my dad's side, my father's side. And then through that, I learned that Pocahontas, she is my, I believe, it's my seventh great grandmother on my mother's side. And so, it's just gone from there to trying to discover who I was.

I did DNA testing. I've joined several groups. Lots of people helping me to find my connections to cousins. And I even believe that you are my cousin. We haven't really compared DNA yet, but I've been told that we might be. So anyway, just learning that, connecting through DNA groups has led me to where I'm at now.

So, yeah.

**Heather:** You know, I wouldn't be surprised if we are cousins.

**Chief Deanna:** Yeah. If they're a common ancestor would not surprise me at all.

**Heather:** Right. Right. Yeah. Chief Deanna, you're the author of the book *Unraveled* and made *Whole Again*. What are the themes of the book and what inspired you to write it?

**Chief Deanna:** Well, I would say the theme of the book is not to give up hope, no matter what you go through in life, that there is hope. My hope stems from my belief in God, the Creator, but it starts with my childhood, my father, in fact, is connected, I guess you would say to the Jesus Revolution, the movie actually that just came out. It is so much my life that I grew up with, started out.

But anyway, he wound up getting into the church ministry, and we went on the road. I grew up in a bus, my mother homeschooled me. I had a very different childhood.

I wouldn't take anything for it though. But my father ministered, he had a heart for people. And so, I see a lot of times that he actually prayed for people. And I seen miracles happen, which is hard for people to grasp sometimes. But God does do miracles. And I still believe in that.

Doesn't always come the way we think they will. But I did see miraculous things in front of me. So, I wanted to put that down. I wanted it to be shared with other people and with my own children, what I grew up in and what I witnessed. So, I go through my life story with that. I went through a divorce with my two children.

So, it goes through that. My living basically out of my car with my daughters to being made whole again, to having my life, my business, my home, everything restored that I had lost and heartbreak, just trials and things. So basically, I wanted to share it with people to give hope, not to give up no matter what you're going through, no matter your heartbreak, your sadness, loss of loved ones.

I lost everything and I realized the only thing that mattered was God and my family and all the other stuff is just icing on the cake. So that's why I wanted to put my story out there.

**Heather:** In what ways do you feel your story has inspired others?

**Chief Deanna:** Well, there's been a lot of people that have sent emails and messages and phone calls to me. They have read my story and they have said that it's helped them realize they're not the only person that's gone through something dreadful or felt like they were at the end of their world and know that if I came through what I went through, which there's a lot of things I went through and I've been diagnosed with PTSD, depression, just everything that regular humans go through and so it gives them hope, hey if she did it, I can do it. And also, I like to share that my hope in God, you know, prayer is a very important thing.

So yes.

**Heather:** Deanna, you're the chief of the Tsalagiya Ngvadi tribal nation. Would you tell us about your tribal nation, its history and how it came to be?

**Chief Deanna:** Oh, wow. Well, to be honest with you, I am still learning a lot. As I said before, through the DNA groups and study and meeting people and all, is how I got connected with the Tsalagiya Ngvadi here in Texas, the Texas Cherokee.

I had been asked if I would run for chief. And I felt so humbled because like I said, I'm still learning a lot about the tribe and our history. So, I don't feel like I'm exactly the one to give all of the history on the tribe.

Our Ugu Bill Hoff is excellent at doing that. But it started with teeth bowls. It was back in 1839, I believe, when there was a battle, a war. And he was killed on July 16th. And they ran most of the Texas Cherokee out, or they thought they did. And so, you know, they thought they were all gone, but we're not, we're still here. And in 2019, the governor, Greg Abbott, he recognized the tribe once again. And so, we're state recognized. And since we are part of Mexico tribe, we're also recognized in Mexico.

And my understanding also is Canada. And so, it's just, there's so much, like I said, I'm still learning. So, but if you want more answers, you know, well, we can get them from Oogoo Beilhoff, but I'm still learning.

**Heather:** No, that's great. Were any of your ancestors on the Trail of Tears, do you know?

**Chief Deanna:** Yes, I can't really name all of them right now, but yes, they were.

**Heather:** As some of our listeners may know, there is a connection with the Trail of Tears and the Melungeon people. But for those who don't know, we did do an episode on it. I believe it was in last season, season four.

And as many know, in the 1830s under president Andrew Jackson, they had the removal of tribal nations here on the East Coast, primarily like the Cherokee. But there were actually people of mixed ethnicity who were also among those who were removed and went out west into like Oklahoma and Texas. And yeah, so there is a connection.

So, I just kind of wanted to bring that up.

**Chief Deanna:** I think that would be great for someone to go back and listen to that episode. I'm actually going to try and find it as well because there is so much to learn about the Trail of Tears that we don't understand or haven't heard of.

**Heather:** Exactly.

**Chief Deanna:** Yeah.

**Heather:** Now we haven't gotten in to where our listeners can purchase your book.

**Chief Deanna:** Okay. Well, it is available online. Of course, the obvious one is amazon.com. But Barnes and Noble, Target, Walmart, it's all over every place that offers books online. They can purchase it there.

**Heather:** Yes. And once again, the name of Chief Deanna's book is Unraveled and made Whole Again. Find it on Amazon.

Deanna, is there anything else you wish to share with our audience?

**Chief Deanna:** Well, I would say if you don't know who your people are, where your roots come from, I highly recommend digging and doing DNA testing. It has been an eye-opener for me. It's answered a lot of questions as to why I'm like I am or maybe features even that I have, but it's been a great, great journey for me and I would recommend that to anyone.

And if they read my book, I appreciate it. If they buy my book, I appreciate it. But the whole idea is just for I want to help people. So however, I can be a blessing or however I can help someone, that's my desire and that's one reason I'm serving as Chief. Of the Northern Towns District of the Tsalagiya Ngvadi in Texas.

**Heather:** And for those who want to get in touch with you, how can they do that?

**Chief Deanna:** Well, they can reach me through [texascherokees.net](http://texascherokees.net) or they can email me at [unraveledandmadewholeagain@aol.com](mailto:unraveledandmadewholeagain@aol.com).

**Heather:** Fantastic. And correct me if I'm wrong. I think I read somewhere that they're working on a movie edition of your book.

**Chief Deanna:** That has been in the progress. I'm at a standstill right now due to finances. But "I do have a simple movie trailer that is available to kind of give someone an idea of what we're working towards.

And I'm also talking to a screenwriter. So, we're keeping our fingers crossed and praying, you know, that finances will come through for that. So, we'll see what happens.

**Heather:** But that would be awesome, yes.

**Chief Deanna:** That would be awesome. Wow. That's just amazing. Thank you.

**Heather:** Well, Chief Deanna, thank you so much for being on the Melungeon Voices podcast. And I'll be on the lookout for the movie version of your book in the near future.

**Chief Deanna:** Thank you. It's been my pleasure.

**Lis:** You've been listening to the Melungeon Voices podcast. On behalf of myself, Heather Andolina and the entire MHA Executive Committee, we'd like to thank all of those who participated in making this episode possible. For more information, you can visit them on the web at [melungeon.org](http://melungeon.org).

That's M-E-L-U-N-G-E-O-N dot O-R-G. The information, views and opinions expressed in this podcast episode do not necessarily represent those of the MHA. Melungeon Voices is presented by the Melungeon Heritage Association.

All rights are reserved.

From Melungeon Voices: S5 EP3: Discovering Melungeon & Indigenous Ancestry, Oct 25, 2024  
<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/melungeon-voices/id1517233900?i=1000674393338&r=959>