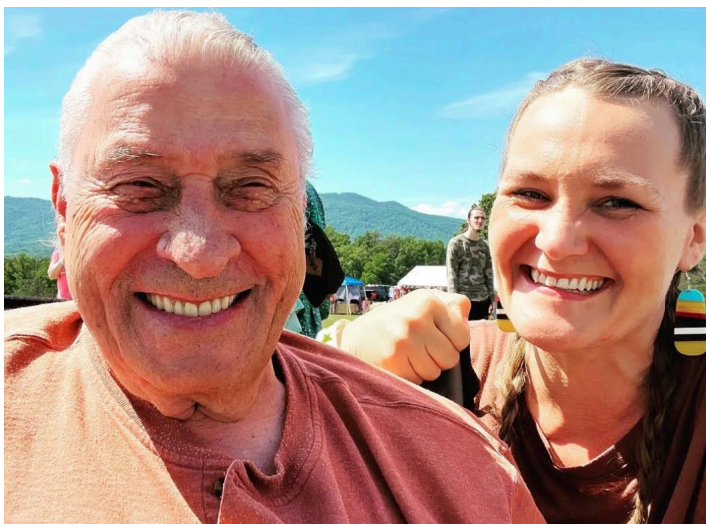


## An interview with Crys O'Grady, a member of the Monacan Nation, by Eric Olson-Getty

Director of Programs Eric Olson-Getty keeps a blog called "Runarchism." For a recent piece he interviewed Crys O'Grady about her life, her running practice, and her journey of healing to reconnect with her Monacan relatives and ancestry. The two are both members of ReNew Earth Running, "Running to protect and heal the environment by restoring land to the stewardship of Tribal Nations and Indigenous leadership."

Virginia Organizing's main office and many of our chapters are on Monacan land.



Crys O'Grady with her grandfather (and fellow runner), Daniel Branham.

Eric: Can you introduce yourself, and tell me about where you grew up and how you ended up in Portland, Oregon?

Crys: I actually grew up in Warren Grove, NJ which is very close to Manahawkin, on the traditional lands of the Lenni Lenape people. And it was in the Pine Barrens, so a really unique climate, very arid and dry, and very rural. It was a great place to grow up. After I lived there, I was in foster care for a while until I aged out. I was in a few different placements all over what is now known as South Jersey. My experience growing up, and my experience as an indigenous person who experienced foster care, and not really having a sense of home, really impacted my life path and is rooted in intergenerational history. I ended up in NJ because my mom was taken from her Tribal community in the 1960's and was placed with a white family by an adoption agency that specialized in placing children of women of color, primarily Black and Native folks, up for adoption. She was adopted into a family who lived in Maryland and they eventually moved to New Jersey, which is where my mother met my father and where I grew up.

My life was impacted by the generational trauma and disconnect that my mom had growing up. She knew she was Native but she was not able to have that connection with her family, the culture, or the community. She held on to a lot of trauma around that identity, but it was a place where she found a lot of healing. Because of the impact that this had both on my mother and I, I pursued public policy and law and studied the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978. In law school I focused on Indigenous law, and I interned in tribal courts with the Tulalip and Muckleshoot Tribes. After law school, I came down to Portland to work at the National Indian Child Welfare Association, which focused on protecting the rights of children, families, and tribes through ICWA. I don't work there anymore, but that's how I ended up in Portland, OR on the land of the Chinook people.

E: For people who are not familiar with ICWA can you say a little bit about what's going on with that right now and about your family history within that context?

C: Yeah, so the ICWA of 1978 was enacted because in the late 1800's and 1900's there were formalized programs through the US

government, particularly in the Bureau of War, which is where the BIA originally sat, to take Native children away from their families and put them into boarding schools. In the 1960's, they formalized the initiative as the "Indian Adoption Project." It was funded by the federal government and sanctioned by the Child Welfare League of America to take Native children away from their tribal communities and place them up for adoption with white families so they would be more "civilized." The purpose was to remove Native children from their families so they could "domesticate" them in whatever way white supremacy defines that term for a Native person. So the Indian Child Welfare act, also referred to as ICWA, was developed in response to keep Native children in their tribal communities and to have protections for Native children in foster care to be placed first within their tribal community and families. Being Native is not just a racial relationship, it's a political identity, and the purpose of these adoptions and boarding schools was ultimately to argue that there are no Native people left so the federal government could justify taking away our lands and resources. That ties into concepts like blood quantum, which was made by the US government and not by Native communities themselves. ICWA is meant to keep Native families, Native communities, and Native nations together. In recent years, challenges to ICWA have been brought to the Supreme Court. On November 9th of this year in the Brakken case brought this issue to the forefront again and the plaintiffs, in this case, made a lot of arguments that are harmful to the very existence of Native people.

E: I asked you to speak to that because it's possible that people are just not aware of what's happening at the Supreme Court right now, and what its implications are. And it seems like you have a very personal connection to it. You talked about these federal programs that were happening in the 1960's. Is that what swept your mother up?

C: Yes. The adoption agency received its funding from the Child Welfare League of America. They have since come back and apologized and acknowledged their role, and how wrong their behavior was. And so there has been some acknowledgment of that. But what they did was a form of genocide of a whole community by coming after our children.

E: And that has a long-standing history going back centuries as a matter of policy with settler colonialism. It has just changed iterations over the years. I'm curious, how did you get connected to the Monacan Tribe in your personal history?

C: It's actually been a journey of reconnection and healing for me. My mom was always searching for that connection for herself and the relationship with her parents, but raised us without having this connection. There's this thing we talk about as a cultural connection just within the Native community called "blood memory." It is a spiritual and physical sense of knowing about who you are, which includes your tribal community and your traditions as something that passes through you, as something that's known in you. It wants to be known and tended to..."

<https://runarchism.substack.com/p/running-for-land-back-in-virginia>

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