

EMILY BRIGHT: Hey, I'm glad you're with us here on *Minnesota Now*. I'm Emily Bright in for Cathy Wurzer. On the show, we love to talk to local artists about their influences and inspirations. Our next guest is a comedian making waves in the Minnesota comedy scene, both on her own and as a member of the comedy troupe NDN Way. Let's listen to a clip.

TRISH COOK: My dad was also really fond of shopping. It's not like a used grocery store. It was on the South Side-- not used, but maybe the cans of food fell off of a truck. Or maybe they were almost expired. Maybe they were expired. I don't know. They had no labels.

We had this food. We found it really interesting for my dad to be like, oh, let's just get a can opener [INAUDIBLE]. It was like a Russian roulette of unmarked canned foods. You know what I mean? Like we have that. I remember one specific lunch that I had that was hominy and pineapple chunks.

[LAUGHTER]

And my dad was like, oh, what the hell? It could be worse.

EMILY BRIGHT: Trish Cook spoke with host Cathy Wurzer earlier this week.

CATHY WURZER: Trish Cook is on the line. And, Trish, I'm so happy you're here. How are you?

TRISH COOK: I'm doing great. Thank you, Cathy. I'm happy to be here. Thanks for having me. And as we say in Anishinaabe, [ANISHINAABE].

CATHY WURZER: Thank you. Thank you for being here, too. Say, I suspect this is a question comedians get a lot, but have you always been funny?

TRISH COOK: It depends on who you ask probably. I would say, to my friends, yes. I wasn't a class clown or anything, but to my friends, yes. My family is probably really annoyed by it, but they're accepting. They're accepting of it.

CATHY WURZER: Well, take us back to your childhood. You're a South Sider. You're from the South Side of Minneapolis, as am I.

TRISH COOK: I am.

CATHY WURZER: So what was it like growing up on the South Side back in the day?

TRISH COOK: I loved it. I had very unusual parents. We had a house near the Parkway, near Lake Nokomis. And my parents always really encouraged us to make the entire city our backyard, basically.

And I grew up at a time where kids were able to do that. That's why I have a lot of funny stories, actually. But we had a lot of freedom to go in the "crick." We call it the crick-- the Minnehaha Crick, Creek-- go to the lake.

We lived by bus lines. So for \$0.20, I know I could take the 14 downtown. Because my parents were one of the very few Native families to own a house in the city, our house was kind of a stomping ground or landing place for folks coming into the city from reservations or other Native communities. And we always had people coming through.

There was no loss of conversation or strangers or strangers at the door that you found out later were your cousins that you hadn't met before because our families are so big. It was great. There wasn't a better place to grow up than Minneapolis in the '70s and '80s, for sure. It was a blast.

CATHY Completely agree with you on that one.

WURZER:

TRISH COOK: Yeah.

CATHY So you and I were talking off-air. My Native friends who went to Phillips Junior High with me and South High were hysterically funny-- I mean, a lot of self-deprecating humor. The putdowns were very creative, very funny. And I bet that might surprise some non-Native people. Can you talk a little bit about that?

WURZER:

TRISH COOK: I think so. I mean, and I think it's important to remember-- this is going on a serious note-- that people don't really expect to know Native people. We are the minority of the minorities, which is kind of a misnomer because we're not really a minority.

We are Indigenous to this land. We were here first. We went from 100% of the population to less than 4%, 2% maybe. So people don't really expect to know us, to have us as coworkers, or have us in school as a school mate or potential partners or whatever.

So I think there's a lot about Native folks that people still don't know, and I think our humor is one of the tools that we have used for healing, for survival. I mean, if you can grow up in poverty for a lot of times or have other social issues affecting you and your family and still find in that dark a place to laugh, it's so good. It's something that just brings light to so many situations.

And we are really good at it. I don't know how to explain it when people ask, but I know it starts with laughing at yourself first. It's not to put down other people. It's to bring out the funny. And it's usually something that is a little light, really dry, and just cracks everybody up.

CATHY Yep, yep. And go to Trisha's show to understand, really, because it will be--

WURZER:

TRISH COOK: Yeah, please, do. Always.

CATHY --a good lesson. Yeah. And I'm trying to think of, gosh, the Native comedians on stage. I mean, I'm just thinking of Williams and Ree. And it's the only ones that come to mind. I mean, who were your comedy role models?

WURZER:

TRISH COOK: Well, Charlie Hill, of course. And any time Charlie Hill was around, I was lucky enough that I had parents that would take me to see him. I got to meet him personally. I mean, he was the guy. I mean, there was nobody else on the national scene.

And now we've got such great people, like the 1491s that are very instrumental in *Reservation Dogs*. Dallas Goldtooth is an amazing actor and writer. We have Tania Jo Hall coming up.

And then the guys that I work with, I adore. They're like cousins to me-- Jon Roberts and Rob Fairbanks. They're amazing. So it's fun to see, and it's fun to get out there. And we have a blast doing it.

CATHY You mentioned *Reservation Dogs*-- *Res Dogs*. Did that show help you guys get more gigs, do you think?

WURZER:

TRISH COOK: I think it makes people a little less anxious to hire us. I think that they're like, if it's going to be like this, OK. There's going to be more swearing than a normal show, but people will like it. And we've been doing it together as a trio for our NDN Way Comedy for just over a year now.

And I mean, we've been selling out shows and just having so much fun. And people are responding to it. It's so fun to have predominantly Native audience, Native people coming out, getting dressed up, making a night of it, having an event. And we are getting together to have fun and to laugh.

And we've had Native and non-Native people tell us that, wow, there was really something happening. And it's just-- nobody's getting hurt. We don't punch down. We don't do that kind of comedy. And it's really-- if you want to see three people making fun of themselves and their families, we're your show.

CATHY OK, let me ask you about your act. What topics do you normally cover? I mean, you mentioned your parents being unusual. They've got to be part of it.

TRISH COOK: Yes, my mom and dad are definitely-- and if I don't do enough bits on my mom, I hear about it from everybody because everybody loves to hear about Mrs. Cook and how she parented in the '70s and '80s and what was going on. And I mean, I could probably do an hour just on her.

But I'm also blessed with three sons, so they make it into the bits. Everything I do is really personal. It's about my mom, dad, my kids. I do some about dating, but that's actually not that hilarious yet. So there's--

CATHY Oh, but it could be. No, you're divorced. You're divorced.

WURZER:

TRISH COOK: I am divorced. Yes.

CATHY OK.

WURZER:

TRISH COOK: Yeah, I'm not married and dating. No, I'm divorced.

CATHY Yeah. [LAUGHS] Right. Exactly.

WURZER:

TRISH COOK: Uh-huh.

CATHY Yeah, the whole dating thing could be really rich ground to plow, though.

WURZER:

TRISH COOK: Right. Right. But it's also funny to have a kind of-- a funny, endearing, kind of salty mom who all the other Native guests that we have in the seats, they get because they've seen that mom. Or that's their auntie.

They know her. They know her. And that's, I think, the best compliment that I get after a set.

CATHY WURZER: I love that. Now, Trish, I ask all artists on the program who or what is inspiring you lately.

TRISH COOK: A lot of it is my dad. My dad, Lee Cook, passed away during COVID, of COVID. He always made me feel proud of being Native. He would always go the extra mile and say that I looked pretty or was beautiful because again, Native women didn't see Native women in ads or advertisements.

And he was really supportive of my academics and art. And one of my favorite memories of him is when I was doing a show at the House of Comedy. And he drove from Red Lake down to the House of Comedy to watch me do a five-minute set and drove back. That is love and support to do that.

CATHY WURZER: Dad.

TRISH COOK: And I've been able to take some of his stories and his parenting and make it laugh. I have a bit that I do about his funeral. And I can do it now.

And it's fun, and it's funny. And I've had other comments from folks saying, oh, my gosh, I haven't laughed like that about death in a long time. And I'm like, OK, then I'm doing my job right.

CATHY WURZER: Not exactly a fun topic, as you know, Trish. Yeah.

TRISH COOK: It's not. But if you can laugh at it, there's something good in there. And I think that gets to the Indian humor, again, of how we can laugh and find humor in those things. And I like being able to share that with folks.

CATHY WURZER: Do you feel your dad still with you when you're on stage sometimes?

TRISH COOK: Yes, absolutely. Yeah. And I think his response would be like, well, what the hell? Of course people want to hear what you have to say. I don't think that, but that's what he used to tell me. And I wish he could be here to see what we're doing now. But he's present in it, for sure.

CATHY WURZER: So NDN Way, Jonny Roberts, Rob Fairbanks-- when can we see you all again?

TRISH COOK: We will be back at the House of Comedy this coming Sunday, April 23, at 7 o'clock. And that is a real 7 o'clock, not Indian time, 7 o'clock. They start their shows early on Sundays.

CATHY WURZER: If you had a magic wand and you're going to wave it, where do you want to end up? What is the ultimate goal?

TRISH COOK: Oh my gosh. I love my day job, and I love what I do and the folks that I work with. I do. But if I could do comedy and writing full-time, that's what I would want. And if I could bring Jon and Rob with me, that would be even better.

CATHY OK, we're going to cheer you guys on, then.

WURZER:

TRISH COOK: Yay. Thank you.

CATHY And I wouldn't be surprised if it happens. That would be fantastic, too. Oh my gosh.

WURZER:

TRISH COOK: Oh, thank you, Cathy. We sure appreciate it.

CATHY Oh, Trish. It's been really fun. Thank you so very much for the conversation.

WURZER:

TRISH COOK: Thank you so much. Hope to see you on Sunday. Have a great week.

EMILY BRIGHT: And that was Cathy Wurzer talking with comedian Trish Cook. Her Ojibwe comedy trio, NDN Way Comedy, will perform Sunday, as you heard, at the House of Comedy at the Mall of America at 7:00.

That story was made possible in part by the Minnesota Legacy Amendments Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund. You can find more stories from our North Star Journey Series at NPRnews.org.

And here are just some news you can use. Residents of Southern Minnesota will soon have a second area code option. With 507 numbers poised to run out in the next few years, the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission has approved 924 as an additional area code for the region.

And that's it now for *Minnesota Now*. I'm Emily Bright, and Cathy Wurzer will be back tomorrow.