CATHY WURZER: Well, clearly 2022 is going to come to an end soon. And we are taking some time to look back at some of our favorite stories and some of your favorite stories from this year. *MPR News* has reporters, of course, living across the state. We asked a few of them to come and share their favorite stories of the year. Dan Kraker joins us from Duluth. Hello, Dan.

DAN KRAKER: Hey, Cathy.

CATHY WURZER: Hannah Yang is in Worthington. Hi, Hannah.

HANNAH YANG: Hi, Cathy.

CATHY WURZER: And Katherine Richard is in Rochester. Welcome, Katherine.

KATHERINE RICHARD: Hello, Cathy.

CATHY WURZER: So I had the great honor of previewing the stories you picked. Love all of them. Kat, your story really got eyes open I think. You did a very interesting story about policies in Rochester that kept Black people from living in parts of the city.

Mayo, of course, has a huge presence in Rochester. And you found that these covenants, these housing covenants were supported by the Mayo Brothers, the founders. How did you hear about these covenants?

KATHERINE RICHARD: Well, this was one of these stories that I think really fell under the radar during the height of the pandemic. So what happened is the city decided to embark on this project to map all the racial covenants in Rochester, and this is a very painstaking process that requires a lot of research.

The city council put their stamp on it. And in the local coverage, there was a line way down in the story that just mentioned-- oh, and by the way, the Mayo Properties Association, which is effectively this entity that the Mayo Brothers and the other founders of Mayo Clinic used to buy and sell property perpetuated this practice. And of course, as we say in this business, they buried the lead.

CATHY WURZER: I want to hear a little clip from the story. We're going to play this.

KATHERINE RICHARD: Pastor Don Barlow sits in the front pew of his Baptist Church holding a piece of paper.

DON BARLOW: This property shall never be occupied by Negro.

KATHERINE RICHARD: Barlow is reading from the deed for the property where his predominantly Black Church now stands. It's a moment of poetic justice for Barlow who recently learned that about a century ago, he and his congregants would have been blocked from worshipping there because of a legal tool used for years to keep non-white people out of white neighborhoods.

DON BARLOW: The shock, the alarm came from, if you will, just not so much the usage of the word Negro, but because that was the language of the day. But more so, the fact that in a legal document, it was being stated and accepted and was norm for the day.

KATHERINE RICHARD: Reckoning with the past is hard for any city, but Rochester's reckoning comes with an unusual twist. New research into housing covenants makes it clear how the founders of Mayo Clinic, a health care giant viewed globally as a force for good, played a role in perpetuating practices that favored all white neighborhoods, practices squarely at odds with the welcoming community Rochester strives to be today.

CATHY WURZER: So the pastor says he was shocked. How did he learn about the racial covenants that would have blocked his own church?

KATHERINE RICHARD: Really through the course of this reporting, which was, sort of, bananas. And I found that to be the case a number of times. Don Barlow, I should note too, is just a really well-known figure in our community. He's also on the school board. So he's someone who is deeply involved. And so just about a day or two before I did that interview with him, he had found this out and I think he was still processing this information. So it was very fresh.

CATHY WURZER: Obviously, it's a big deal when Mayo is found to have supported these racist building practices. Did you hear from anyone at Mayo about the story?

KATHERINE RICHARD: I did. I spent a lot of time talking to a woman named Barbara Jordan who is long lead the Mayo Clinic's diversity efforts. And she is a Black woman, and she was really great at talking about taking the past, learning from it, and moving forward.

She also shared with me a number of instances that she's had as a woman of color in this community, moving here and facing racism herself. So it was a really interesting conversation and I was glad I was able to talk to her for this story.

CATHY WURZER: What did locals say about it? Did you hear anyone say anything to you about the story specifically?

KATHERINE RICHARD: Yeah, I got a lot of feedback on this story. Everything ranging from emails directly to me, asking me how they could get this racial covenant off of their property. People listened to the story, went back to the documents that came with their house, and found these covenants, and were like, oh my gosh! I want to get rid of this. What can I do? How can I volunteer? People telling me that they had no idea that this part of Mayo's history existed.

Also hearing from people who live in a particular community in Rochester called Pill Hill. This is a historic part of town. A lot of the houses here, almost all of them have these racial covenants on them. And basically saying like, why do you have to portray us so negatively in the press? Can't we just forget this part of our history?

The Mayo Brothers had no choice but to employ these practices, which is actually patently false. There are plenty of communities that were not employing these practices at the time. So really the range of responses I would say.

CATHY WURZER: Why was this one of your favorite stories of the year?

KATHERINE RICHARD: I think for me personally, this brought together all of the things that I love about reporting. Its history. History about the community that I live in and history that is remarkably untold. I think Rochester is a community where people are really proud of where they live because many of them work for this institution that is associated with miracles some days.

Sometimes, that means that people here are unwilling or scared to look at the parts of our history that they're less proud of. And I think this really forced Rochester to take a look in the mirror on something that they didn't know about, or if they did, didn't really want to talk about.

The other thing I loved about this story is that this information is actually being used to improve city policies, for instance, around zoning, or the city will use this information to figure out how they might use future funding to help undo some of the policies that have created segregated neighborhoods.

And I think that that's really great. Anytime you take something that was bad and turn it into something that could be positive in the future, it's just a great story. I got to meet lots of really interesting people too. So that is why this was my favorite story of the year.

CATHY WURZER: Excellent reporting, Katherine Richard. Thank you.

KATHERINE RICHARD: You're welcome.

CATHY WURZER: Hannah, I'm going to turn to you next. So for folks who are not familiar with Hannah Yang, she lives and reports on the region around Worthington, Southwestern Minnesota. This story that you did, my friend, is very personal. It starts with you preparing for a birthday dinner. So we're going to take a quick listen.

HANNAH YANG: It's the weekend of my husband's birthday. And on the menu are his favorites, baked mac and cheese and yellow cake with fudge frosting. Aaron chooses these every year, but I always make a small pot of miyeokguk seaweed soup. Happy birthday! [LAUGHS]

CATHY WURZER: So the story is about this special soup and its connection to birthdays. Tell us about that.

HANNAH YANG: Yeah. So miyeokguk is pretty much a staple every birthday. It's made-- it's a pretty simple recipe. It's made from seaweed, stewed beef, sauteed in soy sauce, and sesame oil, and garlic. And you let it simmer on the pot for a while and then you serve it to whoever's birthday it is.

It's a tradition really that honors your birthday, but also it helps remind you of your mother and the relationships between parents and their children specifically because your mother had eaten this dish in recovery. So that's pretty much what we eat on every birthday. [LAUGHS]

CATHY WURZER: So mothers then eat this in recovery and then you eat it too in honor of mom. I love that, and I loved hearing your mom's reaction to continuing the tradition. [LAUGHS] I'm going to play a little clip.

HANNAH YANG: Alma says she was so happy that I learned how to cook.

ALMA: [SPEAKING NON-ENGLISH]

INTERPRETER: Because if you didn't learn or didn't want to learn, then cooking Korean food could end with my generation.

HANNAH YANG: I didn't marry a Korean, but Alma said she was so happy Aaron and his family love Korean food. She also loves that there are traditions we can pass down to our own kids someday. [SPEAKING NON-ENGLISH]

INTERPRETER: Mom, you're going to come and make it for me, right?

ALMA: [SPEAKING NON-ENGLISH]

INTERPRETER: Well, maybe. I don't know. [LAUGHS]

CATHY WURZER: It's such a personal story, Hannah. What made you want to share this on the air?

HANNAH YANG: I think for me mostly, it was because I really didn't see a lot of stories like these when I was growing up. But it's a staple in our households. And this is something that made me really want to share with our readers and our listeners, that there are other traditions that are being honored in our households. Perhaps one day, there's a kid who eats miyeokguk can see that, Oh, my gosh! Yes, there's someone else like me who does this every birthday. That's great.

KATHERINE RICHARD: Hannah, one of my very good friends here is first-generation Korean as well, and she heard it and she loved it. She was like, oh, my gosh! Yes, this just nailed it. But she was just talking about how after having two kids, she was really sick of the soup. She doesn't love it.

[LAUGHTER]

CATHY WURZER: I love this story. Was your family at all concerned with your talking about this family tradition? I mean, were they OK being interviewed?

HANNAH YANG: [LAUGHS] I think my mom was a little nervous at first. One of the things that she expressed was not so much about me sharing the story. It was just she was very self-conscious about not being particularly fluent in English.

And it just reminded me a lot about their experiences being immigrants to this country, how they were treated. And me growing up, my brother and I, we always translated for our parents. We always try to help them as much as we could. So it was a really amazing way for me to connect with my mom. Being able to converse and talk to her like how I normally would and she was able to just be herself and her complete self.

CATHY WURZER: Now what, kind of, reaction did you get from listeners?

HANNAH YANG: Mostly positive. I was a little afraid at first, talking about a Korean dish like this just because growing up, I was bullied with a lot of racist prejudice. And people made fun of my food, things like that. There is a lot of trauma associated with Korean food for me for a while.

So for me to put something so personal out there was a little frightening at first. But seeing so many readers and listeners chiming in, saying they were touched by the story, realizing that, it really just healed a part of myself that I hadn't been able to touch on for a while.

CATHY WURZER: Well, I think you did a beautiful job. This is one of my favorites. Good work, Hannah.

HANNAH YANG: Thank you.

CATHY WURZER: Dan Kraker, you had a story about culture and roots. But not your own, not your own. You talk with folks in Northern Minnesota, specifically who identify as both native and Scandinavian. And this one got a lot of attention too. What drew your focus to this story?

DAN KRAKER: So first, there was this book that came out like six years ago called *In The Land of The Finndians,* which was about people of Finnish and Native American descent living here in Northern Minnesota. It was actually done by a couple of Finnish journalists, and it really featured these beautiful portraits of folks here in my region. So that piqued my interest.

Then I think it was about three years ago, our APM Research Lab, they did this project called Roots on Race in which they found a large number of people living here in Minnesota who identified as both Scandinavian and Native American. So I thought, huh!

I stuck it on my giant list of story ideas and sat there. But then the newsroom, earlier this year, we launched our North Star journey project, which I think all three of these stories actually were a part of. And I thought, maybe this is my chance to finally do something here about this.

CATHY WURZER: You talked to some really interesting people. Melissa Walls comes to mind. So Melissa identified as Anishinaabe, but is more recently exploring her Swedish roots. Talk a little bit about her.

DAN KRAKER: She has an amazing story. So she's a well-known public health researcher here in Duluth. She actually works for Johns Hopkins University. She grew up very much identifying, as you said, as an Anishinaabe person. That's how she was raised.

She knew really hardly anything about her Swedish side until she was selected to be a part of a Swedish reality TV show that took Americans back to Sweden to discover their Swedish roots. So she did this.

Then on a subsequent trip, she met her extended family there. They presented her with a traditional midsummer folk dress. And when they were dressing her, Cathy, she told the story that she said gave her the shivers. "It kind of gave me the shivers," as she was telling me it. They told her to tuck her handkerchief behind a heart shape on the dress that covered her chest. And then I think we have a piece of tape, so we can listen to what she said next.

MELISSA WALLS: And I said, well, why? And they said, well, "we always lead with the heart." And those three words, "lead with the heart," you will hear Anishinaabe people saying that. Those are teachings. "We lead with the heart." "Do it the hard way."

Tears popped into my eye. I thought, what is happening here? They're saying the exact same words that I'm learning in Minnesota from Anishinaabe people. Like these are deep, deep teachings. And I just stood there stunned. Like is this really happening?

CATHY WURZER: That really was beautiful. So what significance does that have to her and to the larger community do you think? The similarities between the Swedish and Ojibwe cultures.

DAN KRAKER: She described it to me, Cathy, as embodying both the colonized and the colonizer. Walking through the world with light-skinned, she's pretty light-skinned, but feeling like she's an Anishinaabe person. And so she said this whole experience really helped her try to grapple with that a little bit.

And I mean, all the folks I talked to, they grew up in identified primarily as Anishinaabe people and recently reconnected with their Scandinavian roots. And it's taught them to look for-- look for commonalities, but also to celebrate differences in the culture and how that comes together and who they are.

CATHY WURZER: So what reaction did you get?

DAN KRAKER: Really positive I have to say. People love to celebrate this unique sense of place of Northeastern Minnesota. But also I heard from a few folks who also identify as multicultural, and that was most gratifying to me as they shared that this story, they said, helped them feel seen as they also try to work through these issues of culture and identity.

CATHY WURZER: You all three did a wonderful job here this past year. Thank you, thank you, thank you for your work. And I look forward to hearing what you have planned for next year.

DAN KRAKER: Thanks, Cathy.

HANNAH YANG: Thanks, Cathy.

KATHERINE RICHARD: Thank you, Cathy.

CATHY WURZER: Those are some of the *MPR* reporters from around the state: Kat Richard, in Rochester, Dan Kraker in Duluth, Hannah Yang in the Worthington area. They did a great job this year. If you'd like to see the other favorite stories from other reporters, go to mprnews.org.