

Un Pueblo de Nada

2017-03-14

SETTING

A community television station, WEVP. The building once doubled as a schoolhouse, so there are a few old school desks somewhere in frame.

Talk show style arrangement of chairs, and maybe a desk.

CHARACTERS:

- **RITA.** Host. Actor: Mireya.
- **MAYA.** Earthworks artist. Maya. Actor: Amelia.
- **RON.** Older man. Made a video of wild things. He falls asleep in the chair during the broadcast.
Actor: Shane.
- **NIKKI.** Older woman. Poet. Actor: Carmen.
- **ELMO.** Meteorologist. Silently does the weather report with transparencies on an overhead projector. Actor: Tamas.
- **CYRANO.** Musician. Actor: Ben.
- **GEOFF.** On phone only. Boring monologue for 3 minutes or so. Actor: Drew Ackerman.
- **EMILY.** Studio assistant. Never heard or on-screen. Actor: n/a.

Scene 1

(WEVP-TV title and intro music, then cut to RITA sitting alone.)

RITA

Hi, it's Rita. This is your evening broadcast, number eight-one-nine-two.

Wow, it's really raining out there! Damn. It's picked up a lot just in the last hour, I think. We have a few leaks ... put some pots and bowls underneath them. Thanks, Ron, for lending us some more pots and bowls.

Well, I hope you had a good day, despite the weather. It was so nice earlier, though!

I had a good day -- I made a new friend, who I'll introduce you to in a minute. I think most of you already met her, this afternoon at lunch. Well, if you

didn't meet her, you will in a minute. And even if you did, we can all talk some more.

So this is eight-one-nine-two -- is that right, Emily?

It is, isn't it?

(Listening to Emily)

(to Camera) That's a lot of broadcasts. When I came in, we were in the fives. So I've only been around for half of these. But still. Man.

Back in the fives, we had a lot of other shows. I did "Night Noise," and there was the "Swap Shop," and the bird show, and everybody was always bringing tapes in ... and now ...

Now it's just the evening broadcast!

But it's not, like -- I'm not saying it's a decline, right? I love the evening broadcast! I think it was the first show on WEVP?

(to Emily) Emily?

(to Camera) Emily is the station librarian. Ha ha. Not really. But she keeps track of this stuff.

(Listening to Emily)

Yeah. So this was the first WEVP show, and now it's the only one. This is the spine of the station. Or is it the heart? Maybe the skin.

What part of the WEVP body is this -- what do you think? Maybe you can stop by the station and let us know. We'll be here for the next thirty minutes or so.

Or just call in, if you don't want to brave the storm! Same number as always: 270-216-5556.

Let's start with a tape, OK? This is an old one. It's one of mine. We haven't run it in a while, so even if you've seen it before, you might have forgotten.

This was from several years ago when I was really into history, like ... local history. The history of this place. Here.

In this tape I shared some of my research and some of my thoughts about a community that lived here a very long time ago -- before us, before the company town, before the airstrip. Like, more than a hundred years ago.

(to Emily) Ready, Em?

(Play video #1, 'Un Pueblo de Nada'. Rita's voice-over narration in plays over sometimes-related VHS still footage in the style of Chris Marker. Spanish with English subtitles.)

Scene 2

(Back to the studio. MAYA is now present+seated.)

RITA

(In the middle of a conversation with MAYA)

... yeah, exactly -- and even then it's just not the same as real toothpaste --

(To camera)

Oh, OK!

Well, I hope you enjoyed the video. Like I said, that's from, like ... it's several years old, I forget exactly.

MAYA

I enjoyed it very much.

RITA

Oh, thank you, Maya.

MAYA

I didn't catch the ending -- what happened to them?

RITA

Right, we don't really know.

MAYA

Hmm.

RITA

It's sad, right? Do you think that's sad?

MAYA

Oh. Well ... No, I don't think so. In fact, I think that's very common. When a society collapses, everything gets very muddled, I think. Nobody ever remembers to write down what happened.

RITA

Sure. They might have bigger problems.

MAYA

Or -- it's more common, historically, I think -- they might have been conquered? Conquerors don't usually preserve their subjects' records.

RITA

Oh yeah, wow.

MAYA

Well ... do you think it's sad?

RITA

Yeah.

MAYA

Why do you think so?

RITA

Oh, I don't know. I'm sentimental!

(To Camera)

Hi everybody. This is our guest, Maya.

MAYA

(To Camera)

Hello!

RITA

If you're watching, you probably met Maya earlier today sometime -- she was kind of "doing the rounds," right?

MAYA

That's right.

RITA

And then we had a meal together.

MAYA

Very nice, thank you.

RITA

But for anyone else who didn't get to meet you, or maybe for anyone who didn't get to hear all about your project -- Maya, maybe you can tell the people at home a little more about yourself?

MAYA

Yes, sure.

RITA

So what do you do, Maya?

MAYA

Well, I'm an artist. Just like you. Like many of you here, actually -- I think everybody I met today is some kind of artist?

RITA

Sure, everybody is an artist, right?

MAYA

No, you're right ... but also, here --

RITA

Everybody who ever lived. It's part of being human!

MAYA

I agree. But, also -- when I ask someone here, "what do you do?" they always say something like "I make videos of trees," or "I'm working on an opera," or "I maintain the Sandin Image Processor" ...

You know? Nobody says they're an electrician, or a grocery bagger, or an office manager here.

RITA

Right.

MAYA

Is it an artists' colony?

RITA

Oh, haha. No. I mean, maybe -- kind of ad-hoc?

We all came here for the station, basically. To work on the station. There were some other folks here who had straight jobs, for a while, but they all left, or switched over. The company pulled out, but they had to keep the TV station going for some legal reasons ...

MAYA

Oh you have a corporate patron ... ?

RITA

No, not really -- they don't do maintenance and they don't pay for anything, except for one powerline that comes in from the forest. Maybe you noticed it?

MAYA

Right, I followed it out here.

RITA

Yeah, yeah. Of course -- that's the only way to find this place. So they aren't allowed to tear that down, or shut down the station -- court order. But they don't have to maintain any of it against weather or normal wear-and-tear ...

MAYA

Sounds precarious!

RITA

That's the word for it, yeah.

So -- you came here to see the mounds.

MAYA

Yes, exactly. The mounds.

To, um, to summarize: I'm an artist, and I work with earth. As my medium. I make piles of dirt. Very large piles of dirt.

RITA

Mountains.

MAYA

Well ... hills, let's say. And I'm working in the tradition of some people who lived here, in this land, a very long time ago -- hundreds and even thousands of years ago -- who built great mounds of earth.

RITA

Native Americans.

MAYA

Yes. Pre-colonial.

Some of their works have been wiped out over time, but it's a testament to their ingenuity and craftsmanship that so many of these mounds have survived for hundreds, thousands of years. I travel a lot in this region, and I make sketches of these surviving mounds. And that's how I heard about you

and these beautiful, ancient mounds you have right there in the middle of your town.

So I parked my car and followed the power line through the woods, about two day's walk from wherever I was. I was following directions.

RITA

All alone. Brave.

MAYA

I was a little worried about bears.

RITA

Oh, right. No, we haven't seen any bears here for a long time.

MAYA

Oh really?

RITA

Used to be a big problem, but they -- I don't know, I guess they found somewhere else to congregate.

We have another tape to put on. Will you stick around, Maya?

MAYA

Absolutely. I'm not going anywhere in this storm.

RITA

Right! Nobody's going anywhere tonight.

(To Camera)

OK. This is a new tape, actually. Ron brought this in earlier today. And I haven't even watched it yet. Ron's going to come out and tell us some more about it in a minute, but let's just watch it first so we can get the full effect.

But I will tell you the title because it's written on the box. Ron calls this "Wild."

(Play video #2, 'Wild.' This tape is very amateurish, with only on-camera editing. A montage of shots of things RON considers to be "wild.")

Scene 3

(Back to the studio. RON is now present+seated.)

RITA

OK, Ron, anything you want to tell us about that tape?

RON

Everything on that tape is wild.

RITA

Yeah, you think so?

MAYA

Wild stuff indeed.

RITA

I mean -- really, though? Even that horse?

RON

Everything on that tape is wild.

MAYA

Was that was a wild horse? I thought that was one of the horses here.

RITA

Oh, the neighbors? We call the horses here "neighbors." No, I didn't recognize that horse.

I don't think there are any wild horses, anymore.

MAYA

Oh. Really? How could that be?

RITA

They've all been domesticated.

MAYA

Are your neighbors "domesticated"?

RITA

Um. I mean, we don't "own" them, no. But their ancestors were domesticated. They're ... feral?

MAYA

Oh -- in your documentary, you said the people who used to live here freed their horses?

RITA

Exactly. But ... you can free your pet cat, but she won't turn back into a panther?

MAYA

No, I guess not. Interesting. What about the dog?

RITA

Was that a wild dog, Ron?

RON

Everything on that tape is wild.

RITA

Didn't look wild to me.

MAYA

I guess it's a matter of perspective.

RITA

I'm not sure I agree, but now it's time for the weather!

Thanks again, Ron.

Well, the weather should be pretty "wild"! I can hear it for myself right now.

MAYA

Yeah, getting pretty intense out there. Do you get storms like this a lot?

RITA

More and more.

MAYA

Right, of course.

RITA

Alright, here's Elmo with the weather report, and -- lucky us -- we also have Cyrano Cole, who stopped by to add some drama! Musically. I hear he's gonna be at the Rum Colony later tonight if you need a cocktail after the show.

So let's go live to Elmo for the weather report.

(Play video #3, weather report.)

Scene 4

(Camera back to RITA, MAYA & RON)

RITA

Thanks, Elmo, and Cyrano.

Next tape is a selection from the Video Databank.

You'll like this one, Maya, it's about caves.

MAYA

Ooh.

RITA

Local caves, yeah. This is a cool one, we play this one a lot.

(Phone rings)

Oh, there's the phone. Should we answer it now or should they call back after the tape? We'll answer it now.

(RITA picks up the phone)

Hello, WEVP.

(Long monologue from GEOFF over the phone. RON falls asleep. Eventually GEOFF gets cut off by a bad phone connection.)

(A brief silence before anyone fully processes that the call has been disconnected.)

RITA

Um. Hello?

RITA

We lost him. Might have been the storm? Or just the damn phone lines -- they're really flakey. Business as usual!

MAYA

He has a very soothing voice.

RITA

That was Geoff. He's a regular caller.

MAYA

He's asleep.

RITA

Hm?

(MAYA indicates RON who has fallen asleep in his chair.)

RITA

Aw. Well, let him sleep.

Here, let's play the tape. This is called "Cave Art." It's a classic around here.

MAYA

I'm excited.

(Play video #4, 'Cave Art.')

Scene 5

(RON is gone.)

MAYA

That was great.

RITA

Yeah, I like that one. I kind of --

(A sound of thunder. Both look off-camera suddenly in the same direction. Lights flicker. The signal is briefly interrupted with static.)

Scene 6

(When the picture comes back, NIKKI is drying her hair with some paper towels. She's been out in the storm and her clothes are wet. RITA and MAYA are standing nearby, like they're helping her dry off.)

RITA

-- wow, just completely ...

NIKKI

Yeah, just completely flooded. I passed Ron on the way in, he's going to check it out, see what he can do.

MAYA

Will they be OK?

NIKKI

Ron knows what he's doing. He used to be a firefighter.

RITA

It's a little different, though, right?

NIKKI

I guess.

(NIKKI hands some wet paper towels to RITA.)

NIKKI

Thanks.

(NIKKI pulls a journal out of her jacket pocket.)

Well, I brought my work.

RITA

Oh, good.

(To MAYA) Nikki comes by and reads her poetry. It's a regular feature on our weekly broadcast.

MAYA

Oh, great. I look forward to hearing it.

RITA

I just hope we can keep the broadcast going in this storm! I think we lost power for a second there, earlier.

NIKKI

Better get started then.

(RITA and MAYA sit. NIKKI approaches the camera.)

(NIKKI reads her poem. At some point, the signal is lost and the broadcast ends.)

NIKKI

"To the Out-of-Towner"

What eagle flew you to your final bed?

It was not men who brought you there to sleep.

The men who left you bloodied then and fled

had chosen mud and muddy-watered creek.

Did wild turkeys gobble, dote and care,

and wipe the moss beneath your eyelids clear?

Did cardinals pull the twigs out from your hair,

and wash your hands and feet, and trim your beard?

(Interrupted somewhere in the middle of the last line)

