



Native Perspectives on Sustainability: Kathryn Martin (Ahtna)

Interviewee: Kathryn Martin

Interviewer: David E. Hall

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DH: Well, if we could start by having you tell us a little bit about yourself in terms of your heritage and some of your background in terms of your home, and then the focus of your work now.

KM: Ok, well, my name is Kathryn Martin. I grew up in Mentasta, it's an Athabascan village. My grandma Katie, Katie John, lives there. My grandpa Fred, he passed away a few years ago, but basically they were the ones that brought the village really to its population. They have fourteen kids, over two hundred-some grandchildren, great grandchildren, and great-great grandchildren. I'm married. I have five kids. I'm Athabascan, but I'm also half Norwegian on my dad's side and I grew up, a majority of my life, in Mentasta. I've lived a couple years in Anchorage and I do now live here in Tazlina, which is about a hundred miles away. Right now, I'm working with Ahtna Incorporated, which is a regional Native corporation for our area, and I'm VP of Land and Resources. So basically I oversee our land, which entails about 1.7 million acres and I also oversee the subsistence issues that we're dealing with when it comes to state and federal regulations or changes. So, we're involved in that also.

DH: Great, later I'm going to ask you some questions about your community. And, I guess, the question there is how would you define your community now; how would you define the scope of your community in terms of people and places?

KM: Well, I'm going to talk about Mentasta, because that's my home community. Right now, the population is about eighty people. We're all related, one way or another. I would say that probably eighty percent, or maybe even ninety percent, is subsistence. They're very active in their subsistence lifestyle-fishing, gathering, and hunting. There are some people that, in our community, that are the hunters, and the ones that do the fishing and the gathering. So there's a dependability on certain people in the community. My husband and I have been one of them, as far as the fish wheel at Batzulnetuz; my husband and I have been putting that in probably for the past eight years. He's also considered one of the hunters, but there's probably about 4 or 5 in the community that are hunters. I would say that they're also very involved in the modern things that are coming in as far as TV, telephone, things like that. Education is a big thing there. I would say in the 80's, even before the 80's because they never had a high school there, I think they had a high school back in '84/'85, but before there was a high school there, Mentasta never really had a high school graduate because they were traveling to Tok, which was fifty miles away, to go to school. And I think, just because of the distance and all that, they just were not able to finish. Once they got to high school in the community though, and that's one thing they really pushed for, was to get a high school there, there has been probably maybe two or three drop-outs since.

So, it has dramatically changed, and they really push education, and not just western civilization education, but also even traditional, a lot of traditional things are handed down and passed on.

(5:41) DH: How does your cultural heritage, your personal identity, and your connection with your community inform your current work?

KM: I guess for me, one thing is that I do have a traditional background. I worked with my grandma for about five years; I traveled with her. Especially towards the end of her fishing case, she was asked to speak at quite a few events and stuff and I'd travel with her. And I would say that was probably my best schooling I ever got right there; was just traveling with her and learning from her. Hearing stories, even just stories that were passed on to her, but even stories of what she had experienced in her lifetime also. Maybe rephrase the question again? I know I was going somewhere with this (laughter).

DH: Yeah, just how your connection, like with your grandma and your community, how that informs your work.

(6:51)

KM: Well, and then with my community too, I don't like to say I am, but I know I'm a leader there. I guess I want to be humble in that position. A lot of my family and the community looks up to me. I'm not the only one though; they look up to my aunt Nora, who I also think is a good mentorship to me, also and my grandma. But there is a lot of dependability as far as making sure that our way of life is protected, and that's one thing I bring to my job now is making sure that we don't ever lose our land, that we are still able to fish, hunt, gather, and just continue our traditional lifestyle. And I know that there are some people that might think, "Well, you guys now go out hunting now with four wheelers, there weren't four wheelers years ago." As Native people we learn to adapt with our surroundings and the changes. Because we didn't have to work years ago at a 9 to 5 job either, we didn't have to sit in school from 9 to 3 either. But now we do, and with that we have to learn how to adapt to still get our food.

I think a lot of that, just with my job now, it puts me in check with myself, "Am I doing the right thing?" not only that, but making sure that is the right thing to do, and continue to protect that. My community, they're very traditional as far as hunting, fishing, and gathering. That's just something they depend on. If they don't have that that, they basically feel they have nothing. And even if they had a good paying job and could go to the store, and all that, they don't have their moose meat and fish, they'd feel they'd have nothing. And I'd feel the same way. I have a good paying job too, but I have to have my moose meat, and caribou, and fish like that, and if I don't, I physically get sick. This happened to me this last year. I went to Minnesota for a week, and about the third or fourth day, I literally got physically sick, and I didn't understand what was going on. I thought I had a flu or something, but it felt different, 'cause I wasn't running a fever or anything like that. And soon as I got home and ate moose meat, it went away. And so, I just know that even my body is dependent on it.

DH: The term of sustainability now is being used by a lot of people now to people that are working to address the environmental, social, economic challenges today. I'm wondering if sustainability is a term you use, or if there is other terms that you prefer to use.

KM: I don't know if I so much use sustainability, 'cause what I see is more taking care of things, and protecting it, what we have, and trying to make sure we will have that in the future.

DH: Does sustainability capture those elements of care and protection?

KM: I think it does, but the word itself is just not in my language. I guess it's maybe a little too big of a word to use. To me, it's more taking care of what we have and trying to protect it. That's how I understand sustainability. And it's not just for me and my community, but others who depend on this also. Making sure it's still there twenty, thirty years from now. I think as Native people, that they've always done that. They have traditional laws when it comes to food, "en'gee" is one of the words that they use. That is a really precious word to the Native people. It basically means that you need to care for the things that you're doing. If you don't it could be bad luck, or it could bring disaster. It's hard to really explain it, but I'm wondering if I was working on fish, and I just went and left half of it lying there, and not even take care of it, my grandma would say, "That's en'gee, you're not respecting the food-you're not taking care of it." Maybe that would be the word for sustainability for us, because what the laws are, that they have; it's still practiced today. My grandma, even if we go to a restaurant, and she will see how people will eat; she'd just look and they just waste food. They order so much and then they'd only eat bits and pieces, get rid of the rest. Don't even take a to-go box or anything like that. To her that just makes her sick in her heart, because they've gone through starvation before. It's not just going through that, but taking care of things. That's not just with food. You take care of the land; there's laws for that. You take care of family; they had laws for that also.

DH: En'gee has been a term that's come up in other conversations. The best English equivalent is "taboo"?

KM: Yeah, I would say it is. But it's not really just taboo. I think more what it does is it teaches you how to take care of yourself, your family, your food-everything that's in your life. And I think for myself and Native people, they grow up, they share quite a bit, and if it's not taken care of, how can you share anything, you're just wasting it. And so, I would say, yeah, it means taboo, but there's a lot more to it than just . . . that.

DH: So it would be used when someone would do something that is taboo, or inappropriate, disrespectful, but it also implies an alternative course of action that is more respectful.

(15:10)

KH: Yeah, I remember when I was growing up too, as a young girl, even now, stepping over a man; that was just considered not right. And not even a person, even stepping over his stuff or his hunting gear. That was just wrong, because it would be like we brought bad luck on him, because we disrespected him and his property as a hunter. I guess that's the only way I could explain it and how I learned to grow up with it. It doesn't have to do with just food, but a way of life, taking care of things.

DH: Anything else come to mind when you think of things like "taking care of" or "protecting

the future”?

KM: Well, I guess right now I see that maybe we’re losing some of that. You can still see it being practiced in some of our Native communities, but we’re losing it in some also, and it seems like they’re the ones that are closer to . . . I don’t know, maybe stores or urban-type living, which is really sad. When I moved out here a couple years ago, when I was talking about hunting and foods that I eat and stuff, there’s this one guy, he’s a little bit younger than me, he’s like, “I’m a store bought Indian.” I was like, “Store bought Indian, what are you talking about?” It’s like “Well, I get my food from the store. I don’t know how to go out and get it from the woods.” And I just thought that was so sad, because that’s where a lot of our food comes from, but he had, I guess, nobody taught him or what, I don’t know. It was just the thing the more convenience of a store right here, instead of going out and gathering it.

DH: Any other associated thoughts with . . . any of this: “care,” “protection,” “the future”?

KM: No (laughs)

DH: I’m wondering if maybe this will help stimulate something. If you’re having a conversation with somebody that’s unfamiliar with the term sustainability or any other terms that you’re bringing up. Are there any ways that you talk about it and help them understand the concepts and the importance of it.

KM: I’m not sure so much as talking about it, but maybe more of my actions. I think that if someone has spent time with me to learn about this, they would learn it more through my actions than just me trying to explain it to them and tell them. And I think because there’s, for me, people understand more when they’re seeing it and observing it. I don’t know, maybe that’s for me. I know for us Native people, that’s how we learn, by watching and observing. So I don’t think I could just sit down and tell somebody and try to explain to them who I am, and what I do, it’s somewhat difficult. And even right now, with this interview, I’m struggling as to what do I say? What do I share? How much can I share? That I know that it’s going to be used against us. You know what I’m saying?

DH: Right.

KM: There’s just some hesitation. For me though, it’s just if they were to see me, and watch me, they would learn.

DH: What kind of things would you like them to see and watch you do?

KM: Well, just how I interact with people and how I take care of my family. And when I say family I’m not just talking about just my husband and five kids. I’m talking about the community of Mentasta. When I go out in the woods and do things, how I take care of the property or the land. Even berry picking, go out berry picking, we always see garbage everywhere and I won’t allow my kids to leave trash behind, make them take it back with them. And there’s some people that do that too, but . . . there’s just some that don’t care, or don’t know really. That’s what I think, that there’s a lack of education. Even our property that we own here, we have 1.7 million

acres of property and it's considered private property and people don't understand that, this is our property, it's private. And they're just thinking that they can just pull off the side of the highway and go walking and do whatever. Not realizing that they are on private property, even though they see signs that say no trespassing, they feel they should have a right to go wandering out there, because it's so open. The only way I could explain it to some people, "Well, do you own property?" There was this one lady in Fairbanks, and she said she owned property in Fairbanks. And I said, "Well, how would you like it if I went to Fairbanks, went into your backyard, set up a tent, used the bathroom wherever, threw my garbage wherever, didn't even ask permission to stay back there, and didn't even care if you were there?" And she goes, "Well that would just be rude and disrespectful." I said, "How do you think we feel? This is our property. This is our land. We want to care for it and you come and think you can just pitch a tent and do whatever. You can't just go and do that." We do sell permits for people to do that on our property, as far as camping and accessing our property. Along with that permit you get a list of do's and don'ts, what's allowable and what isn't. It's just showing respect.

DH: Any other analogies or metaphors or brief stories that capture some of these key points?

(22:50)

KM: I'm drawing a blank.

DH: Ok. In this conversation so far, have there been any strong images or symbols that have come to mind that represent key aspects of the notion of care and protection.

KM: Not so much images, but the story that my grandma told me about how en'gee came to the Native people.

DH: Can you share that?

KM: It's a long story (laughter). Maybe I can try to shorten it, basically there was this young boy and he was living with his uncle, his parents had passed and he was living with his uncle. And he was just lazy, didn't do nothing and his uncle tried to make him work, make him work. His aunt, she was trying to protect him, because he lost his parents, "Don't bother him." But it just never ended. And finally one day his uncle just told him, "You need to go. Get out, get out," threw him out. He took off walking. There was a grandma there too and she knew that she couldn't argue with him to come back, but she made a little bag for him of food and gave it to him. And he took off and he left. And he was walking through the woods and came along this creek and was walking along the creek. And he found, I think it was like, a cave or hole or whatever, and went to sleep. And he woke up and was just mad at himself, why I can't do this and why I can't do that. And then all the sudden he felt someone tap on his shoulder and he turned around. And the way my grandma explains it, I guess it's the only way I could say, is there was an angel standing there. And he started talking to him and said, "What's wrong?" "My family kicked me out. I'm just worthless. I don't know why." And to basically make it a lot shorter, there's a lot that goes on. He ends up throwing up: he threw up all this bad stuff, this laziness, just ends up throwing it up. And the angel told him about en'gee and told him all the laws and rules that go with en'gee. And so he took that and he started heading back to the village and he basically lost

everything that he had as far as laziness and stuff. He saw a caribou, he killed it, he cut it up--it's like he knew how to do this stuff from then on. And he brought back the meat and shared with the village and shared with them about how to take care of food, and en'gee, and all the things you're supposed to do and don't as far as respect. That's the short version (laughter). It's a really long story and it's a good story.

(26:34)

DH: That's great. I'll be looking forward to that, get a fuller version.

KM: My grandma has probably told that story and has it on video with Mount Sanford Tribal Consortium.

DH: Well would you add anything else to this concept of sustainability or en'gee?

KM: I don't think so.

-Break-

DH: Earlier you identified your community in terms of Mentasta and the people and the place of Mentasta. Now I'd like you to think in terms of your vision for Mentasta where these ideas of respect and protection for the future have really been achieved, and also en'gee is a guiding principle in peoples' lives and it's just the ways things are. And so I'm wondering what your vision of that kind of a place is for your community.

KM: Well one thing I think of is that there'd be continuance of being able to practice traditional, cultural activities, but also that the resources are there to do that. If they eat fish, there are still fish there twenty or thirty years from now, moose, caribou, the different animals. What I really see is that we're able to continue that practice. And also though is what I'd like to see is that the community is independent, as far as economic development. Right now they do get funding from the government as far as BIA and others, grants and stuff like that. What I'd like to see is that they're not dependent on those anymore, that they have something that sustains them as far as economic development. I also see continued education. Right now we've got head start through the high school. There is an opportunity to take classes through the UAF (*University of Alaska at Fairbanks*), long distance learning, but I would like eventually to see more of that. They're able to do classes, college classes, right there. Even if just a couple people are taking them. The opportunity is there to do it.

DH: What would that form of education look like? How would it be different from education we talk about today?

KM: I guess it would be different, I think our education system could improve right now; just making sure that kids aren't just passing through. If they do have a disability that it's recognized. I wouldn't even call it a disability; people just learn differently, they all don't learn the same. Like I said, Native people, they learn from observing, they don't just read something and then they go it. So, I would say I'd like to see where the education also includes the teaching of our

culture too, right within the classes. And from sewing, to basket making, to whatever, and having those type of classes also taught. Especially with our elementary and even our language--and that is being worked on now, trying to get our language implemented with the head start in kindergarten.

DH: So, a work in progress?

KM: Yeah. Mount Sanford Tribal Consortium's been working on that through an ANA grant. It's been worked on both in Mentasta and Chistochina. Chistochina is like a sister community of Mentasta; they're all family there too.

DH: What other things are in your hopeful vision of the future?

KM: I guess, just that there's opportunities there for our people, whether they decide to stay home and live in Mentasta and make a life or even if they decide they want to move to New York and be a model, that there is the opportunity to do that. Right now, it just seems like that's impossible, those kinds of dreams, but I know some of our kids have those dreams. We're just trying to make it possible for them to do that.

DH: What kinds of opportunities would you like to see in Mentasta?

KM: I guess I would like to see whatever the young people want to do. I can't really say specific things, whatever our young people have dreams to do. But I guess the only opportunity that I really want to make sure that's always there is that they have the opportunity to know their culture and to know who they are, because that seems something that's getting lost. I guess little by little, it's nothing like a big chunk or anything, but it slowly seems to be going to the wayside.

DH: You mentioned earlier that being able to practice the cultural traditions that were tied to the land. Can you talk a little bit more about the vision of the future to be hopeful looks like in terms of that relationship and the interaction between culture and the land?

KM: Can you maybe rephrase your question?

DH: Yeah, just what would the nature of the relationship be between the people of your community and their landscape and what would the landscape look like?

KM: I would say that the land would be the same as it is now, in its natural state. But also that it provides a lot more resources. My grandma talks about, she's ninety-one years old, how she remembers years ago that, going to Anchorage, there in sheep mountain area, the mountain would be basically be white in the summer because there was so many sheep. Now you hardly see any. You go through Eureka and there would be caribou all through the road and the area, and you don't even hardly see caribou anymore when you go through. Even for Mentasta area, the resources are there as far as the animals, the fish, and the berries. I think we're losing some of it. I would like to see in the future, where there's an abundance of it.

Right now, we're fighting this tier two hunting in our area and that's basically set up so that we as Native people could get moose and caribou before the sport hunters came in. They

think we're against them coming into our area and hunt; it's just that we know there's not enough for everyone right now. And we feel we should have first priority because we do live there, and we live off the food. We're not just going after it because of its horns, or how big it is. I would like to see where there is abundance of the resources, so that everybody can participate in it, even the sport hunters. If they come and hunt, even they get an education in how we hunt and why we hunt. It's not just for the adrenaline rush and big horns. Someone gets a moose in Mentasta, we don't ask how big it was, we ask how much fat was on it (laughter). There's a difference there. "How much fat was on there?" That's what we ask. Sometimes, "there's no fat," and, "oh, that's a poor moose then."

DH: So you see a lot of fat moose?

KM: Mmhm. We've seen poor moose though too (laughter). Well, it was that one year too, it was 2002, we had that earthquake. That year, nobody in Mentasta got moose. They just weren't around. They weren't in the area. That earthquake hit, nobody saw moose. That winter, a lot of the people really struggled. Just cause they didn't have that food. Not just physically, just because of finances and what not too.

DH: In your vision of the future, what are some of the key relationships do you see between your community and external organizations or institutions?

KM: I see there being a working relationship there. To me, Mentasta people are very open, they're very friendly. You do something though, they will forgive you, but they will remember it, they will be more cautious. It's just not organizations, but people also in general. That's one thing too, that they're very protective of their family and their area. And it's in a good way, if someone moved in that was a child molester; we're not going to allow that. Even if they do, they're going to watch that person 24-7.

The other thing too that I'd like to see, as far as the alcohol and drugs, that they're not even be part of the community anymore. How we get to that, I don't know. But I think a lot of it has to do with knowing who you are as a person and even with our young men now. When I say young men, I talk about my generation, and even the generation right before me, they lost their identity. Just as Native men in the community, and we're slowly moving back, trying to get that back. And so, I think some people, they drink because they want to drink, but some people, they're just lost because they don't know about who they are and what they want to do.

DH: I'd like to come back to that identity piece in a minute, but you also mentioned things that aren't there, like alcohol and drugs. Are there any other elements that are really absent from your ideal vision of the future?

KM: I guess, not to do away with modern technology or anything, but to find that there's a balance there. As far as TV, games, and computers, stuff like that. I'm seeing a more lot of our younger kids spending a lot more time on these. But finding a balance there, because a computer you can do a lot with it, but being able to find a balance there. Yeah you're on the computer, but you need to go out, walking in the woods, find out what that's like too. I'm noticing that even with my kids; that's one thing I'm trying to teach them. Yeah, it's ok to play video games, but you need to also get outside and go climb a tree or something and see that there's some

enjoyment in that also. It's not just all on the computer or TV, watching TV all the time. Even that, if in the future, on TV, I would like to see where we have programs on there that teaches about the different cultures in Alaska. Where they learn, maybe the language is being taught, they have a show on it. You can watch a half an hour, an hour, learning their language.

DH: Other ways to use technology to be in balance and reinforce other aspects of culture. Are there any others that come to mind?

KM: There probably is, but my mind is blank right now.

DH: Anything else to say about that idea of balance between technologies and being outside or balance between new technologies and traditional and cultural practices?

KM: (15:39) Well, I think there has to be...I own a four-wheeler. My kids right now, they ride it just for fun, but they also see me using it though when we go out hunting, go out camping, and saying, "Look, a long time ago our people walked to different camps, and camped out for two or three weeks at a time." This day and age, you just really can't do that. I work forty hours a week and even longer sometimes. The kids have school and they're required to be in school. So it's just finding that balance there. Yeah, we have to do this, because state law or whatnot, but you need to also do this though. Even for myself, when I go out into the woods, or campout, or hunting, or whatever it may be, to me that's almost like my therapy. I get rejuvenated, reenergized; don't have the cell phone ringing every minute. Just kinda get away, and just get in touch with the land. That to me is just, I don't know how to explain it, it's like therapy for me. Even spiritually, I feel renewed, and I can come back into the busy-ness of life again; cell phones, and TV, and computer, and all of that.

DH: In your ideal vision of the future, is the balance achieved in that same way, or is it different than how you experience it now.

KM: I would say it could be. As long as it's recognized too, that it's not lost. I see some of our older people are just even losing that. I'm not sure why, but it just seems to be.

DH: Losing what?

KM: Losing that balance of, kinda like they give up on trying to pass on the knowledge that they have as far as our culture. And thinking that it's not worth it anymore, 'cause their kids are just watching TV all the time. It's kinda like they're giving up. I would like to see in the future that they don't, that it's continued on. Our culture, it's really learned through our elders, because it's passed on. It just seems like we're losing that too.

DH: This idea of learning, you mention the idea of technologies being employed to transmit some of that knowledge, such as language. Any other learning processes that you'd like to see in place in the future?

KM: (19:26) What I know right now, what MSTC is working on is that they're putting the language, they're recording it, like from my grandma Katie and then another elder in

Chistochina, Charlie, and they're putting it on CD, so that you can go to the computer, put the CD in, and you hear their voices. How they pronounce it and use it in a sentence, and all of that. And I think that if that is more enhanced, and one of the things that that did too, was getting it into the school curriculum. And if that could just be recognized state wide for all of the cultures that we have here in Alaska, I think that there's just another opportunity where we're using modern technology, but we're learning our language. And our language is a big part of our culture. One of the things is that, how they tell stories, or say things in our language and then they try to put it in English form; it loses its meaning somehow. Just because they can't really explain it in the English language. I think that's one place that we're losing our culture, because we're not knowing our language, not understanding the full aspect of the stories told in the English versus our language. Even that en'gee story, if my grandma told me in her language and I understood it, I probably would have gotten a lot more out of it that I did get as far as her tongue and English.

DH: Anything else in terms of kinds of relationships that you see? That's relationships between people within your community, relationships with the landscape, relationships with outside organizations.

KM: One of the things I'd like to see is that in future that there would be a respect there with different organizations, groups of people, or just individuals--just respecting who we are. That's one thing growing up that I always was taught, is that you always respect someone else, no matter how they look, how they act, you always showed respect. Sometimes I feel like as Native people, we don't get that. There's still, I don't know if it is racists or what, but there's still remarks that are made as far as Native people. Just to be able to have that respect and be recognized. Yeah, that's who they are, and yeah they do exist. That's just the way they do, how they live, being able to respect that. I don't know, it's just education needs to happen there. Some people that are still in the lower forty-eight, they're like "So, you're Eskimo?" They don't even know there's Athabascan. Athabascan's are in the whole interior of Alaska. We have this huge area and huge population. A lot of times when you hear of Alaska, they just think of Eskimo. It's no disrespect to Eskimo, but there are other cultures here. There's Athabascan, the Aleuts, the Tlingit and Haida. There's not just Eskimos in Alaska. And that's how they think too, as a Native person, I've traveled in the lower forty-eight, going to Hawaii in high school and being asked, "Oh, you guys live in igloos, eh? We didn't even have igloos. Just that concept that when they hear about Alaska that they know more about it and the people. Not just one certain group.

DH: So that'd be one way of showing respect?

KM: Mmm hmm (nodding).

DH: Any other ways that would be a good demonstration of respect?

KM: I don't know (laughter).

DH: Particularly in terms of outside organizations dealing with your people.

KM: (24:40) I think that other organizations are starting to recognize that. I think whereas years

ago they would come in and feel like, “Oh, we’re here to help you and make you better.” We don’t need that. What we need is respect from that organization. You know what, here’s an opportunity. And it’s not just even to make the community better, where the community will say and recognize here’s an opportunity where we can enhance ourselves in some way. Where the organizations basically come in and say “We’re here to save you.” That concept has slowly changed. I remember years ago that that was one of the thinking is, “Well, we’re here to help you.” Now it needs to be more, where we help ourselves, but give us the tools to do it.

DH: We’ll probably come back to that in terms of what kinds of tools you’re looking for.

KM: Ok (laughter).

DH: I wanted to get back to another thing you brought up, in terms of identity. You used an example of men and your generation, and the generation that lost their identity because the way of life has been taken in a lot of ways. So, thinking ahead to your hopeful vision of the future. What’s that identity look like among your people, not just the men, but the people’s sense of identity?

KM: I would think that they know who they are. Even for myself I think of, I’m Athabascan and I’m Norwegian. I’ve asked even my dad, on my Norwegian side, where we came from, and the history. I think a lot of it has to do with that, as far as their identity, is knowing the history of your family. But, I think also just as far as identity that they know who they are and be able to recognize within themselves that they can be a healthy person, that they can do what they want to do, and achieve their dreams. That it’s ok if you just want to live in Mentasta, and live off subsistence, that’s it’s ok you want to live in Anchorage, just remember where you came from. I think a lot of that, that’s what I’d like to see as Native people. That we just know who we are and I think it would just make us a lot more stronger that way as a Native group.

DH: What would be some of the core values people would hold?

KM: There’s respect, even self respect, sharing, love . . . that’s it, the ones that come to mind right away.

DH: How would sharing and love be important in terms of maintaining a healthy sustainable community?

KM: (28:55) Just growing up, that was one thing that I was always taught, is sharing. Even if a stranger comes to my house, that I feed them, that I offer them something to eat. Make sure that they’re taken care of. I don’t know if it’s so much pride, but maybe more self esteem that when you do share, just ‘cause it makes you feel good that you helped someone else out that needed that. But it also feels good when someone else brings you something and shares with you too. I don’t know how to explain. I guess an example that I can think of is when my husband gets a moose in Mentasta, we cook the stomach, that’s a delicacy for us. When I go to cook it and prepare it, I call almost everybody in the village that I can get a hold of to come over and eat. And everybody will come and eat, and we’ll give them a piece of meat. What happens during that time, it’s just uplifting, it’s joyous. I guess you have to be there to see what happens, and it’s

not just for me, it's also for everybody else, everybody just feels good. There's times of sharing of stories, just good times. Now sometimes you hear someone got a moose and nobody gets nothing and that is just not, to me it's like how can they do that, how can they not help out others in the village that need meat. When I say others, there's single parents, the elderly. My grandma talked about long ago that there was people recognized as hunters and providers in the community and when they got something it was shared with everybody, it wasn't kept to just themselves. Then even young men now are growing up, make their first kill, one of the rules is that they don't eat one bit of it, it's passed out to the opposite clan and that's just to show that, it's teaching them to share, but it's also supposed to bring them good luck the rest of their life. That they will be good providers and not be stingy with their food.

DH: So you see a lot more of that sharing?

KM: mm hmm.

DH: Also, sounds like sharing is not just to make sure that people have enough to eat, that there's also the ability, the community, lifting of spirits.

KM: Yeah, when I moved out here a couple years ago. There was an elderly couple and they were looking for cranberries and I said, "Well I have some. I'll give you guys some." So I brought five bags of cranberries to them. They tried to give me money, and I said, "No, I just can't take money. I'm sorry. It's no disrespect to you. It's just to me that you guys are elders and I'm just helping you guys out." That lady saw my grandma about three weeks later and told my grandma about it and how she was like, "I've never seen a young person do that in a long time." And to me that was just heart breaking, what's going on, why aren't our people taking care of our elders, even down in this area. Like I said, Mentasta is my home, but here in Tazlina there are elders around this area too, but they don't get any assistance from the younger people anymore as far as going out and getting stuff, providing that to them. That to me, was just heart breaking. To me, it just made me feel good that I was able to share cranberries with them. Just the look on their face was like "Gee, thanks," all happy. It was shocking to hear that young people aren't doing that down here. I don't know why, it seems the thinking has changed that you're not part of a community anymore. That you take care of self, self is number one. That shouldn't be, that's not Native people. Yourself ain't number one . . . your family and stuff.

--Video at end of tape--break--

DH: Well, Kathryn you generated a little list there of "I am" statements, somebody in the future of your community would speak of in terms of their personal identity. So could you share with us what you wrote?

KM: I basically put: I am Native, happy and healthy, a provider, a teacher, a student, respected, an elder, a wife, and mother, living my traditional culture, eating my traditional food, and speaking my language. I guess this is more who I see myself in the future. Hopefully that others in the community see me as that also. I don't know what you want me to touch on here.

DH: How are these important to having a community that really cares and works towards

protection towards future generations, and understands en'gee.

KM: I guess for me, it's just knowing who I am, and wanting to see where I'm at in the future. And one thing I forgot is that I hope I'm still alive too (laughter). Some of these I know I will continue on, but there's some of these I'm going to have to work at, as far as speaking my language fluently. I know bits and pieces. Being a teacher and a student, one thing is, I think no matter how old you get, you'll still always be learning, but you'll also continue to be a teacher to younger generations. I think when I say just happy and healthy, I think as far as drugs and alcohol, other things in life that makes a person miserable. That I would be healthy enough to be able to deal with those things and move past them. Just to be happy. I think a lot of people in life forget that they just want to be happy. They just get caught up in everything else and lose that goal they have for themselves. I really see myself living in Mentasta and growing old there continuing to raise my family there, whether they're there or elsewhere, to still be a part of their life.

DH: With this vision of a more hopeful future, thinking from where we are today. What kinds of actions and strategies need to be taken this day forward to bring about that kind of future?

KM: Well, for one is that making sure as Native people that we still have the opportunity to hunt, fish, and gather foods. It seems like that's just slowly being taken away or there's always a court case, always something trying to take that away from us. That's just not, as far as laws and regulations being written, but the abundance of it too. My grandma told me stories about as Native people how they managed resources also. They would have control burns, just to build up the vegetation and stuff for animals. If it got too crowded with plants and things getting killed off, they had traditional management styles. Some of it is still being practiced today. I guess the other thing I'd like to see is that different organizations and government gets this information and it's shared by the Native people, because they lived for at least ten thousand years on this land. So they know it, they know the animals and how they move. I think with the scientific side of it and the traditional knowledge being combined and working together, that it'll be able to save the resources.

DH: What are some of the best strategies for combining those two? What tangibly needs to be done?

KM: Working with the village councils, there's traditional councils that are throughout Alaska. They are the governing body. It's a western concept, but it's included the tradition. Right now, in Mentasta, our tradition was to have a traditional chief, he was the leader, he was the one that made decision. He decided things for the community as a whole. And now they use the council, which is like a five member board, and they do the same thing. But being able to work with them, and figure out a way together, what will work? Not just coming and saying, "Oh, this is what you need to do." Well, we know what's going on, we live here. We're losing fish in Mentasta Lake. We're bringing this up to people, but no one is listening. That's another thing, people need to hear things and listen. Mentasta's at the headwaters of the Copper. If the fish are lost there, it's going to mean that they're lost all the way down the river; all the way to Cordova, where they commercial fish--all of it's going to be lost. Everybody needs to work together and give their input, but a lot of it needs to come from the Native people too. Because they know, the

knowledge and the different things, the scientific side of it. The facts of what the theories are, what they know.

DH: So greater amount of communication and collaboration between the councils and the scientific community.

KM: Not just scientific, even the government, as far as state and federal; the regulations that are being implemented. We go in and we testify. We've held rallies to things that they try to pass that effect our area, and will be detrimental to us. But they don't understand it because they think they're trying to do the right thing. I don't know, there just needs to be communication, but I think also a better relationship needs to happen.

DH: How would you build that relationship?

KM: For one, if just even take the governor or her dignitaries right now and have them come to the area and visit with them and educate, but also to where we learn about them also and what they're trying to accomplish and do. Just have an understanding of what the other person's trying to do and work with that. Grandma Katie, the state government, spent sixteen years in court with them on the case. Governor Knowles, in his second term, it was suggested to him to come and visit with my grandma and he did. And he understood why she was fighting her case and everything. That's when he decided, "We're not going to fight this no more." All my grandma was trying to do was get the fishing open at Batzulnetuz. Once that happened she wouldn't have to worry about her family being able to find a place to fish and get food. And that's all she was trying to do was make sure there was a place to for her family to continue on to survive. And once he understood that, it has nothing to do with the politics, or fighting the state government or federal government, all she was trying to do was provide for her family. Once he understood that, they had an opportunity to appeal the case, but he said, "Nope, it's done with, it's over with." That, to me, was a huge accomplishment, but that was just because he made the effort to come out and visit. Come to her home and understand what she was trying to do. If you don't understand something and you continue to fight it, it will just continue to go on, nothing will be accomplished or resolved or anything.

DH: You sense where understanding was achieved in that situation, there's still a lot that remains particular the new politicians. What are ways to build relationships?

KM: Even for myself, when I go to Anchorage, that's a big city. That's considered the big city of Alaska. When I go there, I need to understand how they live there in Anchorage. I need to understand how they do things there in anchorage. Just show respect towards them, not to just go in and say, "You know what? You guys are just doing this all wrong because you all live right next to each other and on top of each other and it's ridiculous" By understanding that, that's how a city is built and works and so people like to live that way. And there's just an understanding that people are different, because for me I could never live in a city. I just know that, I have and I've adjusted to it, but I like my wide open space (laughter).

DH: Are there other primary threats that you see to maintaining the opportunity to fish and game?

KM: Well, other organizations or businesses like the oil company. We've got the pipeline running through our property here and it crossed over Tazlina river and Gulkana river that drain into the Copper and we're trying to make sure that if there was ever an oil spill, they do have a contingency plan if it does ever happen, but we feel it ain't right, it won't work. By the time the oil hits that river it's too late. They need to prevent it, before it hits the river. They have a plan if the oil does hit the river to try and contain it. For us, we think it should be before it hits the river.

DH: Any ideas how to achieve that prevention?

KM: Like I said, if we can get them to understand where we're coming from, that we have the same goals. Maybe just some of the people in their organization is thinking of the bottom dollar, the cost. Even for us to understand, well how can we do it, efficiently and cost effective. Instead of just saying, "This is what we'd like to see," but helping them out in the process, making sure it's cost effective for them as a company. I think it just needs to be more communication and more working with each other. Not just ignore us or we ignore them.

DH: Any ideas about being able to tangibly work together on that specific issue of the pipeline?

KM: I think it needs to come from the leaders of this organization and the villages and dealing with leaders of the company. And when I say leaders, I mean taking to the head people, and that way it filters down. Don't start from the bottom up, but from the top down.

DH: Other threats that you see that need to be addressed?

KM: I don't know...there's military. Not so much as a threat, but more a lot of the people that are in military are stationed up here, they're not actually from Alaska. They just need big education to the military on the different Native groups, and not just the Native groups, people in Alaska too. How the land is laid out, there's different ownership. Just having that respect too.

DH: Other strategies, actions, that can be done today or continue from this day forward to bring about the kind of vision you describe for your community?

(16:23)

KM: I think a lot of it just has to be communication and education, and I'd say that for both sides. Whereas my community gets educated. Even the military, I don't know much about it, but I think once I'd be educated on how it works and stuff and being able to understand. Then I could figure out a way then, "Ok, how do we go and approach the military then and start education or communication." I think education and communication are two key things, in really working with anybody.

DH: Other things that need to be educated on?

KM: I don't know, I would say maybe, I mentioned the people of Alaska; there's different Native cultures. The land, how it's laid out, as far as ownership. That in itself, a lot of people,

once they understand how the land is laid out, that even though this is the state of Alaska, that there are regional Native groups that own huge chunks of property. And you also have the federal government that owns property and then the university and the mental health. If there's an understanding of that there would be less trespass, less disrespect of property. There's opportunities to see a lot of the beauty that we have here, but if it doesn't get respected or taught or even learned. It's going to all get ruined. It might not happen in a day, but it'll happen over time.

DH: Other ways of building that respect?

KM: Like I said, I think it's just education and communication. When I came on board here, I started working with Bureau of Land Management and the National Park service, DOT, department of transportation, these different agencies. I've been here two years, and I think I've finally got to the point where we finally got a relationship and now can start working together. A lot of it is communication. And it's not just communication of Ahtna Incorporated or the Native group, there needs to be education and communication between the other agencies themselves and talking to each other. One of the things that BLM (19:36) started having a land managers meeting at least twice a year, which included all land managers in the area; whether they were state, federal, private. They all got together and have a meeting and talk about what they're doing, what they're working on, what issues they're having to deal with. By that happening I see that there's collaborations starting to happen. Where they'll say, "Maybe we can do this, instead of this to help out on this issue whatever, say with the park service and the state."

DH: Do you see more of that happening?

KM: Mmm Hmm.

DH: And room for a lot more probably.

KM: There is a room for a lot more.

DH: Are there any particular issues that you see the need for those kinds of conversations to take place around?

KM: Well, just for the land itself. Like I said, we are a private property owner, and that's how we're looked at and so we fall under state laws for that. But the federal government have right of ways through our property and the state has right of ways through our property. Those cause issues. I would say that the region is heavily impacted with trespass because we are on the road system. It's just being able to work with all the agencies and say, "Can you guys help us in educating the public as far as what we are as a Native corporation," but it's the same for us. Like 17-b easement, which is a federal right of way from BLM to go through our property to public property, but it's also our part to educate the public to understand what that means. And even just understanding ourselves, they were trying to fight it and find out why it was set up the history on it and then we're able to say, "Ok, if this is what we're going to have to deal with it, now we need to find a way to deal with it that will work with us and the government."

DH: You talked about sharing as something you'd like to see a lot more of in your community.

KM: Mmm hmm (nodding).

DH: Any thoughts on how to bring about that kind of activity?

KM: Well, I think it just starts with the younger kids and teaching them at a young age, but it's not just telling them what I think. It's also showing it and practicing it.

DH: Any thoughts on strategies to bring about the kinds of values you discussed as being important?

KM: Well, for me, I have to start with myself and teach it to my kids and my nieces and nephews, that's my responsibility. And trying to get others in the community to recognize that this is your responsibility as a parent, or aunt, or an uncle, or a grandparent. Then, I guess, just practicing it, and showing it. As far as the leaders, they're looked up to how they do things and stuff. So I know people will copy and just making sure the leaders are able to do that.

DH: You also talked about collaboration with other organizations and the old model was more in the form of: "here let us help you" and you'd like to see it more in terms of a collaborative partnership where you're given tools to help yourself. What are some of those kinds of tools that you're looking for?

KM: Well, it could be funding to scientific knowledge to, maybe just even, "How to go about getting someone to listen to you and your concerns?" But I think also, can we resolve it ourselves? I guess some of the organizations think that come into the community, that they're able to be able to provide that and say, "We'll do it. We'll take care of it." Because that ain't gonna work.

DH: So, other examples then, of say, scientific knowledge, that you could use and how you would use that?

KM: An example I think of is like Mentasta, the fish has been depleting, but the village feels that there's a creek that used to drain into the Tok River, but not. When the army core of engineers brought the telegraph through in the 40's and 50's they diverted the creeks and that drains into the lake. We feel it's caused a lot of sediment to go into the lake where it's killing the oxygen in the lake, which is basically what's killing the fish. And that's one aspect of it. Where the scientific knowledge could come in and say, "Ok, can this scientific side of it prove what is happening?" And if it ain't that, then ok. The other thing that we're noticing it that the lake temperature has been warming. What's causing that? I think with scientific knowledge they'd be able to find that out?

DH: So, you'd rather see a model where the scientific community can help make that case, but you'd like to be empowered to present that case? I just want to play with this idea of being given the tools to that so that you can be empowered to work on the issues.

KM: Well, I think if scientific background was to back up that theory and say, “this is exactly what has happened.” And have the proof to show it. And I think it would empower the village to say look, just because you wouldn’t believe our knowledge, because of traditional knowledge, well here’s scientific knowledge to back it up. Because some people just won’t listen because they think it’s just our opinion that we don’t have the college education or whatever to prove our theory. But I think even just getting organizations to recognize that, Native people, their knowledge, doesn’t come from a book. It comes from years and years of history, that’s passed on through stories, teachings. Even my grandma, she talked about Batzulnetuz fish, how come no bensenida fish? Nation park service says, “What do you mean Batzulnetuz fish? There’s no bensenida fish?” and it’s salmon. And they come in late August, that’s when they come and run in the creek then, and the park service was like, “wow, these are Batzulnetuz fish.” They never had the knowledge; there where traditional knowledge teaching the scientific side. But even where the nation park service side, because they have a fish biologist, has gone to our culture camp every year and has talked of the different salmon species and held little education workshops for the kids on how to identify a salmon. Whether it’s male or female besides cutting it open and looking, tell by the different features and teaching that. And whereas the traditional side, that’s also taught too. But it’s getting it from both sides.

DH: What other actions or strategies that you would like to see today forward?

KM: I think right now, just keep talking education, communication and I think other things will come in after. But I think a big part of it is just getting that information out there and then being able to then, “Ok, now they’re listening. Now what do we do? How can we go about resolving it?”

DH: I’m wondering, I guess before closing, is there any other things of relevance that we haven’t touched on? That you haven’t had the opportunity to speak to, like, “I wish you would ask this question.” Anything like that?

KM: I don’t think so, I’ll probably think of something later (laughter).

DH: Right, well you’ll have the opportunity. I guess the last question, two other questions. One is, are you hopeful?

KM: I am.

DH: What is it that gives you hope?

KM: I guess my kids, knowing that they’re going to grow up. Being able to picture, what I have, they have, but even more. Not just for my kids, I have nieces and nephews too, that’s what makes me hopeful. I would say even my grandma. She’s ninety-one years old; she’s just my inspiration to keep going.

DH: Any closing, any other points, that you’d like to emphasize today? Or maybe any last thoughts to share with anybody that might read this, or hear this conversation?

KM: Well, for me, it's just show respect to the Native cultures here in Alaska. By doing that it's getting education on them and understanding them as a people. Even for myself, I've had to learn about western civilization. How it works, how to understand it. To me, it's been a benefit to me, because now I see myself where I could live in both worlds. As far as if I was living in my traditional culture way back before non-natives came to now, where there are non-natives and I can live with non-Native people, I guess peacefully. There are some things we're still struggling with and fighting, but I think just the more education and communication that happens and understanding one another, that we'll be able to, I believe, continue on to have a better place for everybody.

DH: Thank you.

KM: Thank you.

DH: I appreciate you sharing your time and your thoughts with us today.

KM: I appreciate it too.

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