

Sue Ramsey – Interview Transcript  
Individuals Present: Sue Ramsey (S); Joshua Ream (J)  
Interview Date: March 3, 2012

## **1. Cultural Familiarity and Chiefs (00:00-03:40)**

(Conversation about audio recorders prior to interview)

J: It is March 3<sup>rd</sup> 2012. We just finished the informed consent forms. I'm here today with Sue Ramsey who agreed to be part of this study. I really appreciate you being here. She mentioned before we turned the tape on that she is Kiks.adi yadi, meaning that her father was Kiks.adi. You also have Kiks.adis on your mother's side too?

S: Yes.

J: So we will just start with the first question. I have a whole list here. We may or may not get through all of them. I know you have to go and that's fine so just let me know. So how familiar do you consider yourself with Tlingit culture and with Kiks.adi culture in particular?

S: Pretty familiar. I've actually gotten a degree in American Indian studies. And so I also have a bachelors in psychology so I feel you know that since I wrote my thesis on the psychotherapeutic effects of American Indian traditions such as singing, drumming, dancing and storytelling, that I had a chance to think deeply about these things and come to realization that the mythology of what would be our stories were originally referred to as mythology by the first contact people that came here, like John Swanton and the naval Captain, I think his name was Emmons. He wrote that book that is edited by De Laguna about the Tlingit Indians.

J: Frederica right?

S: Yes. And then the other book the Tlingit Myths and Texts is edited by John Swanton but he interviewed my great grandfather John Kadashan and his mother, and so almost I'd say, maybe a little under half of the whole book is stories by those two people, that were my relatives and they were like from Wrangell or the ended up in Wrangell. They weren't originally from here. She was originally from Canada and he was born up in Chilkat country. Because he was the son of a chief, Shotridge, and so back then, I don't know how else to say it but I really don't like... I kind of like the name chief but I refer to it as the royalty. You know because the word chief has so many stereotypical things about it that have been made fun of by American culture for years and years. They don't think we are valuable but we are. It will come to light to them someday. To the mainstream culture. And so back in those days, this was like in the 1800s and even before that. Well the royalty could only marry other royalty. So because of that Chief Shotridge sent his son down here to marry Chief Shakes' sister, Chief Shakes Charlie Jones the 7<sup>th</sup> and so my mom, through that union...

## **2. Bloodlines and Selection of Chief Shakes (03:40-13:04)**

To back track a little bit, Chief Kadashan and his wife had only one child, and that was my grandmother, and I'm named after her, her name was, our name is Kat.tlat and it doesn't have a meaning. You know a lot of the names have a really neat meaning but I think the reason for that is because she had such a high stature. These were strong chiefs on both sides that were, that she was carrying the Nanya ayii

bloodline and so because of her older sons, her two first born sons, they both have to have the same name because the first one died. So the second one had to have the same name because the names were really important names for the clan. It had to be someone you know, important, to be able to use those names. So her sons even though she was born in Sitka, or she was born in Wrangell, but she went over to Sitka to go to college. She was from the Wrangell Nanya.ayii clan so her sons were supposed to be like the next Chief Shakes. They both died. She miscarried the first one or it died in childhood. She had three or four kids that died in childhood. Back then it was really hard. That was before hospitals and stuff were here in Alaska.

J: So your name is Nanya.ayii?

S: Yea. I'm just trying to explain how the whole clan system works for like each clan leader. There's only a certain people that can be the leaders. So like even though there's been many, when people come here they get confused because they say well everyone in town is related to Chief Shakes so they think we are all making false claims. But we are not because even though I'm the one that carries, if it was traditional times, my son, one or the other of my sons, first they preferred the older son but, both of my sons would be eligible to be the next Chief Shakes. But they would have to be selected. There's certain families that can be selected so they would have to be selected by one of the frog clans, the Kaach.adis, I think it was just mainly the Kaach.adis, but their symbol is the frog too aside from the Kiks.adi.

J: Was it the Kaach.adi's status that allowed them to choose the family from which the Shakes would come?

S: Well I have a copy of the letter from William Paul and in it he explains that and then I've also heard it from, I don't know if you know Tis and Carol, well they have cousins, first cousins that have moved north from here to get work. They left as young adults. The oldest of them, I became friends with her when I was working in Juneau, and she explained to me that her grandmother who was Chief Shakes Charlie Jones' daughter, taught her that their clan had to select the Chief Shakes and they wanted to select, well, this is very controversial. VERY controversial but. I totally don't care if you ever publish it or not but. I wouldn't mind if you did because then it would be recorded but they told me they had gone to, back in the 70s they had gone to Charles DeWitts, he kind of proclaimed himself Chief Shakes and had a party that, I think it was in Ketchikan, and he invited all of them and they all went but they didn't really stay, because they didn't approve of what he was doing. Because they knew they were the ones that were supposed to select the next Chief Shakes. And so they had told me in 2006 or it might have even been 2002, it was at one of the Celebrations, they told me that they would. They said get ready and get lots of fish because we are going to select your brother to be the next Chief Shakes. Then, but they're behind that but the other Kaach.adis in town are against it, so the ones that have more knowledge about the culture are for it but the ones that live in town are always against it. Like they wouldn't even come to the repatriation of the Nanya.ayii robe that, the flotilla killerwhale robe, none of the Kaach.adis in town would come. And they worked really hard to get no one to come. They worked very hard and it was really hurtful because one of my best friends, I had bought her gifts and so she got tons of gifts but she wouldn't show up at the party because she listened to them. And so her house guest who came down here from Canada for the party took all the gifts home to her and I was going why didn't I pull Clara's name and put her friend's name because she had enough respect to show up at the party. And then I asked Clara why she didn't show up and she said oh I was sick but later on my aunt Chrissy said she ran into Clara at the grocery store and Clara was trying to talk her out of going to the party. So it was mostly people from out of town and a few people from in town but you know we didn't mind. I mean, but now I wish we had kept those beautiful... Well my son made a drawing of the flotilla killerwhale

robe, but he made it in white, red and black because those are our traditional Tlingit colors, and then he made a whole bunch of them and he said that this artwork, art project was worth like five or six thousand dollars. Because there were so few people there, we just kept giving them out until they were gone. Some people got a whole bunch of them and then the family members only got like one or two. Just it seems like it wasn't fair. We should have kept them. We should have given some to the museum and then just kept them to give them out as gifts over the years.

J: Did the tribe after that pass a rule that there would no longer be a Chief Shakes?

S: Yea.

J: And it was because of the controversy to kind of end it?

S: Yea, I think so. And also I think when Chief shakes Charlie Jones, when he was inaugurated he, I think he said that he was going to be the last Chief Shakes. I'm not really sure but I've heard that, but you know it could just be them saying that but. I don't really think he. Well you know that letter that our family got from William Paul was written in the mid-70s and I have a photocopy of that at my house somewhere in my files. I have so many files, I'm really disorganized. But I know I'm going to find it someday. I think I found it during the winter and read it. It's kind of a complicated letter you know? He was the one that won the land claims for us.

J: With Tlingit and Haida?

S: Yea. Yea but he was the Indian lawyer. The first Indian lawyer. Tlingit lawyer I mean.

J: Were the Kiks.adi involved in any of these negotiations or mostly just the Kaach.adi?

S: Are you referring to... negotiations for what?

J: For the selection of Chief Shakes.

S: I think it's just the Kaach.adis. Yea.

### **3. Connecting with Culture and its Meaning (13:04-22:17)**

J: Thank-you for that. So were you raised in a traditional Tlingit household?

S: Well we ate some of the food and we learned a few of the words but both of my parents had lost their culture because they grew up in that era when they didn't want anyone to speak the language anymore. If they spoke it at school they got punished severely.

J: Did they attend the Wrangell Institute?

S: My mom did. It was so evident in her face whenever, well right when my sister Lou and I just started performing Tlingit dances and songs and drumming it was so evident in her face that it embarrassed her. She would get a real ashamed look on her face but she got over that after the years. After several years but it took a long time for her to become comfortable with it.

J: Did she go past having it comfortable eventually into having it a part of her heritage and pride?

S: Yea she got herself some regalia. I forgot what year it might have been. It was in the 80s. She got herself a really nice what they call a tunic; it's a long dress with fringes on the bottom. These ones, the one she has, I think it's sort of like the Athabascan flowers sewed on it, beadwork. Then she also got herself a blanket or a robe with a wolf on it and then she would get into the parades with us at Celebration. She would get up on the stage as an elder and just sit there to support the youth and us as we were dancing. Yea her and my aunt Christine Jenkins, Marge Byrd.

J: Will you be attending Celebration this year?

S: Yes I will.

J: What does being Kiks.adi yadi mean specifically to you?

S: It's a very special thing for me because I didn't know my grandparents. You know they all passed away before I was born, except for my German grandfather.

J: And that is Chrissy's father?

S: Yea. Yea she is half and half ya know, half Tlingit and half German. But like my dad but anyway when I went over to Sitka, when I was in my 30s, I'm in my 60s now, and I went down to the ANB hall because I was there for a native women's conference, and they had a huge dinner there and when I walked in I felt like I was surrounded by love. Ya know because I think my grandparents had been there so many times that it was a, their spirit was there to warm me. Because like... (Pause for crying).

So anyway it was... I forget what my last sentence was. About how when I walked into there they had such wonderful food and it is a really neat ANB hall. And then to know that my grandparents had been there time and time again. That you know because my grandmother Elizabeth Kadashan James moved there to go to college at Sheldon Jackson. I think she went to high school and college. That's where she met Ray James senior and she married him and he was the son of Elmira Cameron and she's a well-known Kiks.adi, she did a lot of genealogy. She is the one that is the one my son Gary found our names at the museum in Ketchikan and it was in Ron Olson's field notes. It said Elmira Cameron compiled this. It had our bloodline, I mean the Nayna.ayiiis because she took it down probably from my grandmother because my grandmother was her daughter in law and then also my mother had in her autobiography she wrote about her Kiks.adi relatives and how they fought in the battle of Sitka.

J: With the Russians?

S: Yes, against the Russians. She said the women fought right beside the men. I mean I can't imagine that. They would have to be so brave. I mean the Kiks.adi women. I was thinking after I saw you yesterday at Betty Nore's. I was thinking about well, it's still puzzling to me you know why the Tlingits picked the frog as one of their symbols. I thought I could count on one hand how many times I've seen a frog in this area. Is it almost time to end?

(BRIEF INTERRUPTION BY LIBRARY STAFF)

J: We have some more time if you can.

S: Oh yea. Well anyway. I was thinking back to when I was writing my thesis and how well you know I have a degree in psychology so there's like this branch called uni in psychology where whatever you see in other people its actually a reflection of yourself. You know the admirable traits or the dark side and so when I was getting my American Indian studies degree we talked about that type of thing a lot in our classes because when human beings first became humans and they would look into the darkness and they would see. They would come up with these stories. And it was actually about themselves and it has a lot to do with, how do you say it, attributes and integrity and you know all those, strength, human frailties, and so all of these stories are about all that. Then to hear the frogs from the raven's side, and the raven is the one that taught us everything that we know about the world according to one of those stories I've read. I had more stuff to say about that but I get distracted every time you look down or look at the clock.

J: No no, sorry. We have plenty of time it's only been half an hour so we are good.

S: So anyway the frog is very rare, that is what I think.

You know since I did the healing heart in 2003 was a ceremony for Betty Nore's daughter and granddaughter that she had lost to murder. I got to spend more time with her and got to spend more time with my auntie and my dad died when I was young so even though I valued my aunt and my uncles you know I didn't see them that often. I saw my auntie Chrissy a lot when I was growing up but there were many years when we weren't spending time together because we're both half German and we are both hot headed. So we got angry about something years ago and then my husband came and he brought us back together. I married him in 2004 but I would say we were alienated from the early 90s till 2004.

#### **4. Frog Leadership and Generosity (22:17-25:25)**

But the reason I think when I first read about the frog and why it was selected it said that they heard it singing in the woods and it had a really loud voice and I actually haven't ever heard a frog singing but I think to me that indicated that these are people that have a lot of power and they have a big voice and they're important to people. They're also very warm and humorous and kind. I've just noticed that because when I worked at Sealaska I met other Kiks.adis from other places and I worked closely with Andy Abona when he was the head person to plan Celebration in 1998. He was so much fun to be with but also very generous and kind like when we finished he bought us each a jacket that said Celebration 1998 volunteer or something on it. But it was 100% wool with leather sleeves. It was a very attractive jacket. They each cost over \$200 so he gave it to several of us. He had a dinner at his house when Celebration was over and I just loved dancing with him and you know his dance group. And I got to be in the parade the first year, the Fourth of July parade, and his mom was on the float, and I was on the float, and Andy was on the float. But she had the most beautiful headband. It had the sun on it. I don't see that very often. You know like I thought I had a picture of her but I didn't. When I looked through my photos but I saw the pictures so many times and then they even put us on some kind of commercial. They didn't even ask us but my boyfriend at the time said you're famous because they show this commercial all the time with you guys being on that 4<sup>th</sup> of July float, so its Andy, me and his mom. And I think his mother but I think that was 94 or 96 when I first moved up there.

J: Where is he from originally?

N: He's originally, I think he's originally from Sitka but his sister Andrea Bona does the workouts and the lunch program for the Native adults, or the Native elders. My mom goes there all the time. And so the thing about the... What was the question again? Something about the frog.

#### **5. Kiks.adi Yadi (25:25-36:54)**

J: What being Kiks.adi yadi means to you.

S: Oh okay so to me I feel like I am sheltered by them because you know when I worked at Sealaska and I read all of the things that the Dauenhauers wrote at Sealaska Heritage, we called it Foundation then. It was like these are special. I think that type of relationship is kind of humorous in a way because an old person can go call a young person their grandfather you know because they're from their grandfather's clan or something but so that has something to do with yadi but I don't really recall that. I haven't read that for a long time or been with the Dauenhauers since I moved away a long time ago.

J: Dick and Nora?

S: Yea, they called me, they said she's our... Well they were my mentor and I forget what they called me. I worked with them for several years there and I edited, or I did research for their book, the 50 Tlingit elders Haa Kusteyi and I transcribed a lot of the stuff for it. So anyway it's sort of like having grandparents and for me it was meaningful because like I never had, I never had my grandparents because even the grandfather I knew died when I was seven. I remember going to his funeral and forcing myself to cry afterward because everyone else was so sad and I just sat down on the steps and forced myself to cry because it seemed like I had actually only seen him a couple times. He liked to be alone. My grandmother and...

The other thing Kiks.adi yadi means to me is, when I was growing up, like Carol and Tis' mom would tell me stories about my grandma, grandma Suzie, she was Kiks.adi. Her maiden was Cooday. They'd say "your grandma was so kind and she was so much fun to be with. She would let all of us kids from around the neighborhood come over to her house and we would do fun things like pull taffy." And they said "as soon as your grandfather would come home we would all have to leave because he was really stern." Well they actually said mean but stern is a nice way to say that.

J: Have you seen some of those attributes that you talked about with the Kiks.adi and the frogs in your family? In your grandparents?

S: Well like I said my grandparents were dead but I can see it in my auntie and Betty Nore because they are Kiks.adi. And then also Andy Abona and then when I go to Sitka I can feel their presence strongly in the ANB hall and even when I went to Sheldon Jackson. I didn't go to school there but I got to stay there when I was in the pep band. I went up there for a tournament. We got to stay at SJ. Yea.

J: I actually went to Sitka with my mom a couple months ago and it was very beautiful over there too. The sun was shining and yea it was a nice place. We saw Sheldon Jackson and went down by the water.

J: Well you mentioned that you've only seen frogs around a few times in your life, maybe five times? When you've seen them, do you think that the animal that you see on the landscape, do you have any connection to it being Kiks.adi yadi?

S: You know what I was in my twenties when I saw a frog and I was at four years old when I saw a bunch of them up in Haines. And I didn't feel any connection because back then I wasn't into my culture. I didn't get into my culture until I became a Bahai when I was 32. And until I started college and started taking American Indian studies classes. You know because I felt shame about it. It was passed down from my mom. Even when I was 14 my friend Peggy Gross' grandfather taught us how to dance. He taught Peggy, Carol and me. Peggy Snooky how to dance and perform for the tourists at the Shakes house. They took our picture and then on the Alaska State Ferry they use to have a little TV where they showed a little slide show. When we were teenagers. But even so, I just felt so much peer pressure you know, not to be involved in it. So I didn't become involved until about my, after I started going to college. I started going to college in 76 and when I came back I was pretty much done with my bachelors in 84 when I was 34.

Marge Byrd invited me to dance with her and her family and her niece Dawn Hutchinson-Stevens and... I'm just cold so. Anyway I went to dance with them. We were performing for 4<sup>th</sup> of July and we were on stage at the community gym and I was so scared, I was terrified you know when we got up on the stage and I felt like I was going to urinate myself, that's how afraid I was. As soon as we started singing and drumming and dancing I felt a lot of strength flow through me and I was able to overcome that shame. I don't, I've never felt it again. And I always feel, I can tell the little kids like me to be there because they think I'm... I have a feeling they can gain some strength and courage from me. Because I remember when Tammy Meissner's little daughter first started dancing, and the littlest one was almost attached to my leg. That's how scared she was. Even the ones in kindergarten and grade school they kind of watch me and try to emulate what I do because you now I sing loud and I sing really proud and confident.

J: That's really inspiring that you came to that realization. That you didn't go throughout life having that shame ya know.

S: Yea, it's awesome. And that's why I'm so grateful to Marge for inviting me to dance with them. This one, I think you might know Steve Brown, the carver?

J: Yes

S: I got hired as the JOM instructor in 1986 and back then there was a lot of money so I got to hire a lot of instructors to come and teach us how to do things and one of them was Steve Brown to teach kids how to make drums. So when he finished making the two drums he gave me one of them. I didn't touch it for a long time. I kept it with me but I felt I'm not capable of drumming you know so. Then when I was going to college in Seattle I'd always do other things you know like on the evenings and weekends. Educational things like I had gone to a workshop. It was called Sacred Traditions of the American Indian. There was another American Indian woman that got a degree in psychology, but I was only in like my second or third year of college when I met her. She taught us how to, well actually I'm getting confused because I did so many of them, but it was actually Tahani Yahoo. She is a Cherokee and she is really beautiful and she has these really, almost see-through green eyes. Have you ever seen those kinds?

J: I have but I always think they are wearing contacts (laugh).

S: Oh no she definitely wasn't. And she also had pitch black hair you know real long. And she was very beautiful. This was like in 87 I met, I started or somehow I got involved in taking her classes with some of her students. Then I got to meet her in Vancouver in the summer of 88. Well she taught us how to connect our male side with our female side by doing certain meditation movements. One of them was

just to sit and make like the eight, the infinity sign with your body. Anyway after doing all of her meditation things for several months then I felt strong enough to start drumming. She actually wrote a book, well she talked about it then she has written a book. She said that you can't really drum until your male and your female side is equal. Like for me, I'm assuming that my male side was weak and that my female side was strong.

J: Traditionally it was the man that drummed?

S: Um, no. It wasn't that. I think that. See I think that I've sort of learned from a lot of different sources. I pick up their ideas but they're different from what we do here. There were female shamans here and drumming is a big part of being shaman. So, I think with the Cherokees though it is male dominated. Well patrilineal whereas we are matrilineal. Yea so it was nice to learn from her. I guess that's all I have to say about that.

## **6. Drawing Strength from Animals (36:54-45:31)**

J: I guess now that you have the strength and you're able to learn about your culture and you have significantly, if you were to see frogs on the landscape locally would that have a meaning to you do you think?

S: Oh sure. Yea because when I was little, Cameron, Tis' dad, he was actually in the same clan as Kadashan, so he was like part of our family. He said that, it was either him or May, I spent a lot of time at their house as a child, come to think of it I think it, it was his wife May Daly that said it. She said that when long time ago the Indians use to be able to talk to a chickadee, and I'm going "wow what does that mean?" You know I was so puzzled by that. How could they understand what they're saying and all that? But since then I've, it was really weird but you know when I was a kid and when I was, well as I got older I kind of pulled away from the land. I remember my mom told me the first thing I did when she took me on a picnic when I was two, was cry the whole time because I thought the beach was dirty and I didn't like being there. So now that I've written my thesis and I know how valuable it is to be out on the land and to be aware of what's going on, I started feeding the Ravens. People would give me the eagles even though I'm Native, we're not supposed to have them because, unless we have a permit. But people will sneak them to me if they find them dead, and I know how to like, you know like cut them, oil them ya know to get rid of their bugs and stuff. And it was so weird because I had, the second one I got I buried the bony part of the body in my backyard. Well it was a young eagle and I could hear the mom crying for that eagle. For like, the eagle got killed by a transformer over on Case Avenue, and they brought it right to me, my friends that live over there. And I put it in the freezer for a while because I was busy and then when I had time I took care of it out in the backyard and I could hear the mother eagle just crying so mournfully. And then when I actually buried the bony carcass in my backyard, it was kind of a sunny day and there was a little overcast. It wasn't real hot but it was humid and it was weird because as soon as my husband dug me the hole then I covered it up, as soon as I got it in the ground it felt like I had grown like that. Just real fast and then stopped suddenly. But it was like there were so many dimensions that just came up out of me it was so weird.

J: What do you think that meant?

S: I think it meant that I can see dimensions. I can see dimensions and that's into the spirit world. To tell you the truth I almost passed out. That's how powerful it was. So I think I grew somehow by doing that. Then that little piece of sacred land is always going to be on my property. See I have property with tide



lands that face the east. I have like, in summer there is sun there from the time the sun rises, which is sometimes 2:30AM it seems, until it goes down at midnight or so. So it's really, I love it.

I think the original question was something about the land and how, oh if I saw a frog. Yea, I would definitely be honored if I met one and probably sit by it and stuff because a lot of times when I go down to Shakes Island an eagle or a raven will come and sit in the tree and make racket and then sometimes in the summer I can hear all the Ravens over at Trident Seafoods. Well it used to be Wrangell Seafoods then. They use to have this little roof area where they'd all come and hang out and they'd all sit there and make all kinds of racket and it was always on the anniversary of my dad's death which is August 5<sup>th</sup>. Then sometimes, let me see what else. I dreamt about Ravens walking through the snow. It was before Tis and Carols mother died. You know she was Kaach.adi Raven. And I was walking home one snowy night and I felt a dead raven right in front of me but I was scared I didn't know what to do. You know like I wanted to pick it up and process it but I felt maybe I don't have the right to. Now I look back on it and I think, why did I pass that gift up. You know because the raven feathers have a beautiful scent to them and when you first get them you are very aware of it. But you know, the longer they stay in your house you can't really, they lose, you can't smell it anymore. Other people can and it smells like incense. So one time I did try to process a raven but I didn't have any luck. I forget what I was trying to do but I thought well I can save this. I can get the skull free of all the feathers if I throw it in the fire. So I threw it in the fire but it just burned up. So I don't, maybe as an eagle I'm not meant to have a raven but I find lose raven feathers and I keep them because they smell good. They look pretty. So the animals have become much more important to me because if I, cause if you sit outside like you're supposed to to get in touch with your soul, then you become aware of them. And it's really cool how I learned about all this when I was doing my thesis. How being outside is very important for you spiritually and for your soul. So I tried to do it more but you know what right now it's really hard because my favorite place to go is Shakes Island and they've had it blocked off since last fall. Yea so that's a source of pain for me right now. There's not really any other place outside that I like to go around here except for up in the marsh and it's kind of hard to get up there.

## **7. Ancestral Communication, Shamanism, and Witchcraft (45:31-50:46)**

J: Do you feel that your ancestors can talk through the animals to you?

S: mmhmm. I'm pretty sure; well you know they can't, not in language that you can understand but in spiritual language. Because you know when you can hear them and see them it makes you feel happy. You know it's a way for your spirit to become nurtured. So I think it's very important.

J: Do you think that a specific ancestor can be embodied within an animal?

S: Um, for sure. The reason that I feel so adamant about that is I had been looking for my spirit animal. I had been going to native gatherings since the 80s, the early 80s like 82, mostly in Canada. The Four Worlds Project had a lot of stuff going on there. I had been looking, and at the same time I was learning about American Indian culture and mostly through books because even before I started college I asked around here when I'd see people from other communities. I'd ask because I knew there were no shamans here. I'd ask about it and they'd say well there's no more shamans alive but I'm not really sure. The first thing I learned is that a person cannot say they're a healer because if they say they're a healer then you know, a healer like a shaman, then they'd be targeted by other forces. Mostly evil forces like witchery. You know stuff like that. And it's something that actually goes on, like even when I was growing up and I was a young adult in the 70s, I didn't realize it but when I made friends with Cindy. Like

I told you she's, her mom was Charlie Jones' daughter. She said that her and her mother actually saw witchcraft going on one day. Her grandma said "don't ever speak about it and don't ever tell anybody who's doing it otherwise you're going to be in trouble." The other, my mother, had a similar experience over in Sitka, because of the status of her mother, they were the target of a lot of envy. There was a Tlingit witch down in the village. Have you seen the village?

J: No.

S: Well if you go down to that part of town where the Pioneer Bar is and the ANB hall there's a bunch of, there are rows of houses that look real old...

J: oh, I know where you mean.

S: Yea it was the village. Whereas my mom and her family they lived up in Sheldon Jackson housing. And so this lady cast a spell on the family. My mom said that the only reason she survived is because she challenged the witch. She saw her maybe in downtown Sitka or something but, she said "I made contact with her and I stared her down." That's the only reason my mom lived. That's what she believes. But both of my mom's parents died, all of her sisters and brothers. On different accidents like, my grandmother drowned, my grandfather died of TB and what else. My mom's sister burned in a fire with her three kids. Burned to death. And my mom's two brothers drowned. Then she had about three or four other sisters that died as children. So, my mom had a real traumatic life. Yea, so it was very, very much alive. And my mom will never tell me who the lady was. I said "I want to know what family it is." She said "I can't ever tell you."

J: Because then it would affect you?

S: mmhmm.

## **8. Acquiring a Spirit Animal (50:46-58:02)**

J: So there's a lot of power that can come from the land?

S: Yea. A lot of, you know some people used it for bad, some people use it for good. But, the reason I started talking about that is because at the beginning of the question I was going to say that I know that these animals are an ancestor because when I first... I had been in so many sweat lodges hoping I would find my spirit animal. Working, going to dream classes and you know trying to find out what my spirit animal was. Then in 19, I think it was either 96 or 98. No I think it was 98 I went up to Whitehorse for a Bahai indigenous council. That's when all the Indian Bahais get together. You know white people can come too but it's all based on Indian culture. So we went into the sweat lodge and it was like 40 degrees below zero. And it was right at three o'clock in the afternoon, right when it's going to get dark. And we had this sweat lodge and it wasn't even that big and it was so old and the wind just blowing. We had to strip down right there and get blessed before we crawled into the sweat lodge. I thought oh good, it's going to be so nice when we get in the sweat lodge it's going to be hot. It wasn't hot, it was so cold. It was so cold in there and then this, they used spruce branches to line the floor of the sweat lodge so when you crawled in on it, it was real prickly. I was kind of ticked off because all the other ones I had been in were in Canada and South Dakota and it was always so hot and always so warm and always smelling so beautiful. Because once those rocks hit the earth the most beautiful scent comes up. So I think, I thought, I was so miserable at Whitehorse in that sweat lodge and then holy, I saw so many

spirits come in. I just thought “oh, I don’t believe this.” You know they say the spirits are going to come in through the roof of the sweat lodge. That’s a bunch of BS you know I never saw it. Every time I went to the sweat lodge. But this time I saw, first I saw you know a ball about this big (shows size of baseball), and it was a beautiful green color, kind of light green but you know more than one shade of green. It came over to this lady about six people away from me and then I saw some other ones too but I can’t remember right now. I should have wrote it down but and then mine came in and it was the biggest wolf head I have ever seen. I mean it was so huge and I thought “oh gosh, this scares me.” It came in and it came right over to me and it went inside of me and it got smaller and smaller and smaller and smaller. Then when they sang the song for the sweat lodge to be over it started going away from me and it was still small but it looked so sad and I knew it was my grandma. I just knew it was. Because every time I, you know when I missed her, because I had never ever met her, my mom said she was a beautiful person. So did a Kagwantaan’s wife up in Sitka. She said, I can’t even think of her name right now but her, she’s from the Kitka family. She’s married to, well he’s a very well-known Kagwantaan, he died a few winters ago.

J: Herman?

S: Yea Herman. Yea. And his wife. I can’t believe I cannot recall her name right now because she was so important to me. But anyway she told me that my grandmother was so kind and gentle and also very happy. Ya know laughing all the time. And it’s something that I feel I hardly do any of, is laugh. It’s because of all that grief that has happened to my mom and my side of the family on both sides. It’s a very special thing but it’s also a very big responsibility but I’m glad that I learned a lot of things like the community healing that I learned from Lee Brown at one of the Four Worlds Projects that I went to. Well actually I had him come down to the UW (University of Washington) and I had him do a workshop on community healing there. I’ll never forget all the controversy because he had gone to college there and he was an alcoholic at the time and everybody ridiculed him because he went back to his culture. And then all the other American Indian events that we, there was hardly any people. The President of the American Indian Association came to check out Lee Brown’s workshop and the whole place was packed because Lee Brown had become a Bahai and a member of the Four Worlds Project, well a faculty of it, and he and the head guy were really close. They did all kinds of stuff together, spiritual things. When he showed up and he had so much spiritual power and he drew so many people, not just from Seattle but from all over the state of Washington and Oregon and Canada. People just flocked there to hear him. Yea so they couldn’t laugh at him anymore and they were shocked. But they said, when I went into their office they said, “I cannot believe you know the size of that workshop.” And since I was the one that was in charge of getting him, or setting up the workshop, coordinating it, they all let me know. And it was like very, when a person makes a spiritual change in their life they can do a lot you know but also set themselves up for a lot of friction. A lot of animosity from other people.

## **9. Healing from Tragedy (58:02-59:00)**

J: So do you feel that you are going through a healing process?

S: Yea I mean all the time. Almost every day. You know because there is a lot that needs to be healed. All the loss. Not only on my mom’s side but also on my dad’s side, a lot of people drowned. And then my dad died of Carbon Monoxide poisoning. He fell overboard and somewhere, he wasn’t found for ten days or so. So then, his brother drowned and I don’t know. Just there’s been a lot of death and dying and grief. You know a lot of family problems because of self-medicating through alcohol. Drugs.

## 10. Frog Powers and Encounters (59:00-01:03:13)

J: Do you think that that the animals associated with your clan can help to protect and guide people through the afterlife?

S: I think what, I can't say for sure but, I think what they can do is make us aware of what their embodiment provides. Like I won't know until I get there but for example, I have this really neat book it's called, well it's about American Indian astrology. I looked on the internet and I couldn't find it. I had lost it for several years and I finally found it again at my house last winter. I think its called Robin and Sun Bear Earth, it's like astrology. He writes about every animal associated with the American Indians like the cougar, the frog, other ones. Anyway the trickster figures. And he said, he says things about frogs like that what's so neat about them, they can go from water to land and that gives them a lot of power too I guess. Because not many people, or not many animals have the ability to survive in both places. So I wonder if that's why I never see frogs because they're always, they could be in the water. Oh yea because now I remember too that we used to swim as children out at Pat's Lake. Only a few times but it was, there's always those lily pads, I think it's on the north edge of it. Yea and it was, I was always afraid a frog would get on me when I got near those lily pads.

J: Is that where you saw them before? You said you saw them farther north.

S: Yea I saw them in Haines only as a child but I don't think I ever saw one when we went out to Pat's Lake. The only other frog I've seen while I was in Wrangell was up the Stikine River. I went up there when I was 29 and I had just gotten divorced from my son's father. My boyfriend, we found, there was a frog and he like stuck it down the back of my shirt. It really scared me because you know it wiggled down. But that's the only encounter I had with the frog but that was before I was into native culture and knowledge.

J: Do you remember what it looked like? Would you know if you saw a picture of it?

S: Yea maybe.

J: These are the three native frogs (shows example pictures) that we have locally. This is the Wood Frog, this is the Boreal Toad and this is a Columbia Spotted Frog.

S: I'm pretty sure it was this (Columbia-Spotted Frog) because I know that it didn't have you know, those raised things on it. And then it didn't have a face like that.

J: This mask is pretty distinctive on the Wood Frog so if it didn't have that it was probably a Columbia-Spotted Frog.

S: mmhmm. But it seemed like it was long. Could it be like that big or something? Or when they extend their arms out they look bigger.

J: They can get fairly large. Do you remember where on the river it was?

S: It seems like it might have been at the Desert.

J: Okay. I hear a lot of people talk about the Desert.

S: Yea because I knew he had gotten out of the boat and we were doing stuff but I've only been up there a few times.

### **11. Treatment of Animals (01:03:13-01:05:52)**

J: I'll just ask you one more. I'm wondering since you say that there are the different qualities that can be seen in humans and that ancestors can speak or be embodied within an animal, does that help to inform you now about how animals should be treated when you find them?

S: Oh yes. Yea because you know how so many people are afraid of the wolves? They're so mistreated you know it's very sad because they look so innocent to me and they look so, well they have a strong family orientation. We used to have a dog that was part wolf when I was a teenager. So I just think you know that they're valuable and they should be honored. And I definitely wouldn't step on a frog or anything or try to kill them or. One time I did accidentally. It was a toad over in New Orleans, or in Louisiana. I went to see my son and there was a big storm and all the kids went crazy and they started decorating the trees with toilet paper. Rolls of toilet paper and just running around slipping because it makes the ground real slick. Just going crazy because they don't see the rain very much there. And I went out to see them and watch them while they were doing it and I stepped on this toad. You know because they come out when it's wet. And it made me feel really sad. I still think about it to this day.

J: What about bringing animals like frogs home as pets? Do you think that is appropriate or that they should be left where they are?

S: I think they should be left where they are. You know but if little boys want to do it I think that would be okay because sometimes kids get bonded through stuff like that. They learn a lot by being close to them.

J: I learned a lot today. Thank-you so much for coming. I do appreciate it. Unless you have anything else you want to share.

S: No.

J: I'm going to go ahead and turn these off so we can deal with the honorarium.

END