

Interview with Karma Grayman
Paiute Indian Tribe of Utah, Shivwits Band
September 26, 2008

Karma Grayman

My father was one of the people that were sent on the relocation when we were terminated, and so we went to many places. He went on to become a machinist. He never graduated from high school. He went as far as the 10th grade, and I remember living in the cities in Los Angeles, Santa Barbara, Salt Lake City, and a lot of my brothers and sisters were born there. I myself was born in Delta, Utah and I just remember living in the city, and then when we came home he really didn't use the machinist schooling that he received in those places and he actually became a migrant, like a migrant farmer. He had a friend that hired him throughout the year and we lived on a farm up in (pronounced Burro) Utah. So I remember that and we'd come home to the reservation every now and then to visit my grandparents--his mom and dad lived there. My other grandparents, my grandfather lived in Kaibab. I had family from both, and so I remember that, and we didn't have much. We didn't have a lot of money. We barely made it through the years, as I remember. We didn't have a lot of health. I don't remember having a lot of health issues. We were pretty healthy and I had seven children. There were seven children, three girls and four boys, and during those years too I remember, before we were reinstated, I remember my grandmother had diabetes and this is what she died from. She had no medicine for it. She wasn't treated for it. My aunt... about three of my aunts followed right after her, so it was a really hard time in my early years because my grandmother and my aunts passed away and it was because of diabetes because we had nothing, we had no medications. So when we were restored under the government we were given those... we were covered with, you know we were covered to become more educated on those diseases, those sicknesses, and I know that it's a lot better now. When we first started with restoration and we had health coverage then more of our people started living. We didn't have so many deaths. Our age went up. As I remember my aunts were only in their 40's and so they passed away quite young and they left families behind. My father lived and he died when he was probably about 60, so he lived a long time, and since we were restored for health then he was able to live longer because he did get sick later on in his later years, so...

Interviewer

Thank you for that personal story about termination and restoration. We're going to move onto education. Talk about the success and the barriers in terms of education for the young in your tribe.

Karma Grayman

Probably some of the barriers I see with the Paiute children are... a lot of it has to do with parental support, and that means that our parents need to know what's going on with our children in the schools. They need to be involved-- parent involvement. They need to not be afraid to go to the teacher and to the school and say, "How can I help my child? What can I do to help him get a better grade?" How can I help him to read more?" Because I'm finding a lot of our Paiute children sometimes aren't on grade level because they don't have a lot of books in their homes. They don't have access to books. Our people have never been a people that have a lot of books. We've always been oral; that is our tradition. So I think a lot of this has to do with how our children learn. They learn a lot more from example, showing them how, and just telling them-- listening to directions, but now when they're in school they have to learn how to read and sometimes our parents are not always well-read themselves and they feel a little bit insecure and saying, "Well I can't help my child", but if we get involved with the school, with the teacher, then we'll find ways to help the kids become successful, and when they feel good about themselves they'll do so much better in school.

Interviewer

You told me a story earlier about cultural education. Do the Paiute children... two questions. Does the curriculum cover the history of the Paiutes correctly for these elementary school children?

Karma Grayman

As far as I remember I remember looking into some of the books and the part about the Paiute people or any of the tribes of Utah is very little. It is taken from the perspective of the author and not from the people themselves, so they don't really learn about their people and what they've done in this area or any other area, and so we... part of my work... we have been trying to remedy that.

Interviewer

By... how?

Karma Grayman

By a couple of years ago I was involved in a cultural storytelling program in which we had six Paiute stories that were edited and we were able to give those to the families and then the schools themselves, they can go online with USOE and they can make copies of those, and so they can share that with their students... any student has access to that, any teacher, and also I was involved a little bit with a history. We had a group of Indian educators that came together that wrote history lessons and we went through the lessons and looked to see what was true and gave our ideas and our thoughts to it and so some of that is in place and it is online. You're able to look at that if you go to USOE.org and you can find it under the Indian education.

Interviewer

Why is it important for Paiute children or any American Indian child to know their culture... especially in the public school system?

Karma Grayman

I have read a lot and ever since I grew up I've always been told that I am Paiute and should be proud of who I am. I had an opportunity to see my family do things. My grandmother was a cradle maker. She was a weaver, and she tanned the buckskin and she used the brains. She used everything in that deer, in that kill that my father would bring home. My grandfather was a salt song singer. He was fluent in the Paiute language and he has an amazing story so I think culture and knowing your history and your family has a lot to do with it, and now research says in education that the more that an Indian child knows about his culture, his history, the better he's going to be academically, and if they are well-versed in their language then that's even better because it... we don't look just this way. We open our eyes and we go that way. We look at all of it, and so that's why I think it's really important for our people to know our culture, and I wish they would do it even more, and don't hide it, share it!

Interviewer

You were talking earlier about alcoholism and people I've interviewed say that if you grab a kid when he's young, there's hope. What about a kid who is 17, 18, 19 and he's going the wrong direction? How do you reel these kids back in and how does the community rally around those kids and their families?

Karma Grayman

I think that's mainly a parent or a family issue. I mean I think it has changed quite a bit from when I remember from when I was a young girl, and so now we're, the Paiute people are now into this westernization thought that if we intrude on another family it's not good, and in the old way we were able to go in, aunts and uncles and neighbors and take care of each other's children and help them, you know, we could send maybe a child to talk to their uncle or the uncle could go and talk to them and they were more willing to listen to that relative or their grandmother.

Interviewer

Are you saying that the best way to keep the kids on the correct path is to have the Shivwits community be more involved in that child's life?

Karma Grayman

I believe so, I really think so, you know. The more they know that people are behind them to support them they're going to feel better about themselves, and it makes them stronger and there was one other thought I had about that... that

even though they're having a rough time now, it's going to get better. You know we all go through this. All of the older people like myself, we've been through this. We know, and we need to share that more often and say, "Hey, when I was young, I got lost" and that's what we call it, we get lost. We get lost in our way, and somewhere we've fallen off that trail and I've done it. From high school I graduated, yes, and then I went to college a little bit, and then I fell into the alcohol scene and for many years I partied with a lot of people and then one day--I had five children at that time--and then I finally thought to myself, what am I doing? I want something better. I want a better life for my children. I want them to grow up to be good people. I want them to be educated. I want to be able to provide for them, and so I went back to school. I turned my life around, and I've seen many of my tribal people do that, and I respect them very, very much so because that is a very difficult thing to do because once you do that then sometimes you feel like you have no friends, and this is what I relay to my people that I see that sometimes drink or even my own children. It is difficult, but it can be done, and you're happier. You're much happier, so I would advise, you know, parents to talk to their children and encourage them. Keep it up. Don't give it up.

Interviewer

We were talking earlier that you believe a lot of people don't even know that the Paiutes are in their own backyard. Talk about that a little bit. Speak to those people.

Karma Grayman

That is so true because when I was going to school Santa Clara was just so tiny. Ivins was just a little dot, and St. George wasn't very big, and we used to go to school in... We'd have to ride the bus from Shivwits out to St. George, Utah, and the people we knew were very close to us. A lot of them were LDS, you know people, Mormons, and they came out onto the reservation and they became good friends to us and when we older Paiutes went to school we knew everybody and they knew us and they knew we were from the reservation and it wasn't always good, but you know those people that were good people did help our children, did help my parents, helped those that were in school and became mentors to them, and so I have some mentors out in the community now, but they've been here for probably a hundred years, you know, much like us, so the newcomers who come into this area, they don't know we're here. We've probably been forgotten within the last twenty years because our schools are... there are so many schools now. There's like twenty-four elementary schools, and four high schools and six intermediates. It's gone so much... it's grown so much... so many newcomers, and so nobody knows that we're out here except for the old timers and so when I go out into the schools or I speak to someone or I have our children, our Paiute children (I have a group of Paiute children), we'll go out and share our traditions with them, our dances, our language, our songs, whatever they have learned, and they will go out and perform, but when

we leave we always leave the message that, you know, we are the Paiute people and we're right out here, thirteen miles west of St. George. We have homes out there. We live in houses just like everybody else, and we want you to know that, you know, wherever we perform like in Springdale up in the Zion's area, down in St. George, in Ivins, down by Bloomington, all of this was once Paiute land. This is where our people came from. This is where we lived. We traveled. We used to travel from place to place according to the seasons and what was going on, so this once was our land. This was our grandfather's land, so we want you to remember it, and sometimes when I see the mountains disappear (and I've seen some of those mountains disappear) they're not there anymore and I think about them sometimes--what I saw when I was a young girl is no longer there, and people don't know this, and so...

Interviewer

How does that make you feel when you lose those mountains?

Karma Grayman

It makes me angry because the Creator put those mountains there for a purpose, and we shouldn't undo what has been built for millions of years, for thousands of years, all for money, and so that's what I think because Paiute people, we tend to really respect the land and what is on it, and if we can we'll try to go around it, so that's what I see, and sometimes it's burial sites and that makes me a little upset too because I would never want to go and dig up anyone else's grave, and destroy them or, you know, just throw the bones away in the trash or... but I'm glad now that they are starting to work with us and they're notifying our band, our tribe to take care of this.

Interviewer

What do you want people to remember about the Paiutes then and today?

Karma Grayman

I would like people to know, and as a young girl I remember sometimes I was embarrassed to be Paiute. I truly was, and I'm ashamed of that, but the reason I thought I was embarrassed was because I went away to school so I went away to school with another tribe that was great in number and so it would make you feel a little bit inferior, and then I wasn't well versed in my language. I can hear it pretty good. I understand it, and I know some of the words because I had that opportunity to hear it, and that's probably why I was embarrassed, and then sometimes people would call us lazy, lazy Paiutes. But as I got older and became more educated and my... well my father always told me to be proud of who I am, so I think that kind of was way in the back of my mind and it kept me going, and later on as I learned more about my people it has been written that we were botanists, that we knew the plants, that we knew how to use them, and we didn't have to go to school for that. We knew it. We knew where they were,

where they grew. We took care of them. We didn't use them all. We saved them. But when the newcomers came into the land and brought their animals, my father said, they trampled them and took them away, and some of those plants are no longer here anymore, so that's what I'd like to say that we're not at lazy people. We work hard. We don't have much, but we have to work hard to keep what we have, and you'll find a lot of our people are very simple, but they have many, many friends and I think that's one of the greatest things that comes when a Paiute elder leaves this world is that his friends all come, the people that he has met all his life from all walks of life, they come to see him. And so I'd like them to remember that our people were botanists, that we knew something, and it helped us, and in this day and age I want people to know that our children can learn. They are capable of learning, and I've heard this... that Indian children don't learn, that they're stupid, they're dumb, but they're not. They're creative, and you have to be creative to teach them, and if you don't have that creativity or that desire like a teacher supposed to, then you're not going to make it, and that child will not succeed, and maybe the next year he'll get another teacher who will be able to meet their needs, and so that's what I would like to say.

Interviewer

You were saying we were here first, our ancestor's bones were here and we will always be here.

Karma Grayman

As long as I remember my father always used to tell me, "we were always here." And he'd tell me, "Oh we were up in the mountains by Mesquite." I would never think that. We were over there... my grandfather came from Kaibab up in Mt. Carmel, the junction, down in the Mt. Trumbull area... that's where we came from. This is our land. This is where we came from. This is who we are! And so we need to always remember that, and our children need to remember that. We need to teach our children all of that... that this is who we are, and this is our land, and we need to take care of it, but not right now, we're, you know, sharing it with other people, but we need to all respect it, and we'll be here forever because our bones will be buried here!