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Interview with Brenda Itta PT. 2

Jeff Kennedy, moderator

Series: Potlatch series

1977

Jeff Kennedy said in June he and Brenda Itta flew to Barrow to attend the Inuit Circumpolar Conference. Inuit from around the world celebrated their being Inuit. Jeff Kennedy asked Itta if it is a narrow tight rope to walk to celebrate their ethnic background without expressing hatred or indifference to others. Itta said this is a very complicated and sensitive issue when it concerns tribes and races. We have to live with each other. She has experienced this. For so long Inuit have felt a certain kind of suppression. Each tribe would like to rule their own affairs. That is how people are. She said it is OK to have your own identity. She believes that Jesus Christ is the mediator between God and man. She has met many races and tribes and when they have Jesus Christ in their lives then they have something in common. It is the answer to have peace between races and people. Jeff Kennedy asked how she deals with the fact that the person she believes in was a white person. She said she had to get over the obstacle that Christianity was just for white people. She said human beings are the same and that is how God sees us. God chose the Jewish people for his son. She said heathens are those that do not believe in God. She said the attitude that missionaries had to the Natives in America hasn't changed that much.

She said America has had tremendous wealth. She talked about money being used correctly. She listened to the Inuit from Greenland and Canada and understood them. Wherever you are in the world there are similar problems such as alcoholism and drug use. She said the Inupiat people have a beautiful characteristic of sharing. Others should follow this example. When she traveled to villages she was filled with love for the people. She talked about one family that shared with her. She said they have to have standards to abide by. In one of the villages she was with a family with many children. They didn't take welfare because the father was the provider for the family. These are the Inupiat people that aren't seen.

Unidentified song

Jeff Kennedy said the background noises are wind and motorcycles. He described where they were standing. The ice was just moving out. He asked Brenda about the Nalukataq (the whaling festival) and how it symbolizes the values that they had been talking about. Brenda Itta said there is a lot of talk about environmentalism in America. She said they are very careful about not wasting any food. Nalukataq means the celebration of the killing of whales. This year they were fortunate to get eighteen whales. The people express their gratitude to the Lord for supplying their food. The people serving it symbolizes that they share their food. Sharing is one of the characteristics of the Inupiat people. Jeff said this reminds him of breaking of bread. Itta said

they have a lot of visitors from other villages and they are able to share the abundance of food. The villagers will take back food to their villages. There are also people from Canada and Greenland. There are Sami visitors, too.

Song by Buffy Sainte-Marie

Brenda Itta said in 1977-78 in Anaktuvuk Pass there was subsistence living. People lived off the land and rivers. They had a subsistence economy. In Washington, D.C. it is a cash economy. There is a different type of giving. In Washington, D.C. they share differently. She said many government programs are helpful, but it is impersonal. They miss out on the beauty of giving. She believes wealth can be a good thing if it is used right. She said it has been a struggle for her people to transfer to a different way of life. The leaders have changed their priorities. She said she is hoping for the best.