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Brenda Dunn, Della Keats and James Pallin talk about Natives and family planning

Moses Wassillie, moderator

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Moses Wassillie said recently a family planning workshop was held in Anchorage. Brenda Dunn from the Seattle Indian Center coordinated the workshop. She gave a talk about customs of Indian tribes of childbirth and the concepts of reproduction.

Brenda Dunn talked about a time when Native American's horizons were not cluttered with tall buildings rising into the sky or electrical wires which obstructed the view of the sunrise. For their lifestyle was determined by the conditions of the Earth from which they came and from which their nourishment came and to which they in turn nourished. Individuals experienced their lives together in small groups. Every individual was considered significant. Population control did not constitute a problem. In many tribes children were spaced because of the availability of food or the health of the mother. Herbs and roots were used by some southwestern or Mexican tribes for contraception and fertility. Research indicates that an IUD type device was used from salmon bone by some of the Pacific northwestern tribes. In North American Indian and Alaska Native health care systems the care of the pregnant woman was the responsibility of the midwife who provided a humanistic approach to medical care. They used sweat bathing, massage and natural herbs. Today they are classified as esoteric. Native American children were born away from bright lights and first touched by human skin instead of gloves. The trauma of birth was a fact instinctively accepted by the Native. The newborn was provided with a womb like environment to help him or her adapt to the new environment. All infants except under unusual circumstances were breast fed. The child's need for oral stimulation weaning was made by the child. Many psychologists are discovering the emotional effects of early weaning. She talked about family planning. The recognition of womanhood or manhood was a basic attribute of tribal life. In the form of puberty rights young people were communicated the importance of their roles as creators of human form. The concept of human production constituted a spiritual recognition of life.

Song by Eric Clapton

Brenda Dunn said society's recognition of the sacredness of Native sexuality has been shattered. Its early destruction began with land conquest by white men. The small number of Natives who survived bullets and diseases are now controlled by bureaucratic institutions which they took away the freedoms and truths they once knew as a proud nation. Now puberty rights, the system of midwifery, the humanistic system of infant deliver and the recognition of a whole concept of sexuality are gone. For the religion and the health care system of Native peoples were defined as primitive by their captives and only white men had medicine to cure the diseases he brought. She said the purpose of the conference is not to create animosity between Indians and non-Indians. She said there is one thing they can do and

that is to finally accept the historical reality of their present situation. She talked about the signs of a wounded and captive nation. Whites are equally burdened with guilt for the destruction of other cultures. One of the ways they deal with the guilt is the dense mechanism of denial. She said that many whites who provide health care to Natives will say there is no problem, but we must all confront the prejudices within us. Once we learn not to be ashamed of negative feelings we have towards one another and we can rid ourselves of these prejudices. Together we can join in peace and mutual concern for the wholesome survival of human life. Once we're joined together we can create a culturally sensitive atmosphere in family planning clinics. Once joined together whites will be giving Natives support in controlling their own health care systems and gather the important knowledge that both health care systems provide.

Della Keats talked about when she was nine or ten in school the teachers wanted her to go out of state for school. Her parents didn't want her to go. She was disappointed. She cried. She wanted to learn to talk English. She got into eighth grade, but she didn't graduate. She first started school when she was about six years old in 1912. They didn't have tablets and no pencils. They used slate and a nail for a pencil. She wasn't in training for nursing school. She has been called a medicine doctor. She never trained or attended school for medical training. They called upon her to teach the health aides in the Nome and Kotzebue area. She said she taught from her experiences. When people need help she has to help. When villages ask her to come she uses her own money. She doesn't think about using her money for helping the people. Sometimes they take her home by dog team. Right now they may use a snow machine. She always works on everything on the body. She can't operate. She has opened areas that need draining. She has saved a lot of people from the coffin.

Song

Della Keats said she will say something about how babies were delivered long ago. She asked her mother about it. She asked her mother where she was born. Her mother told her she was born about four miles away from Noatak village in a hut made of moss. Her father made a little house for delivering her. It didn't have a stove. Her father warmed rocks to make it hot in the hut. There was no one to help her mother deliver the baby. Her mother said that she kneeled to deliver her baby. She had caribou skins for bedding. When she was born her mother cleaned her with some kind of thin caribou skin. She breast fed her right away. She cut the cord with an ulu. She tied the cord with a twist of sinew. She put old dried willow ash powder on the cord. Her mother watched her carefully for infection. Keats said she was proud of her mother especially when she has her birthday.

James Pallin, a Pomo Indian from California talked about customs of Indians in the cycle of life and instructions to young men about becoming a man. James Pallin said before a young man thinks about becoming a father the people taught them. They taught them in four parts. First they taught them respect for the Earth including all living creatures around them. They didn't let them hunt, fish or make songs until they learned to respect the Earth. They still do this. Their tribe is only 3500 people on 25,000 square miles of land. They are told to marry their own tribe to make their people strong again. There are many outside influences that take the young men from the reservation. They tell the young boys about women. They tell them that no machine and no government can duplicate life like a woman can. Only

women can make human babies. Most of the young guys look at women like they have power. They teach them these things most of the time in the sweat lodge. They talk with the old people. They are told how to hunt, make song, make power and how to track. They are told that they need to know these things because if they are going to have children they need to teach their own children. They need to know how to be a man, to provide for their women and children and make their tribe strong. The hardest part of planning a family is before marrying a woman they have to prove themselves to the girl's family. One year one of the men had to climb a mountain to bring back a certain type of quartz. He talked about their wedding ring custom. When a man's wife is expecting a child he must leave while the wife is preparing for the birth of the child. He must follow certain customs like rising in the morning and facing the east and eating just dried meat. The father-to-be has to build the power within himself to become a good father.