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Interviews on Aleut night at the Festival of Native Arts at the University of Alaska Fairbanks in March 1976

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Jeff Kennedy, moderator

Isabella Brady talked about other people working in their program. The students are performing in costume now. She said most people do not understand the full impact of the Tlingit language or the dances themselves. She has learned quite a bit from Charlie Joseph. He is trying to bring back the traditional ways of presenting the songs which are actually the story of the Tlingit culture. She feels that young people learn a lot from the program in Sitka. They have an afterschool program to learn the language and the dance. The parents have been involved in the program because of their interest in the culture. She said this is a fantastic opportunity for the students to be on the university campus.

Tlingit song

Sarah Williams said she was from the Yukon, but now she lives in Sitka, Alaska. She said this is the second year for the cultural education program in Sitka. Both of her daughters are in the program and have been doing well. She and her husband have encouraged their daughters to learn the Tlingit language. She has been attending the practices. She is very proud of her children. She speaks in her Native tongue.

Ethel McKennan is an instructor in the program. She said she travels with the children on trips. She said it inspired her to see the children learning. She grew up in the culture, but didn't put it to use. She talked about her father, Charlie Joseph, being proud of the children's dance group. She said there are things that she has forgotten about her culture that she is picking up again. She enjoys working with the children.

Isabella Brady talked about Charlie Joseph, Sr. who is 82 years old. He was born and raised in Sitka. She said he grew up in the culture. He was singing and dancing from the age of two. She talked about the traditional head dresses. She said Charlie is the only one in Sitka who can teach the traditional songs. He is chief of the Eagle Tribe.

Charlie Joseph talked about some of the songs in Tlingit. Ethel McKennan translates for her father. She said her dad said his Tlingit name which was given to him at birth. The name Charlie is an adopted name. Charlie speaks again. She said he is so proud to be her with the children – they are all his grandchildren. Charlie speaks. McKennan said coming here to Fairbanks is a great experience for him. It is his first trip to Fairbanks. He will be wearing his traditional shirt the evening that the children perform. It was handed down to him and it is quite old, maybe over a hundred and fifty years old. Charlie speaks. McKennan said the song that the children will

perform is Aleut. Years ago there was a man from their nation who was sent up with the Russians to the Aleut country. Charlie speaks. McKennan said the man stayed among the Aleut people and intermarried into their clan. Charlie speaks. McKennan said the man was 82 years old when he came back to Sitka. He had taught his clan the dances and songs. Charlie speaks. McKennan said the songs that the man taught his clan are the same songs that Charlie has taught the children. Most of the Aleut do not know their own tradition or songs. Charlie speaks. McKennan said Charlie believes that the songs were taught to his people more than 100 years ago from the man who had gone with the Russians. Charlie speaks. McKennan said they have songs from the Copper River people. A lot of the songs that the children do are from different Indian cultures. Charlie speaks. McKennan said the Coho clan adopted the Copper River way of dancing. This is how they came about knowing some of the Copper River dances. Charlie speaks. McKennan said Charlie is a child of the Coho clan and has heard these songs. Charlie speaks. McKennan said they also have songs of the Athabaskan. Charlie speaks. McKennan said the songs came down to them through the Klukwan area. The people in the Klukwan area used to trade with the Athabaskan people and this is where the songs came from that they adopted. Charlie speaks. McKennan said the children perform dances with headpieces which came to them through the Haida people. Charlie speaks. McKennan said a lot of Charlie's people intermarry through the Haida people. Charlie speaks. McKennan said they also have interpretations of dances and songs from the Tsimshian. Charlie speaks. McKennan said generations ago all of their people had intermarried and that is how some of the songs came about to their people and that is how they know some of their songs. Charlie speaks. McKennan said he does not know the Tsimshian songs that well so he has not taught the children these songs. Charlie speaks. McKennan said the Tlingit nation had not named Sitka. It was called another Native name. They settled along the river. Charlie speaks. McKennan talked about different crests. She said the Old Sitka song was composed by a person from one of these crests. She said the children love to do the song that is called Old Sitka.

Isabella Brady thanked Charlie. She said one of the keys to culture is the language. She feels a loss because she did not learn her language.