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Interview with Theresa Hatathlie-Delmar

Theresa Hatathlie-Delmar

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Interviewee: Theresa Hatathlie-Delmar
Interviewers: Ash Appleby and Kayla Hamilton
Date: December 8, 2021
Location: Zoom
Collection: Auntie Sewing Squad Oral History Archive, SBS 114: Women and Social Change, From 1890s to the Present, Fall 2021
Length: 01:09:51
Overseen by: Dr. Chrissy Yee Lau

Bio: Theresa Hatathlie-Delmar is a member of the Navajo nation, who belongs to the Deer Springs and Salt Clans. She is a co-founder of the grassroots organization Yee Ha'ólníi Doo DBA and a collaborator with the Auntie Sewing Squad. Learning to sew and weave from her parents, Hatathlie-Delmar organized to provide masks, food, water and medical supplies to Navajo and Hopi reservations during COVID-19 pandemic.

Summary of Interview: (00:00:00) Theresa Hatathlie-Delmar dispels the myth that reservations are impoverished, and rather, her life, family and background while growing up on the reservation in Arizona was very rich with Indigenous culture and traditions. (00:12:13) She explains why she does not use the term Native or American, but chooses to use the term Indigenous. She also shares about how her parents rejected their children's forced enrollment in boarding schools. (00:22:24.15) Hatathlie-Delmar describes how the pandemic highlighted the inadequacies of broken promises and treaties with the federal government. (00:32:09) She narrates how she and 11 other women took the initiative to raise money for supplies and materials needed at the very start of the pandemic. (00:38:35.19) Hatathlie-Delmar explains how the federal government gave defective masks to indigenous communities, how she had already been sewing for her etsy store DeerSpringsCreationsEtsy.com, and how Kristina Wong answered her call for seamstresses. (00:49:12.04) Hatathlie-Delmar credits her role as a woman and mother, her faith, and her upbringing for why she (and other Indigenous women) stepped up during the crisis. (00:58:42.09) Finally, she describes her work as a logistics coordinator for the grassroots organization Yee Ha'ólníi Doo DBA.

*Highlighted areas show unconfirmed proofreading and editing

Oral History Transcript

00:00:04.09
Kayla Hamilton (KH): So my name is Kayla.

Ash Appleby (AA): My name's Ash.

KH: And this is on Wednesday, December 8th at three o' clock.

AA: And this is the interview for the Auntie Sewing Squad. Would you like to introduce yourself?

00:00:26.13
Theresa Hatathlie-Delmar (THD): Sure. My name is Theresa Hatathlie Del Mar and I'm a member of the Navajo Nation and my clans are Deer Springs and I'm born for the Salt clan. My maternal grandparents are the Edgewater people. And then my paternal grandparents are the Rock Gap people and I reside in Apache Junction, Arizona. I'm with my husband. Well, basically, it's just the two of us. But I have children. I have two girls and then I have two boys. And I also during the day, I take care of my nephew and my niece. So due to the pandemic, they do a virtual learning. So that's basically what I do.

KH: How old are they?

THD: My oldest nephew is 18 and my nephew is eight. My oldest daughter is 32 and my sons are 24.

00:01:39.11
AA: So cool. Thank you for sharing that with us. Our first question is what was life like for you growing up?

THD: Growing up, I grew up on the reservation, and my mother and my father never went to school as we know it. But they were very rich in history, so they had a lot of our cultural teachings and I grew up with sheep, with horses, with cattle. And then we had a corn field where we harvested our own corn, our own squash and watermelon, and you name it, we had it. So we were able to, I guess, that's probably the best way today I can define being self-sufficient and then having a sustainable and reliable food source. So going to the store is not something that we did, even on a weekly basis. So that's basically how I grew up. I was a second language learner with English, and so Navajo was my first language. So I grew up being the ninth child in a

family of 11. But I was I have two younger sisters, so my older sisters, they talk a lot about the boarding school, being in boarding schools, being forced to go to boarding school and growing up in that type of environment. But for us, by the time we came along, we went to the public schools. So in just my family alone, it was very diverse, even as far as education is concerned, but pretty much very happy. A lot of times people look at the reservation as being poverty stricken with limited access to food and water and whatnot and then being very poor. I never see my, looking back, I never see my family as being poor because we always had shoes, we always had clothes, we always have food all the time and just an endless amount of chores. But that's how you learn to be self-sufficient, too. So lots of skills.

00:04:25.63
AA: I agree. What was learning English like for you as a child, because you said your first language was Navajo and so you learned English and so like, what was that like for you?

THD: So the immersion, the way I look at it, it was a very total immersion into the program. So when I was in first grade, I had Anglo teachers, two teachers and one teacher aide, and the teacher aide was Navajo. So when we went into the classroom, English was a foreign language to me. And so when we went in there, it was all English. We weren't forced to speak it, but that's just what was available to us. And so it was very slow learning English, but we had the Navajo teacher aide there to do a lot of interpretation. And so my father, my parents, always told us, if you're going to do something, you need to put your whole heart into it and then do your very best and and go above and beyond. So that's pretty much how we were able to pick up English. I guess it was more of a new nuance and it was pretty much a big curiosity factor. But overall, I think we picked it up very well. Whereas my older siblings there was some resistance because that went in a different environment that was a boarding school setting, so there was punishment if they spoke their language. So that was two different types of scenarios that took place. And we had very limited exposure to television and then also to the radio, but we heard it, but we weren't allowed to listen to it as much as probably what we wanted to, because like I said, it was a nuance, it was something new, something different and entertaining, I guess is the best word for it and something that we enjoy, but we weren't allowed to listen to it all the time at home. But in the classroom, we did have somebody there to help us interpret and to make sure that our pronunciation was accurate.

00:07:29.84
AA: We learned about the boarding schools in our class, so it's interesting to hear about how you have family members who went through that and experience it because like learning about it and hearing about it is one thing, but like getting firsthand account or secondhand accounts of it totally makes it more like a more impactful. It makes that more real. And it's not cool, but it's interesting to know that like, it becomes more real.

THD: Real? Yeah, yeah. Yeah, it's totally different what you read in the in the textbooks versus what people actually live. One of the things that, as I'm helping my my nephew through his experiences, they talk quite a bit about the great migration in the textbooks that he was reading, that it being virtual they give a lot of like online reading material and even videos. So, for example, they talk about the great white leaders, what's on Mount Rushmore like Abraham Lincoln and all these notable leaders of America. And so and then they say, Abraham Lincoln freed the slaves. But what I tell my nephew is that's probably the biggest lie ever because they're only talking about the African slaves, that's all that they're making reference to. So Abraham Lincoln is actually known in our Indigenous peoples history as a man that continued with slavery because, yeah, the Black slavery probably ended, but he continued to have Indigenous slaves. And so one of the things that he used as an intimidation factor, and I think it probably had a certain amount of stature to it is that he would go around in his carriage and he had bridles made and those bridles were actually the skin off of Indigenous peoples that were made into bridles and stuff that he used for his carriages. And that is something you don't read about in the history books as much as how he freed the slaves. So that's something that I always tell my nephew, I said that that's a big lie. He let a lot of the Black people go, but he continued to have the Indigenous slaves. And additionally, history also tells you that some of the Indigenous people also bought from the slave market. But what they don't tell you, what is that those Indigenous people, when they purchase from the Black slave market, set those slaves free. Allowed them into their community in some measure of acceptance and then also some measure of protection. And so that's something that's not told in the history books.

00:11:14.91
AA: Yes, it's really sad how much the American or even just the school system in general holds back on information like that, like regarding the Abraham Lincoln, that was the first time I've ever heard about anything like that and and even just learning about Native American culture. I have like the honor to have a Native American friend here at CSUMB, and I have learned more about Native American culture from her than I have over my entire school career.

THD: Mm-Hmm.

KK: My instructor, junior and senior year of high school. She has actually taught us the right way of like the Native Americans because her family came from that background, too. So she was telling us, like all the real things in history instead of like the false information. Was pretty cool too.

00:12:13.20
THD: And even the word Indian is not widely accepted by many of our people. For me, I don't use that. I don't I don't see myself as being Indian. I don't see myself as being an American because I was here way before any of that even showed up. And so people always say, well, you

have to be pretty patriotic. You have to put your hand over your heart to say the pledge of allegiance. And I was like, No, I don't have to say any of that. I don't have to honor it in that fashion because we were here long before that. It's not a stance or any type of, how would you say, like a rebel stance or anything for me. For example, they had the flag pole and up on top of that, there's an eagle. And so when I stand at attention and I borrow my head and I put my hands behind my back. That's me honoring our sacred bird, which is the bald eagle. And that's in our culture and our people, that's how we have always honored the gifts that the creator gave to us. And so even the term American or Native American, we were here long before that. And so I always tend to refer to us as our Indigenous lands, Indigenous peoples and in our own language, we have our own terminology for that. So for us being Navajos, we call ourselves Dine, which is the people. And then we have all these different Indigenous peoples they have in their own language. They have their own word for their own identity. And so when we talk about how we tie ourselves to our land and our environment, for us as Navajo, instead of calling ourselves Native Americans, we say (15:00) Nit Ho Ka Dehin dine. Nit Ho Ka means on top of this Earth and Mother Earth. And so, nił ch'i k'ehgo which are spiritual. Dine means people. And that's where our word Dine came from also. So I think its very important to find that out. It's just about mutual respect. It's not something that we demand. For me, I don't demand it. And then what people choose to believe is their business and not mine. But if they have a problem with what I say or what I believe, then that's their problem because I'm here to be on Earth for a purpose. And a lot of people have that same mindset, too, but also going back to the boarding school, my older siblings also participated in the placement program, placement slash relocation. And so in the boarding school, they were forced to go to church. Forced. They had to go to church. They had to abide by all of that. They had to cut their hair. They had to dress a certain way, like a uniform style.

00:16:33.52
THD: And then at a certain time, the church went out and they solicited for families, quote unquote, foster families. And the whole idea behind that program through these churches and a lot of times is through the Mormon church they were sent out to like the east coast. And so at least in this region over here, they were sent to the east coast, and so they live with these foster families to assimilate them. And so that one day they will not move back to the reservation. But there was a lot of things that they were doing. And my father, he found a problem with it because one day he took them to school because they said they were going to learn. And this is going to be how they're going to fend for themselves one day in the future. So he didn't have an issue with it, but he had an issue with it when they didn't allow him to see his own children but for a few times out of the year. So by the time that they were sent on this placement program, he started questioning that whole process. And after a while, he's like, no, I don't want my kids to be a part of that. And they kept telling them it's good for them, it's good for them. And then pretty soon it got to the point where, no, you're not allowing me to see my kids. You're not telling me where my kids are, I'm going to go find my kids. So he left our home. He hitchhiked to Flagstaff,

Arizona. He got onto the train and he took the train to Los Angeles. And my oldest brother was pretty young then and my dad took him to interpret for him. And so through that process, he was able to find my older siblings. And so he went over there and he picked them up and he brought them home. At first, he went over there to visit to see what they're doing, how they're doing. And then finally, he just went over there and picked them all up and brought them all home and told them that, no, you're not going back. And from that point on, they stopped going to church. They stopped doing a lot of things. And so that's the history of my older siblings. And by that time, we're already in school with the public school. So they finished out their school years and public schools going to school from home.

AA: Yeah, when we learned about it in class and how the boarding schools tried to pass it off as teaching young girls to be like a better woman, but it really it was just teaching native girls to be white, basically, to be a white American girl. And it was very disturbing to read about about how from like the primary sources about how upset the girls were to cut their hair and and to be forced to be stripped of their culture. And it was very disturbing to read about.

00:20:05.00
THD: It was, yeah, if you ever read a book by called *Lost Birds*. It didn't just end there. Women were going to the hospital to have babies and the doctors would just take them and they told the women that your baby died. And one lady, she had twins, and that's what she was told. She was told that her babies died, and all these years she grieved for her babies. And back, I believe it was in the early 90s when those twins found each other and then they found their family in the Arizona area. And so they came and there was like a huge celebration. I always remember that they came and they met the rest of their family, and then they also met their relatives. Surprisingly, the mother, at first, she was in disbelief. She's like, no, this is what I was told. And the father did, too, but in the end, they were all reunited. So there's a lot of that that has happened. Some kids were just picked up, and right around that time there was what is that the one disease called where it affects their lungs? TB, so people were dying from TB, and so they would go out there and pick up kids and take them to the hospital. Some of them were in iron lungs and a lot of them, they were lost in that system. And so they ended up in Salt Lake City or somewhere in California, and they ended up just being a part of that culture out there. And then they come back and say, "I don't remember who my family was. But I think I'm Navajo." That's what they say, so or else they say "I am Navajo, but somehow I got lost in the system" and so a lot of kids never came home.

00:22:24.15
AA: That's yeah, that's very, very upsetting to hear about about how Indigenous peoples were treated, so unfairly, it goes beyond unfair, it goes totally beyond. There's no word to describe how badly they were treated and how badly they still are treated. One question that I really have is like how the pandemic affected, like just everything in general, how it affected the reservation

because I know that some some tribes receive funding and how the pandemic might have affected it or how much growing crops or how you mentioned how you had animals and were very self-sufficient and how that translated before and after the pandemic.

THD: Well, the pandemic itself, I think, really highlighted the inadequacies and the broken promises of the treaties. So the treaties put this on reservations, that was the agreement. You're going to go on the reservation and this is how we're going to provide for you. The reservations were desolate. I mean, you hear a lot about no running water. We cannot get running the water due to the distance. And then because of all the right of ways, if you were to look at a geographical map of our reservation, you're going to see trains, you're going to see power lines, you're going to see uranium mines, coal mines. You're going to see a lot of that. But you look at it, we don't own any of that. And so a lot of these agreements were made back in the late 40s, early 50s. And so they put us on these reservations back in the 1800s thinking that there was nothing but really later on is when they saw there was oil, there was gas and there was water in the fires. And so that's when they went in there and they put, these white lawyers came about and they said, "Oh, we'll help you negotiate, we'll help you." And these are uneducated Navajo people or even Indigenous people because we're not the only ones that this happened to. So they made all of these big deals and pretty much gave up all of our right of ways, gave them right of ways for an eternity. And so we're not allowed to breach any of those in this day. And so because of the amount of those right of ways that criss cross in our reservation in more ways than one, it's very hard to run a water line through, even an electrical line. So people say, "Well, you guys are always talking about, no water, no electricity, why don't you just dig, dig and get it there?" But we can't because we have to get approval from the federal government and the federal government, the way that it's set up is that it's such a very high hierarchy and it's a very bureaucratic. Everybody's got to put their thumb and their missing toe print on it, which is impossible. And so I don't know, maybe somebody is going to borrow somebody else's toe in order to make it happen to get all of the approvals in place from here all the way to Washington, D.C. And so it's a system that's put in place to continue to keep the people in poverty. Because of that too, companies and businesses are not willing to set up shop on the reservation because then they would have to also pay for the right of ways.

00:27:02.69
THD: And it's just a very timely, timely process. So many of the people go off the reservation to work, but because of the high costs of living outside of the reservation, they end up leaving their children behind. And then they go like wherever they end up, and they'll rent an apartment or something with two or three people in there. They all share rent just to get money and then they send it back home. Some people take their families off of the reservation and they continue to stay there but that includes loss of culture, loss of language. So when the pandemic hit the whole Navajo Nation and then inside the Navajo Nation, there's a Hopi reservation, and so the Hopi reservation only has one hospital. The Navajo Nation, which is the size of Rhode Island, may be

a little bigger only has, let's see there's Tuba City, there's Chin Lee, there's Fort Defiance, there's Ship Rock and one off Border Town Hospital, which is Gallop, and that's it, only five hospitals. And then there's probably like five or six clinics. And that's it. That's all we have. So when people were getting sick with COVID, they were intubating those individuals. So the respirators, they found out there was only 17 respirators in all of the reservation so that ERs, sometimes they had people in the ER for one or two days in order for the beds to fill to open up. The all of the Navajo reservation only has like 18 ICU beds. The Hopi reservation, I think, only has four or five. They only had one respirator to provide for all of those people over there on the Hopi reservation. So that's how from the medical perspective, that's what we found was that there was such a huge need and then even PPE, a lot of these hospitals, they ran out of gloves, they ran out of protective gowns, face shields. A lot of these items that they were using was one-time use. For example, Pinyon clinic, with the relief organization that we started, which is the Navajo Hopi Families COVID 19 Relief Fund, of which I'm the logistics coordinator, I am the lead seamstress. That's how I was able to meet the Auntie Sewing Squad. I'm also the legislative liaison. And so when that started, we were able to do a lot of fundraising activity. We raised more than 20 million dollars. And in that process, some of these hospitals ran out of gloves and we had to step in to pay/purchased gloves for them. We started having our own network of places, individuals and companies that we could use to funnel in PPE. And so the government itself was very slow in moving because when the pandemic hit in March, the first case that was reported was on March 17th in a small community called Denhotzo and they had a huge revival. And one of the preachers came from somewhere back east. And so when he was actually providing his message, they have a video recording of it. You can see that he's visibly sweating, he is out of breath, and he looked like he was sick. And so when he was up at that pulpit preaching to all these individuals, that's where that first first case of COVID started. So on the 17th, that community, those people that attended that event through contact tracing, that's where it spread. That was, I guess, one of our first super spreader events before it was even we understood what that meant. That's what had happened on. And that was probably like the 14th of March.

00:32:09.41
THD: And actually it was the weekend before, sorry. And then so the weekend of the 14th, there was another event over an inscription how same thing, they were having a revival. And so it was kind of like a domino effect and it was so obvious where and who these individuals went to those revivals. You can tell where those sicknesses started popping up. And so we organized on the 15th those 12 females and various leadership roles on the Navajo reservation we were hearing about. It wasn't like, if it's not going to happen, it was if it happens, that's what we knew. When and if it happens, we didn't think that it was that we were prepared as a nation. Definitely not our government. So what we decided to do was, hey, let's just get together and raise $50,000 and each one of us, we came from different communities, and so that each individual would be able to take a certain amount of money and help their own community. That was the plan. Fifty

thousand dollars was our goal. So we launched a fundraiser on Sunday. By Monday, we raised five thousand dollars. In 30 days, we raised more than a million dollars. And so when this was on the 15th and then by the 17th was when that first case was reported. And so leading up to that, there was a lot of just being observant and the news and and listening out, keeping in our ears to the ground where we would hear of this mysterious illness. And sure enough, it popped up. And Denhotzo the place where this event happened. So on the 17th, it was reported in the morning and by that evening, we have people down here in the valley who had gone shopping and buy the truckloads of food for a two week supply. And so and that's what people were talking about two week quarantine. But what we talked about is we only have 13 grocery stores on the reservation. Literally, there are all Bashas' grocery stores and they're not they're not stocked like Walmart too. Because of the very high prices many people go to the border towns like in Flagstaff or Gallup or Page or in Farmington. That's where people go to get their groceries, their toiletries, their cleaning supplies. And so when all of this news was happening on this site, what we were seeing around the world talking about stocking up, making sure this and that was in your home. We started noticing that the shelves were going empty. That's what we saw. And so in Flagstaff, which is about two and a half mile drive from the reservation to Flagstaff, already that Wal-Mart was already empty. And so we had to do the shopping another two and a half hour drive, which is in Phoenix, Arizona, in that vicinity. So that's where we did this shopping. There was three individuals that went out and they just did the shopping. We didn't know really what we were buying, but as females, we know what's needed at least for two weeks.

00:36:05.00
THD: Something that stable shelf ready and something that's quick to to fix. We got freezers, we got ice chests and we went out there and on the 17th when it was reported around this time in the evening we showed up there with 30 boxes of supplies, food for those families that were now in quarantine. So that's what the pandemic looked like. And throughout the pandemic, this community that I talked about, Pinyon, my sister worked there. She worked as a behavioral health. She supervised that whole department as a clinical behavioral health clinician. And so she had to go through a one day crash course in how to do drive up triage. And they ran out of PPE and they had to go to the local grocery store, which is Bashas'. And it's not. And this is even more sparsely stocked than the regular Bashas' and other places. And they bought boxes of trash bags and they had to tape those trash bags together with tape in order to use as gowns. So that's basically what we saw and that was the impact of COVID. In the meantime, the federal government sent relief. And so when the pandemic relief showed up all over the U.S., in the cities and the counties and metropolitan areas, it was slow coming to Indigenous nations. So the Navajo Nation took the lead in suing the federal government along with the rest of the 527 Indigenous nations. They sued the federal government at that time, it was President Russell Begaye. He was the leader of our nation at that time, so he and his attorney general took the lead in suing (for) the Navajo Nation for those COVID relief moneys. So it took some time and additional…

00:38:35.19
THD: The Navajo Nation along with 527 other Indigenous nations sued the federal government. So they went through a whole process and was finally approved for that money to be provided to the nations. And then there was some time delays there because of the federal government for a certain formula to be provided. The formula first of all was distributed according to the population, which was a farce because there was a very bad census count that was done, the last census count. There were so many challenges. There was a lot of contesting the count all over on the distribution. And it kept stopping and it would go. There were a lot of challenges/obstacles the census workers had to jump through. The actual count of the census was not anywhere close to the count previously. That's one of the counts that the federal government wanted to use but based on a lot of that legal language that change also included a formula. Using this formula, we were able to be provided more money. When the money was released, it was September of last year, and we were told that we had to spend all this money by December 30th. So it was to spend millions of dollars in that short of a time frame. And then to meet the criterias they had in place was not feasible. There was a huge attempt to make it happen, but when Biden came in he said you know what, we'll give you more time, we'll give you a few more months, which didn't help the situation, but through that process we were able to spend more money. So with the new monies that were here that was awarded what nine months ago, ten months ago, the only challenges on our reservation were man made laws, man made policies that continued to hinder the process. That's basically where we are at but by the time those funds showed up there were not very many items on the shelf left for us to purchase. For example, one of the things that had happened was they sent us thousands of boxes of PPE and masks. But then somebody decided to analyze that mask and they found out they were defective. So those boxes of thousands of masks had to be destroyed. So the way that many of our people interpreted all of that, the message behind all of that, is back then during the long walk during the mid 1800's there was Carson that came and they provided blankets and rations, but the blankets were full of smallpox, they were full of lice and all kinds of diseases and it continued to kill the people. It was no different from that. That's what many of interpreted what the government sent to us because those masks did not even protect the way they should. Another example of modern day the continuous track that the great white father so to speak continues the intent of exterminating the original landowners.

00:43:49.16
AA: Yeah, hearing about the lack of support the government was given to a lot of reservations is disappointing to hear about. Did the lack of support influence you to join as a collaborator with the Auntie Sewing Squad? Was it part of the motivation for creating that? And I have to leave for my final soon for another class. But this will be my last question to ask. I just wanted to ask that question.

00:44:36.02
THD: Okay. Well, I won't keep you long, but I just want to say congratulations for going to your finals. And luck is only when opportunity and preparation meets. And I'm pretty sure you'll do great on your finals. March 21st is when there was such a huge discussion of the need for PPE and also the lack of PPE. So then that's when we had that discussion of masks and then we said, hey, because I myself, I do a lot of sewing, so I like posted on my Facebook. I actually have a business on Etsy its called DeerSpringsCreations.Etsy.com. And so I have a lot of Native jewelry like this. I made this. And so I have other jewelry on there. I also weave Navajo traditional rugs, which when it becomes available, I post on there, but I also make traditional outfits. I sew three tiered skirts. I sew this shirt I'm wearing. I made this shirt. And so, it's just kind of like a little hobby and a small business that I have. I guess if I wanted to, I could leave my job and do that all the time. But I don't, I love what I do. And so people that I work with, and I must say, of all these 12 women, a majority of us are still together today, going into two years, and many of us have never even met. So we just know each other like the way I'm talking to you right now, that's how we know one another. So that in itself is a huge feat, too. But so then she reached out to me and she said, well, the ladies we were talking and I was sewing, "what is that noise?" And then I said, "Oh, I'm sorry, I'm sewing, so I have to keep putting it on mute." Then they said, "Hey, Theresa you should get some of your seamstresses together and start making some masks because we can't find any out there." So that's what started that whole process of me doing a call to action for seamstresses and somehow, that call to action hit the ears of Kristina Wong. And she contacted me, and then we started communicating and she had like all these people that were sewing. And so then I had to do to tutorials. I had to post videos and these different pattern, consulting with the hospital, looking at the CDC for recommended techniques and what would provide the best protection. And so all of that right now, the majority of it is just out the window because our techniques have have changed over the years, I mean over the months, I should say, because this is something that we don't know what this silent killer is. And so that's how we were able to start talking. So somewhere what my call to action put a bug in her ear and she responded and then we started communicating. But her seamstresses also started sewing and sending masks to me. And then I sanitize and repackage and put labels in it for people, like emergency contact numbers. We had a sexual abuse reporting line. We had a suicide prevention line. We had a COVID help line. We had all these different hotlines that were put inside of those little packages of masks that were sanitized. And then we sent them out to the reservation, to different areas on the reservations and the volunteers we had more than 3,000 people who stepped up and became volunteers.

00:49:12.04
THD: They were out there boots on the ground, giving out boxes of food. They were giving out PPE and you name it, they gosh, it was like twenty four hours a day. Then we had to deal with the lockdowns. And so it was very challenging, we had a lot of Robin Hoods out there. And then somewhere in there, we even had challenges with our own government. Like I said, sometimes

women leaders are not always given enough credit. And so in our own traditional teachings, we're always told that the man is the head of household, but you're still equal. And so there is a time that when crisis hits, then this female can take that position of leadership because as mothers, it is just totally different than how a man operates. When you have a child, your child is sick, you practically feel that pain and you will do anything and everything in that in your power to make sure that your child is healed. And so that's the passion that we all have in us. It's something that we grew up with. It's inherent. And so when the pandemic hit, we were able physically, mentally, spiritually, even educationally to pick up those reins and to help in that perspective. So our nonprofit is the WWW.NavajoHopiSolidarity.com And so there's like a whole timeline of history right there. That's where our story is at. And so everything that we have provided up to this point is all because of donations. It's all because of fundraising initiatives that all of us did. We don't have a grant writer. We don't have a fundraiser. It's just us 12 that are continuing to pull forward and push forward so it's amazing. Somehow, even though there's this silent killer, what we call Ntsaaígíí-19 is out there. And so through faith, for me, that's how I am. I know that where I stand in my faith and I know songs and I know my prayers are what's going to protect me. And so I'm able to utilize my skills and my capabilities in order to help my people, my family, my relatives and my communities. And that's something that my parents instilled in us with the way that I was raised. And so I think it's different for each generation. The way we were raised is not the way our children are being raised now. So at one time, we went to haul the water. We went out in the cold, in the dark, and whether it was snowing or raining, and we had to fill up our water bucket and bring it in. We went out and took warm bottles of milk out to the little lambs and the little kids at the sheep corral. Then make sure that they were warm, they were fed and then making sure the fences were mended, making sure the plant, the seeds were in the ground. No matter how hot or cold or muggy it was, we went out there and made sure that our plants grew and that they were plentiful. That's the generation that I come from. And so now, kids, they just walk down the hall. They flip a switch to turn on the light. We didn't grow up with that. And now they just walk up to some wall and they turn up the thermostat to cool or too hot.

00:53:42.10
THD: I grew up without an air conditioner. And so we grew up hauling wood, chopping wood and bringing that in. And by no means do I ever think or see or view my upbringing and what my parents provided to me, I don't ever see that as being poor. I was very, very rich to have a mother and a father. And that's something that I don't have today. And I think that my oldest sister was in her late 60s when both of my parents were gone. For me, I was in my early forties when I lost my parents, both of my parents were gone and they died of old age. I see my oldest sister being very fortunate to have had a lifetime with my parents, and that's something that I didn't have. But I always look at that being the best years of their lives to be able to to enjoy them at an older time in their lives. And when my my mom got very, very old, it got to a point where we had to carry her. I carried her, she would take all her time walking. She was very slow in her mobility. So I

would help her get dressed in the morning, clean her up, pick her up, take her into the living room. And she's like, "What are you doing? You know, I can walk, you know?" And I'm like, "Mom, the coffee is going to boil over. Come on." And then she would just laugh. And then it just became an everyday thing. It was like a little a little kid, and I would just pick her up, take her. But my older siblings were not able to do that. They were not able to pick her up. And that's something I always remember, and my parents, as older as they were, they had taken that time to sit there and tell us about history, about our culture. And so I find myself very, very fortunate to learn something from my mom and my dad that I continue to have with me all the time, which is being able to know and learn the stories of the significance of our jewelry and then our land, our livestock, our clan, our language. And then also for my mom my weaving. From my mom, I learned how to weave Navajo rugs. From my father, he taught me the songs and the stories. But this pandemic has really…every day I sit here and I hear people passing back home. It has hit home, people getting sick and and suffering through that process. I myself got sick in my household. I was very, very sick. And it's not something that I would wish upon anybody, not even my own children. So I constantly tell them, "You need to vaccinate. Now you need to get your booster. You need to protect yourself. You need to stay away from people. Don't go visiting. You can face time. You can text, you can call." But I always tell them that all the time I don't go home to see my siblings. Sometimes I think we forget that we're in a pandemic or we want to hug and visit one another because it still, to some degree, feels like it's not real. I sat there early this morning taking my coffee and it's like, "Is this real?" Sometimes it just feels like a dream, but I think about those people who I know who have passed, and I know it's real. And I know that the work is still not done so all the time I always think that we have all these angels in the outfield pushing us forward and cheering us on. That's the way I think about it.

00:58:23.23
AA: Thank you for sharing. And thank you for letting me ask questions. It was really nice. My partner should, I think, have a couple more questions to ask you. Thank you. I value your answers very much.

THD: You're welcome.

AA: Thank you. Thank you. Nice meeting you.

00:58:42.09
KH: My question is that me and my partner read about your grassroot organization you co-founded. Can you tell me about the grassroot relief organization?

THD: So the Navajo and Hopi families COVID 19 Relief Funds, that's the name of the GoFundMe that we started. I think maybe around springtime, early spring of this year, we changed, or we actually added an "official" name to our organization, which is called Yee Ha'ólníi Doo DBA. Yee Ha'ólníi Doo

DBA in Navajo translated to English means this is what will provide hope, fortitude and resilience, that's what that means.

KH: Oh, I like that.

THD: And so when we say when I say that, I am a logistics coordinator and the head seamstress and I am the legislative liaison of Yee Ha'ólníi Doo DBA. That's our organization's name. So in Yee Ha'ólníi Doo DBA, when we go out, we deliver items, we tell them that this is from Yee Ha'ólníi Doo DBA. And then we say, Yee Ha'ólníi Doo DBA. And so we say that and the communication is, this is what's going to give you hope, fortitude and resilience because we're providing the food, the basic needs to stay home for two weeks, which is food, water. And we're just not talking about cans of food that's going to sit on the shelf, we're talking about milk, we're talking about eggs. This is all fresh. And then cheese, ground beef, chicken, rice, green beans. Some of it is canned food. And then also bread, I think I said bread? And then we also give water for those families that have no running water. We provide like three or four of those huge cases of thirty two bottles of water or else we give them the huge one bottle of water or we give them a few of those huge five gallon bottles of drinking water. And then like right now, the delta surge out there. So the food program that we have right now is called the isolation kit. So if a family or an individual is quarantining or if they've become positive, they can go online or they can call a toll free number and say, this is my situation. And so within hours, we will respond with two weeks worth of food. And that also includes an oximeter and then also a thermometer and then a vaporizer with the supplies to go with it. If they're positive, that would include Pedialyte, Gatorade, some packages of soup, like ramen soup or the stuff for broth, because when you're sick, that's really all you can handle. I don't know if you know…

KH: You can't taste either bcause you've lost your taste and smell and stuff.

THD: Yeah, and so that's what we provide them and we provide them lemon honey. And then we have cold medicine, everything from stuff for mucus, cough drops, and you know how expensive that gets. And then Tylenol, cough suppressant, just a whole slew of stuff that we provide to them. So that's what we provide in our isolation kits currently. Last year, when there was just people staying at home orders, we were giving out just boxes of food and it's good quality food and it's wholesome, well-balanced box that actually everything in that box you can use to cook something. It's not like, well, I got the peanut butter, but no bread or I got the Kool-Aid, but I have no sugar. It wasn't that type of situation. It provided a well-balanced meal. In addition to that, we also have an elder feeding program. So we were able to work with various entities to provide firewood and also coal to some of our households, and then we had to purchase the vehicles, we purchased box trucks, we purchased pickup trucks, trailers. I'm the one that went shopping. I think I'm going to have a shopping addiction. So I purchased vehicles. I purchased trailers. I purchased medication. I purchased dollies and cards and appliances. We purchased more than 50 freezers and refrigerators to place at different areas on the reservation,

and then we contracted with a food company, in this case, Shamrock, and we purchased all of this food. So this huge semi-truck that refrigerated would take all of this food onto the reservation to different sites. And then the team was trained on how to sanitize. Then they were trained how to freeze and store this because just the cleaning process takes like a day or two. And then they had a huge distribution where they could do the contactless distribution. So everything that was used for that whole process is what I purchased for that 18 sites that we established on the reservation Hopi and Navajo.

01:05:35.17
THD: So it became a huge organization and some of our funders include the Kellogg Foundation. We were very, very honored to be blessed by the giving of Mackenzie Scott and and we're still in constant need, even like Jason Momoa gave us a whole diesel load of water. And so all of that 100 percent of that went back onto the reservation for the Navajo and the Hopi, but it started out with 12 women.

KH: Wow.

THD: We just all got together on a Zoom call on a Saturday and then on a Sunday and that's where it started. During that process, other opportunities showed up for some of the women or they ended up having closer ties to other, there's a lot of grassroots organizations that popped up in our nation to address in response to all of these inadequacies. There's probably over 70, maybe even 150 grassroots organizations. But currently on the website, we have women that are on that page, probably half of us are the founding members of the grassroots organization, but really, it was like building a ship that sailed. Like I said, we organized started organizing on the 15th. We did our GoFundMe that evening and by the 17th. Two days later, we were already making like eight thousand dollars worth of supplies that were being delivered. And so it's just like a huge snowball just rolling down the hill just continuing to grow, grow, grow. And so that's basically who we are. We're still trying to work with our government though, we want to work with our Navajo Nation government to see if they can provide us the funding so that we can continue to provide the COVID relief, but it's not happening. It's just very challenging in that sense, but we're very grateful for all of our donors.

01:08:27.24
KH: Yeah. So it's about to run out of time. I'm running a little bit overtime than my teacher told me to. So I have extra questions we didn't get to ask, could I send them to you?

THD: Sure. Email it. And I can do a respose to you.

KH: Okay, thank you. It was really nice to meet you.

THD: Same here, I'm very honored, and it's a privilege to to do this with you. And I have a lot of respect for Kristina Wong with her Super Aunties and Uncles.

KH:Yeah.

THD: Wow, this. I think about that. And there's many times that I've had a lot of emotional times that I'm so grateful for them helping my relatives. And so I can't give them anything, but I constantly keep them in my prayers.

KH: I will do that too. Great.

THD: Thank you to you, also.

KH: You're welcome. I appreciate it.

THD: Have a great evening. Bye

KH: You too, bye.